

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Assembly Board of Directors – 8th June 2007

Smart Growth – Midlands Way

Report of Director – Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To advise the Board of the status and content of the Smart Growth – Midlands Way Action Plan.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Board give their support to the Smart Growth – Midlands Way Action Plan subject to the caveat and comment set out in para. 4.3.

3. Background

- 3.1 Members with long memories will recall Smart Growth – Midlands Way as an initiative which was encouraged by Government (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - ODPM) when the Sustainable Communities Plan was launched in 2004. The Sustainable Communities Plan included four Growth Areas in the South East, including Milton Keynes/South Midlands. At the same time the three Northern Regions, encouraged by ODPM developed Northern Way; in part as a counter balance to the Growth Areas in the SE, but more significantly to identify how economic growth could be accelerated by joint working on agreed activities.
- 3.2 Smart Growth – Midlands Way was encouraged by ODPM as a means to accelerate the delivery of a sustainable and complementary economic and population growth in the English Midlands.
- 3.3 The development of Smart Growth – Midlands Way was led by the two Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) for the West and East Midlands, with the respective Assemblies and Government Offices part of the Strategic Steering Group. The City Regions in both regions were also, at a later stage invited to join the Steering Group.

3.4 The purpose behind Smart Growth – Midlands Way is threefold:-

- To highlight and position the Midlands' substantial economic contribution to the UK and the wider global economy.
- To provide a framework and set of guiding principles to help shape any future collaborative working across the Midlands
- To provide a highly focused set of practical actions that can help the regions to capitalise upon additional opportunities for mutually beneficial joint working and joint investment.

4. Detail

4.1 The Smart Growth – Midlands Way Action Plan was effectively completed in Summer 2006, and shared with Planning Partnership and Transport Partnership at that time. Attached as an appendix is the report discussed by the Partnerships in September; it sets out the key elements of the Action Plan and a hyperlink to the full document.

4.2 The RDAs have now written to the Steering Group members to ask for support for the Smart Growth – Midlands Way Action Plan. The Assembly was represented by Councillor Rex Roberts, chairman of the Planning Partnership and Rose Poulter, Director - Policy.

4.3 It is recommended that the Board give their support to the Smart Growth – Midlands Way Action Plan, and in so doing provide the following caveat and comment:-

Caveat

- Transport Partnership members "noted the report and commented that inter-regional working on airports' access needs further consideration". (26/09/06)/Members were not convinced that the case for further investment to support surface access at Birmingham International Airport would be assisted by putting a joint case with East Midlands Airport, as each airport has a unique set of issues and development plans.

Comment

- West Midlands Regional Assembly will continue to engage with EMDA, EMRA and strategic authorities in the East Midlands, including work on the RSS Preferred Option for Phase 2 revision. The purpose being to secure shared

benefits and synergy in line with the respective RSS's. Examples of joint activity include co-ordination of work on logistics and Burton on Trent as a potential sub-regional foci.

- 4.4 These comments are pertinent to the issues of interest to West Midlands Assembly in its capacity as Regional Planning Body (RPB). Members may also wish to comment on other aspects of Smart Growth – Midlands Way Action Plan.
- 4.5 The RDAs have committed themselves to pursuing the identified activities set out in Smart growth – Midlands Way and monitoring and reporting on progress on an annual basis.

Rose Poulter
Director – Policy

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Regional Planning Partnership

28 September 2006

Smart Growth - Midlands Way

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To update on progress made by East and West Midlands Regional Development Agencies with East and West Midlands Regional Assemblies in developing Smart Growth – Midlands Way.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To note the report

3. Background

- 3.1 There was little activity during 2005 on Smart Growth – Midlands Way. However there was activity on other fronts such as City Regions, Northern Way and Science Cities this together with encouragement from DCLG to refocus Smart Growth – Midlands, has led to a rekindling of interest. The two RDAs on behalf of partners have commissioned consultants to move Midlands Way forward.

- 3.2 The re-drafted document Smart Growth – Midlands Way is available on the Assembly's web site, via the Planning pages <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=47> . AWM intend to organise a seminar in the near future to present the document. The document includes the following sections: -

- Highlight and position the Midlands' substantial economic contribution to the UK and the wider global economy. This positioning identifies the unique roles played by the Midlands regions collectively and is intended to support ongoing lobbying and case making.
- Provide a framework and set of guiding principles to help shape any future collaborative working across the Midlands.

- Provide a focused set of practical actions that can help the regions to capitalise upon additional opportunities for mutually beneficial joint working and joint investment.

3.3 Existing collaboration has helped identify a series of three key principles to aid and guide future joint working: -

- First, activities should make a demonstrable contribution to closing the Midlands's GVA gap.
- Second, all proposed actions should have a clear rationale for a Midlands wide approach. The concept of added value is a pivotal criterion.
- Third, activities should not overlook the practicalities of making collaboration happen.

3.4 As a result of the application of these principles Midlands Way now has a focus on the following: -

- Tackling Shared Productivity Challenges - Driving up rates of productivity is a key objective.
- Enhancing Connectivity - Further improvement of national and international connections and enhancing the international gateway role of the Midlands is a priority, as is facilitating better connectivity across the Midlands for the benefit of both regions and the UK economy as a whole.
- Promotion & Positioning - There are clearly reasons to collaborate on the promotion and positioning of the Midlands both nationally and internationally.
- Encouraging Sustainable Growth. Parts of the East and West Midlands face a series of common challenges and opportunities eg. housing growth and provision of employment land

3.5 Three priority projects have now been identified and will be led by the RDAs: -

- Advancing to a further stage of the Midlands engineering redeployment initiative (MEIRG). There is scope within the next 18 months to expand the scheme to embrace a wider range of sectors and, potentially, internationalise the concept by linking to areas of the EU where there is a surplus of engineers.
- Taking forward joint working on sustainable transport technologies, particularly around the fuel cell technology agenda. Activity would systematically link together

collaborative activity on hybrid fuel cell research and development, related specialist R&D in composite materials and the established lead that the two regions have in a range of transport technologies.

- Joint work on developing international investment and trade links with a particular focus on China and other emerging markets.

3.6 Of particular interest to the Planning Partnership are a series of strategic infrastructure schemes and joint responses to emerging policy. There are a number of areas where it makes sense for the Midlands regions to engage in joint case making on major infrastructure and connectivity schemes likely to benefit economic performance across the whole of the Midlands. The priorities for the next 18 months are: -

- Putting the case for key improvements on the Midlands-Felixstowe corridor, including the rail freight link and the A14. Action would revolve around the way that the two regions exert pressure on Central Government and the key agencies (particularly the Highways Agency and Network Rail) to put the case for improvements and secure funding for them.
- Joint work to secure the best outcome for the Midlands from the new rail franchising process which replaces the existing Central Trains rail franchise. This is the first step in more systematic work across the Midlands to improve inter-regional surface linkages and infrastructure.
- Capacity improvements at Birmingham New Street Station. Collaborative action between the two regions would centre on the case for the changes needed to ensure that the Station is able to handle the significant volumes of passengers and trains that pass through each day.
- Improved access to Birmingham airport from the M42 and surface links to Nottingham East Midlands Airport. Putting a joint case for improved surface access to Birmingham and Nottingham East Midlands Airports would address a set of strategic transport issues which both regions have identified in Regional Spatial Strategies and Productivity TIF bids. For the East Midlands, direct public transport links to the Airport have been identified as a long term priority in the RSS. For the West Midlands, a case for improvements at junction 6 of the M42 in order to provide

better access to Birmingham Airport and the NEC is identified in the Productivity TIF bid.

- Increasing the speed and frequency of trains on the Nottingham to Birmingham rail link. The two regions would work together to put the case for improved rail services between the two cities. This action would address a number of issues, including the widening of travel to work areas and the potential reduction of congestion on the motorway network.
- Measures to improve infrastructure on the Midlands Main Line. The two regions would work together to develop the case for improvements to the Midland Main Line, linking the Midlands to London St. Pancras and to continental Europe via the new Eurostar terminal. The proposed scheme would involve several measures to enhance the infrastructure on the route.

3.7 There is also scope for partners to work collaboratively on two of the defining characteristics of the Midlands economy identified in preceding sections of the report, as follows: -

- Co-ordination of research on the role of logistics and distribution activity in each region, possibly leading to the preparation of a Midlands level logistics strategy.
- Collaborative response to the UK growth agenda. Through dialogue between key organisations, the two regions would arrive at a coordinated approach to handling the implications of Central Government policies to regenerate urban areas and pursue rapid growth in specific areas.

3.8 This report will be shared with the Regional Transport Partnership. Further reports will be brought to Planning Partnership in the future.

Rose Poulter
Director – Policy