

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE - 25 JUNE 2003**

### **PROPOSED STRATEGIC TRANSPORT AUTHORITY**

#### **Report by the Director of Development Services**

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To recommend that the Council does not support the proposal by the Scottish Executive to establish a national Strategic Transport Authority (STA) if this would take over any of the current responsibilities of the SPT or local authorities.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In their recent policy statement, "A Partnership for a Better Scotland," the Scottish Executive indicate that they propose to bring forward proposals for a Strategic Transport Authority. This would be an agency directly accountable to Scottish Ministers. Its remit would include:

- Delivery of improvements in transport infrastructure
- Co-ordination of national concessionary fares schemes
- Better investment balance in transport modes
- Monitoring of national targets and standards
- Delivery of quality bus contracts
- Securing improved working with local authorities as partners in delivery
- Development of effective regional partnerships
- Overseas routes promotion
- Oversight of currently tolled bridges

- 2.2 The proposal will be the subject of consultation later in the year. The Chair of the SPT has, however, asked the Leader of the Council for any comments which the Council may have on the principle of the proposal in advance of the proposed consultation

## **3 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 Communities in the West of Scotland enjoy extensive public transport services. The rail network centred on Glasgow is one of the most extensive urban rail systems in the UK. It is closely integrated with both the Glasgow Underground and bus services through the hub bus station at Buchanan Street. Through the SPT and Westrans transport strategy is being developed in close conjunction with the strategic development plans of the Clyde Valley and Ayrshire Structure Plans. Although the proposed STA is intended to reinforce the regional

partnerships it is inevitable that it would seek to superimpose a national strategy which could undermine the effectiveness of regional transport planning. It would not be possible at national level to develop close integration between different public transport modes, and between public transport, roads and development. Whilst the STA might achieve a greater integration of national transport services, this would be counter-productive if it was achieved at the cost of effective integration at the regional and local levels.

- 3.2 Over the last five years a range of innovatory services have been introduced by the SPT and local authorities, such as the new Ring 'n Ride bus services, bus quality corridors, buses adapted to people with a disability and improved public transport infrastructure. If another tier of transport management and planning is introduced there is a risk that the momentum of change which has been built up will be dissipated.
- 3.3 One of the remits proposed for the STA is the development of a national concessionary travel scheme. The recent changes in the concessionary travel scheme introducing free travel for local journeys, and standardisation of the age for eligibility has introduced a high degree of national standardisation. But the current national standards do not extend to rail. And the opportunity for travel depends not only on the availability of concessionary fares but also on the network of supported bus and rail services. The current arrangement under which the management of the concessionary travel scheme is closely linked to the management of supported bus and rail services could be weakened by removing the concessionary travel scheme to the national level.
- 3.4 The only remit suggested for the STA which appears to be genuinely national is promotion of overseas routes. This is arguably a weakness in current arrangements. Transport planning of the UK and international rail, sea and air connections is only partly devolved to the Scottish Executive. As a result the Scottish interests in issues such as the development of West Coast rail line, the promotion of Scottish airports, the expansion of direct international air services, and the development of international trade through Scottish ports is not promoted in an effectively co-ordinated way. An STA which was focused on such national issues which cannot be effectively promoted at a regional level could complement and add value to current arrangements for transport management and planning. The importance of the development of national and international transport services to Scotland as a whole and Ayrshire in particular is highlighted in the Development Strategy recently approved by the Ayrshire Economic Forum.
- 3.5 Until the Scottish Executive has developed a clearer concept for the proposed STA it is only possible to comment on the principle of the proposal. It is suggested that the Council should support the SPT in seeking to ensure that an STA is not established unless its remit is clearly defined in a way which would complement the activities existing regional and local transport organisations and

roads authorities, by focusing on the development of national and international transport services.

#### **4 LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no legal or financial implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.

#### **5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 It is recommended that the committee endorse the initial comments on the proposed Strategic Transport Authority as set out in section 3 of this report.

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**Director of Development Services**

12 June 2003  
SC/JR

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Nil**

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