1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides the RTF with an update and suggested coordinated response to the DfT consultation on devolving powers on major transport schemes. This offers an opportunity to ensure local authorities offer a credible offer to Government to decentralise decision making to a local level.

1.2 A view as to the extent of further opportunities for staged devolution is also sought.

2. Local Major Schemes and Local Transport Bodies

2.1 The Department for Transport signaled in summer 2011 its intention to devolve decision making on local major schemes. The final consultation document was published on 31st January and incorporates a number of principles which colleagues, through the EEDET Strategic Transport Sub Group, highlighted during informal work with DfT.

2.2 The consultation document seeks views on how localities – particularly strategic transport authorities and local enterprise partnerships – will establish local transport bodies. Collectively, they will spend £200m p.a. from 2014/15 to (at least) 2018/19 and must therefore assure Government of effective governance, financial management, accountability and the achievement of value for money.
2.3 The RTF’s attention is drawn to two particularly important aspects:

a) Scale and leadership
The consultation document makes it clear that both strategic transport authorities and local enterprises have important roles to play. DfT’s Director of Local Transport has since clarified that: “we do envisage that local authorities will be the primary party ... but we want LEPs to have real influence”. That may be through either the LEP as:

• a source of advice about strategic transport priorities and their effect on growth;
• a member of the local transport body alongside strategic transport authorities;
• the local transport body itself, where it has the appropriate legal status and accountability processes.

The consultation paper indicates that indicative funding allocations will be made according to LEP areas – which vary in population size from 900,000 to 3.5m.

b) Addressing cross-cutting schemes
Regardless of the size of local transport bodies, the nature of strategic transport means there will be several cross-cutting transport issues. Authorities may wish to explore how such mutually-dependent prioritisation might work in practice.

2.4 Appendix 1 represents a draft response from the Regional Transport Forum to the DfT’s consultation and is designed to emphasise those aspects of the devolution of local majors that could usefully and quickly be applied to other areas of strategic transport policy.

3. Further ‘staged devolution’

3.1 The current consultation focuses only on the devolution of powers over local major road schemes. It is considered that strategic transport authorities would also wish to examine opportunities for devolving further powers to local decision-makers.

3.2 In particular, Government has indicated its enthusiasm for ‘City Deals’ with the eight core cities to transfer a range of powers, including tailored elements of transport policy. This principle can be extended to other areas including areas across the East of England.

3.3 RTF members may wish to agree whether to consider greater opportunities for further ‘staged devolution’ including the following areas:

• Rail franchising agreements;
• Shaping the Connecting Europe facility (next stage of TEN-T) and ensuring its strategic fit with local activities;
• A greater say in concessionary fares;
• Freedoms around road charging;
• A closer relationship with HA (particularly if it follows Alan Cook’s recommendation of a regionalised operation with stronger links to LAs and LEPs to be more efficient);
• Aviation capacity and integration with local transport infrastructure;
• Port capacity and integration with local transport infrastructure.