

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Update Report

4 March 2021

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Board before taking effect.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- (a) The Communications and Engagement report is noted
- (b) The Board agrees to review and approve the activity plan and communication protocol, via email, post the Board meeting
- (c) The Board agrees to provide feedback on the interim communications strategy, via email, post the Board meeting, noting the intention of finalising the strategy, post the consultation on the high-level transport strategy.

I. Background

Following a competitive tendering exercise in Autumn 2020, Coast Communications have been appointed as the Communications and Public Relations Provider for the Peninsula Transport Sub-national Transport Body (STB) and the Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF). The contract with Coast is for the period January 2021 – March 2022.

As the Communications and Public Relations provider Coast Communications are tasked with supporting the STB to:-

- Build awareness with stakeholders of Peninsula Transport (including PRTF) and its purpose
- Ensure key stakeholders are fully briefed on the work of Peninsula Transport (including PRTF)
- Maximise funding opportunities
- Define a clear set of offers and asks to Government for Peninsula Transport (including PRTF) and brief key stakeholders on how they can help deliver
- Engage stakeholders around the emerging sub regional transport plan

The principle task Coast has been considering, since the commencement of the contract, is refreshing the Communications Strategy for the STB. The Board approved the current strategy in March 2019 and it is recommended that the strategy is reviewed and updated now in order to ensure that the strategy optimally supports the emerging High-Level Transport Strategy and, subsequently, the Transport Strategy for Peninsula Transport. This will make sure that the communications strategy and activity plan align with Peninsula Transport's objectives.

Refreshing the strategy will also help towards achieving the objectives of combining the STB and PRTF communications and public relations functions, namely achieving the alignment of all strategic transport public relations and communications and ensuring co-ordination across the services.

This paper provides an outline of the proposed interim communications strategy, supporting documents, and an overview of communications work undertaken since January and details of future work planned.

2. Communication Strategy, Activity Plan and Protocol

In order to support the work of Peninsula Transport the following interim strategy documents are in development:

- **Communications Strategy** – this will provide the overarching framework to communications. It will set out communications objectives, tactics and audiences, as well as key messaging, in order to shape Peninsula Transport’s identity going forward. The strategy will set out:
 - What we want to achieve from communications (objectives)
 - Who we want to communicate with (audiences)
 - What we want to say to them (messages)
 - How we will reach them (channels)
 - How we will know we’ve been successful (evaluation)

The strategy will be supplemented by two further documents – a protocol and activity plan.

- **Communications Activity Plan** – this will map out the proposed programme of work up until March 2022. It will set out key project milestones as well as detailing specific communications activities and roles and responsibilities to be undertaken each quarter.

The activity plan will utilise a mix of public relations and public affairs in order to deliver effective communications, using channels appropriate for each of the target audiences. It is envisaged that campaign plans will need to be developed for certain work elements or sub-groups.

- **Communication Protocol** – this will give a framework for ensuring a consistent and timely approach to communications - identifying responsibilities, outlining the approvals process and setting response times for all communications work including critical communications for both Peninsula Transport and the Peninsula Rail Task Force.

These documents will reflect Peninsula Transport’s overall vision of “transforming transport across the Peninsula to enable our society and economy to thrive and our unique and outstanding environment to flourish” ensuring the communications align with the vision and goals of the STB.

It is recommended that the Board agrees to review and approve the activity plan and communication protocol, via email, post the Board meeting and provide feedback on the interim communications strategy, noting the intention of finalising the strategy, post the consultation on the high level transport strategy. This approach is proposed to allow the strategy to reflect feedback from the consultation, and effective communications in the intervening period.

3. Communications activities since January 2021

The following work has been undertaken, or is in progress, since January 2021:

- Providing support to AECOM on the vision documentation
- Developing a consultation campaign plan in order to promote the consultation on the vision and encourage response
- Nexus Link Road – produced a web post on the Nexus Link Road in order to boost Somerset County Council’s materials
- A303 Sparkford to Ilchester press release – issued to 80 outlets across the Peninsula and Trade press. Associated social media activity and web content
- PRTF mobile connectivity briefing to MPs across the region
- On-going social media, activity has been restarted since the cross-over period with a focus on getting a constant social media presence again. This has mainly been re-sharing content at present with a view of deploying a cascade of proactive posts to support the consultation as well as Peninsula Transport’s key messages going forward

4. Future work activities

The following work will be undertaken in the coming months:

- Website development – using the Vision to reshape Peninsula Transport’s online voice as well as incorporating PRTF materials
- Updating PRTF campaign plan – ensuring the specific rail key messages are up-to-date following PRTF’s recent discussions and recent MP briefings
- Stakeholder audit leading to the development of new channels as insights are drawn from early communications work
- Development of newsletter channels in order to begin building a regular base of stakeholders interested in the work of Peninsula Transport
- Utilising other opportunities to promote Peninsula Transport’s key messages through proactive news stories
- Public summary of communications objectives and high-level activity following consultation

5. Financial Considerations

Costs are within the financial envelope agreed for communications activities.

6. Equality Considerations

There are no specific equality considerations associated with this paper. The communications strategy will be developed mindful of the need for the work of the STB to be accessible to all.

7. Risk Management Considerations

The proposal to prepare an interim communications strategy allows for the strategy to be refined post consultation to reflect feedback on the high-level strategy, minimising the risk of the strategy needing to be completely re-developed, within a short period of time.

8. Summary

It is recommended that the Board agrees to review and approve the activity plan and communication protocol, via email, post the Board meeting and provide feedback on the interim communications strategy, noting the intention of finalising the strategy, post the consultation on the high-level transport strategy. This approach is proposed to ensure that communications objectives and key messages meet the organisational goals set out in the high-level transport strategy and establish a framework for ongoing communications activity.