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**Meeting:** Transport for the North Board

**Subject:** Outline communications and engagement strategy 2023-25

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**Sponsor:** Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive

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**1. Purpose of the Report:**

1.1 To share with the Board our initial thinking to inform a new TfN communications and engagement strategy to 2025; and seek any initial views/feedback. The full strategy document will then be developed over the summer and shared with the Board for agreement later this year.

**2. Recommendations:**

2.1 The Board is asked to note, and provide feedback, on the outline TfN communications and engagement strategy.

**3. Main issues:**

**Context and background**

3.1 Post re-shaping, TfN's role is more focused on using its statutory functions to: work with partners on pan-regional priorities; enable thought leadership on areas of common interest/issue; and provide 'one voice' for the North, underpinned by evidence, on the case for change/investment. With a sharper, more strategic focus, it is timely to prepare a new communications and engagement strategy to support these functions and ensure we maintain effective relationships with key stakeholders across the region and nationally.

3.2 Moreover, with our revised Strategic Transport Plan out for consultation and expected to be adopted in December 2023, our external communications and stakeholder engagement must be aligned to the STP. We want to maximise opportunities to make the strategic case for investment/change to achieve our vision to transform the North. By providing clarity on our communications and engagement priorities, we can better align with our partners to amplify the North's voice and influence policy and investment where necessary. The prospect of a General Election next year, in which political parties will be finalising policy ambitions for the next Parliament, only further increases the importance of this task.

3.3 We also want to continue to build and enhance our reputation as a sub-national transport body, demonstrating to multiple stakeholders how we can, and are, adding value. In our more focused role, we will be supporting local transport authorities with their planning, for example, by providing access to data sets and analytical tools (such as the Quantified Carbon Reduction dashboard) and facilitating 'thought leadership' on policies and issues that cut across boundaries, and/or where a pan-regional approach could be more efficient. Further details on how TfN can support partners are being discussed with the TfN Executive Board over the summer.

**Communication and engagement objectives**

3.4 The new communications and engagement strategy will explain the breadth and depth of our stakeholder relations, our priority campaigns, and how we intend to

measure our impact across our various corporate channels. At this stage, we want to test with the Board our (draft) three headline objectives for the strategy, and suggested priority campaigns for 2023/24 onwards.

3.5 The strategy would be for three years initially, with a review and refresh during 2025/26 to ensure it remains appropriate and relevant. If there is a fundamental change in our operating environment in the intervening period, we would re-assess accordingly to ensure we remain effective.

3.6 We propose the following (draft) objectives for TfN's external communications and stakeholder engagement from 2023 to 2025:

1. Effectively articulate TfN's 'one voice' remit for the North with relevant partners and stakeholders to enable momentum behind, and support for, our (revised) Strategic Transport Plan ambitions (economic growth, decarbonisation and reducing transport related social exclusion), the case for change and investment priorities.
2. Build and maintain stakeholder trust and confidence in TfN as a statutory sub-national transport body to provide strategic advice, underpinned by robust evidence, that informs and influences government policy, priorities and investment decisions on behalf of the North of England.
3. Build and maintain TfN's reputation/brand as an efficient pan-regional organisation with the professional competency and technical capability to effectively support local partners and delivery bodies in their planning.

3.7 We would welcome Board members' feedback on the (draft) objectives above.

### **2023/24 Priority campaigns**

3.8 To March 2024, we intend to focus our communications and engagement activities across the following campaign areas, aligned to the (draft) objectives above:

- i. **(Revised) Strategic Transport Plan – consultation and adoption.** We will create various opportunities to engage, virtually and in-person, to gather feedback on the STP, to help us shape it and consider what is needed to implement it. During the autumn, ahead of Board in December, we will engage with members and partners to refine the plan and seek support for its adoption, and the priorities for implementation (e.g. investment and devolution, and rail reform).
- ii. **TfN's role (evidence and tools) to support local and national transport planning.** We will build the profile of how TfN can support partners' work and activities, including how our statutory advice benefits the North.
- iii. **Place based, user centric and outcome focused to drive behaviour change.** We will undertake bespoke campaigns to create dialogue and engagement across key issues/topics where behaviour change is necessary pan-regionally, for example: Northern Public Transport week to highlight why modal shift matters and the benefits it can bring to the people, communities and business of the North; and rail reform, to highlight why we need better services now, and more capacity in the future.

3.9 We will use the TfN corporate communication channels and key engagement points, such as the annual conference, to deliver these campaigns with partners. We also want to bring greater consistency to our messaging, with a new TfN core narrative, aligned to STP, and supported by 'positions on' that reflect what we need to achieve, so can we talk better together as one voice to achieve the changes and investment needed in the North.

3.10 We would welcome Board member' feedback on the proposed priority campaigns, specifically if they envisage any strategic gaps.

## **4. Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 *Financial and resource implications***

The 2023/24 budget provides the staffing resource and ancillary costs to deliver these activities.

### **4.2 *Legal Implications***

Any legal implications will be taken into consideration in development of the strategy.

### **4.3 *Risk management and key issues***

Any communication, stakeholder or reputational risks are reflected in TfN's corporate risk register. This is reviewed on a regular basis, and should new risks emerge as this strategy is developed, they will be captured accordingly.

### **4.4 *Environmental Implications***

There are no environmental implications arising from the plans set out above.

### **4.5 *Equality and diversity***

When published, we will ensure the strategy meets relevant standards, as necessary, for accessibility.

### **4.6 *Consultations***

A formal consultation is not necessary. We will engage relevant partners, through our routine meetings/events, as appropriate. TfN Board will be asked to agree the final strategy in due course.

## **5. Background Papers**

5.1 n/a