

Outer London Commission Meeting 3

OLC South Sub-Region Meeting

Location: Kingston Guildhall

Wednesday 15th April 2009

Notes: Peter Wright

Public Meeting

Present

Will McKee , CBE (Chair)	Michèle Dix (on behalf of Peter Hendy) Transport for London
Robert Heskett Land Securities	Tony Pidgley Berkeley Group
Peter Eversden London Forum of Civic Societies	Colin Stanbridge London Chamber of Commerce
Corinne Swain Arup	Peter Rogers London Development Agency
Cllr Mike Fisher LB Croydon	Sir Terry Farrell Farrells
Cllr Derek Osbourne LB Kingston (Leader)	Cllr Sean Brennan LB Sutton (Leader)
Bruce McDonald RB Kingston (Chief Executive)	Jon Rouse LB Croydon (Chief Executive)
Peter Pledger South London Business (Chief Executive)	Billy Dann South London CVS Partnership (Chief Executive)
Peter Wright TfL (Seconded to GLA) (notes)	John Lett Greater London Authority

Names in **bold** are members of the Outer London Commission

Apologies received

Cllr Serge Lourie (LB Richmond); Professor Ian Gordon (London School of Economics)

1. Introductions and apologies

William McKee CBE, Chair of the Outer London Commission

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Commissioners and members of the public to Kingston

1.2 Apologies had been received from Cllr Serge Lourie and Professor Ian Gordon.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 No declarations of interest were made.

3. Notes from previous meeting and matters arising

3.1 The notes were approved and no actions were outstanding.

4. Host's welcome

- 4.1 Cllr Derek Osbourne (DO) welcomed the Outer London Commission to Kingston. He set out his hopes that the OLC will help redefine the relationship between outer London and the centre, particularly in discarding the image of outer London as simply a collection of suburbs.

5. **Presentations on sub-regional responses to the Commission's questions AND the Commission's initial responses to questions**

- 5.1 Cllr Sean Brennan (SB) and Bruce McDonald (BM) gave presentations on behalf of all members of the panel. The panel represented the five boroughs in the south of outer London, South London Business and the Community and Voluntary Sector. The presentations were followed by an open discussion between Commissioners and the panel.
- 5.2 SB summarised the draft submission sent to the OLC¹, highlighting the misperceptions of outer London being a collection of dormitory suburbs for people to work in the centre. He noted that south London has approximately 21% of London's residents, yet only 17% of London's jobs. The largest amount of employment in the region is in public administration, health and education (28% of jobs), the next is banking and business services (27% of jobs) and finally in hospitality, hotels and entertainment (21%).
- 5.3 SB outlined that south London is based around many nodes/centres (often with retail) and that these need to be interconnected to secure future growth - even with Croydon as a growth-hub², this needs to be supported by the areas around it.
- 5.4 Employment growth in south London has not been as great as its potential due to the need for more investment, particularly in transport, which, throughout the meeting, was identified as the greatest single barrier to growth in south London.
- 5.5 Bruce McDonald (BM) followed up with other aspects raised in the south London submission to the OLC. This included the issue of historic net under-investment relative to revenues created in south London (a deficit of approximately £2.5 billion per annum). He further emphasised that transport is the key barrier, even though south London (and the proposed tram schemes and rail upgrades) offers excellent value for money. There is also public support for tram schemes.
- 5.6 The south London boroughs have now set up a Strategy Board, working in partnership with Transport for London (TfL), to address their transport needs. This includes schemes, as well as improvements to stations, station approaches and town centres (to access transport). Furthermore, Sutton has led the work on Smarter Choices with TfL.

¹ See <http://www.london.gov.uk/olc/docs/response-to-first-thoughts.pdf> for the first South London Submission to the OLC

² Although often referred to as "superhubs" during the meeting, throughout these notes they are referred to as "growth hubs" for consistency.

- 5.7 In order to get people away from using cars, improvements are needed to the overground network, the tram network and better orbital connections. There are pressures on radial routes and on the road links to the M25 and beyond. However, south London does offer the potential for providing jobs and for generating shorter trips to those jobs.
- 5.8 Growth hubs were considered a possibility, worthy of further investigation, but BM was clear that this should not be at the expense of other centres in the hierarchy. Transport links need to be improved in the area, including public transport, access to the M25 and the 'Gatwick Diamond'.
- 5.9 BM highlighted that there are lots of examples of successful businesses in south London. He also stated that there is a need to improve and enhance industry in the region. He believes that the Olympics Games and Paralympic Games will provide an opportunity to increase the growth of 'green' industries.
- 5.10 He stated that there is currently a deficit of higher education institutions in southern outer London, outside of Kingston University and St Mary's University College. More universities, as well as links with business, are needed to strengthen the economy.
- 5.11 With reference to quality of life, BM suggested that the new Housing Strategy, with more provision for family homes, would help retain a skilled workforce in the region. Furthermore, there are many opportunities to access green space in south London, with the potential addition of the Wandle Valley Regional Park.
- 5.12 Michèle Dix (MD), in response to the suggested impact of lack of transport investment on growth, asked where the **job growth** would take place if the transport were provided.
- 5.13 Jon Rouse (JR) gave the example of the M23 corridor, which is constrained by the lack of public transport and road access.
- 5.14 Peter Pledger (PP) suggested that the future change of ownership of Gatwick Airport, from BAA, could lead to important changes along the A24 and A23 corridors – along the lines of growth along the A4 corridor in west London. He emphasised the aim of getting 'counter-commuting' flows of people from inner and central London – which is different to the current London Plan. He also suggested that there is opportunity for more financial and business support services in outer London, citing an example of a new trading floor in the Kingston area due to appropriately skilled people living in the area.
- 5.15 DO identified various problems of quality in the overground rail network which could be addressed with approximately £150m investment. This would open up access to centres such as Wimbledon, Croydon and Kingston. This relatively low level of investment is separate from the £500m needed for tram schemes.
- 5.16 Peter Eversden (PE) asked how it would be possible to attract businesses to **invest in transport**. In response JR suggested that the approach would vary, depending on the prevalent economic conditions. For instance, the potential for an infrastructure levy or tariff would not be appropriate at the moment.

- 5.17 PE followed up by asking how south London could compete with the outer metropolitan area (OMA), in particular whether a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the relationship with the ‘competition’ locations in the OMA exists.
- 5.18 PP said that SLB is aware of the potential for businesses to ‘leapfrog’ outer London, but more importantly that they are not competing with central London. Therefore, the accessibility, land and development opportunities mean that they are competing with Redhill, Crawley, Guilford, etc. They are trying to address the factors which make other places more attractive, both to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.
Action: PP to provide list of factors of competition
- 5.19 MD asked how boroughs could address their **parking** policies to allow them to compete with locations outside London and JR responded that the car is important, particularly for accessing town centres from the motorway network. However, even if parking was addressed, the levels of congestion on the A22 and A23 would undo it. Better connectivity to the motorway network is needed. PP went on to make the point that parking is not the solution – there are always more cars than spaces provided by businesses – instead the answer is **better connectivity and choice for orbital transport**.
- 5.20 DO emphasised that parking is not the problem, although it varies between boroughs. He said that it is often the capacity of the road network, citing Kingston bridge as an example of a pinch point.
- 5.21 SB raised the joint work undertaken with TfL in LB Sutton on Smarter Travel, demonstrating that it is possible to get a modal shift from cars to cycling (reduced by 2% and increased by 50% respectively). He further emphasised the importance of connectivity and choice. If alternatives are not available for orbital journeys, then people will use cars with the associated environmental, social and business concerns. This was an issue which BM said need to be redressed with respect to the imbalance of investment for transport in the OMA compared to London. As an example, Billy Dann (BD) said that despite a cohesive voluntary sector in south London, representatives from the west of the sub-region had not attended a meeting in Croydon due to the poor orbital transport.
- 5.22 Peter Rogers (PR) acknowledged the Croydon hub and node concept, but asked what is the key lever for unlocking growth potential in the region? BM and JR re-emphasised the need for transport, suggesting that a growth-hub could be the key lever to get business investment in the region. However, JR acknowledged that business investment is also needed to unlock the infrastructure investment. He went on to say that it is important that the other centres in the sub-region grow, not just Kingston, Croydon and Bromley, but also others like Coulsdon, Mitcham and Wallington.
- 5.23 Corinne Swain (CSw) suggested that, with the highly skilled workforce in the sub-region, there must be **strength in small and medium enterprises** (SMEs) and the level of entrepreneurship. Was there scope in getting people to work closer to home, using enterprise hubs and drop-in centres, etc.

- 5.24 PP said that the vast majority of small businesses are micro-businesses, which might use home working. He said that it is important to support the growth of these businesses with the potential to grow. However, the opportunities for growth in town centres are currently not there, e.g. ‘touchdown’ centres similar to central London. The disappearance of venues on high streets could provide the potential locations for businesses to move in to. He acknowledge that current job losses in London are likely to include a highly-skilled workforce with the potential to set up businesses.
- 5.25 BD emphasised that people actively want to live in south London and it is important that there are vibrant town centres to attract (and retain) people; containing good quality transport, meeting places and shops, as well as maintaining diversity along high streets with faith centres, etc.
- 5.26 Colin Stanbridge (CSt) reiterated that transport is obviously a major concern, and asked whether there was coordination between projects and their priority (perhaps as part of the Strategy Board – see 5.6).
- 5.27 Bob Pinkett (BP) – Transport Consultant for SLP – responded that they have already evaluated the transport schemes to determine their importance in economic terms, as well as social concerns. The local bus services and a cohesive rail network are very important, along with walking, cycling and smarter travel measures. The report, written in July 07, also recognises the importance of strong centres. The report was used to lobby stakeholders such as TfL. CS asked for the report to be shared with the OLC.
Action: BP to send SLP Transport Report
- 5.28 The Chair was keen to understand the difference between improving the connectivity of individual hubs and the connectivity between centres. Is the policy to increase connections to a growth hub, such as Croydon, or to increase density around the other centres? BP replied that they were suggesting improved links between centres, without having to travel through central London. Furthermore, there needs to be seamless interchange, as well as an attractive environment between centres and the stations.
- 5.29 The Chair followed up with the issue of specialisation of growth hubs and their role in the London economy. JR explained that south London is not conventional, with all employment attached to centres, therefore the concept of a ‘constellation’ rather than a hub would be preferable. This would emphasise the role of the centres outside the hubs as locations of employment.
- 5.30 The Chair maintained that the OLC is not proposing a growth hub only concept, and asked how much support needs to be in place in the London Plan, and how much can be delivered through borough Local Development Frameworks (LDFs).
- 5.31 BM emphasised that the Panel reflects the sense of partnership that exists in the sub-region, which has been consistent over a period of time. It would be helpful if this is reflected in the London Plan. However, the boroughs’ LDFs will be used to accentuate the sense of place and community appropriate to them.

- 5.32 Tony Pidgley (TP) asked about the role of key workers, 'green' industries and sustainability in the sub-regional plans.
- 5.33 JR said that it is difficult to get away from the issue of the transport needed for housing and growth, citing that options for development in Croydon are based on either: organised growth around transport investment or dispersed, less sustainable growth and the potential loss of quality of life.
- 5.34 PP stated that whilst transport is still the number one priority, they are not in the business of picking winners in terms of industry. Business administration and manufacturing are still important, and the concept of 'green' industries is rather nebulous. However, it would be helpful if the London Plan, and the message from the OLC and the Mayor, is that south London can still be more enhanced.
- 5.35 PE asked for examples of new businesses that have been attracted, and **what business support is needed** for them to succeed.
- 5.36 PP replied that the considerations for business are consistently cost, availability of skilled staff and access to markets. However, it is only once they reach a level of critical mass that it is possible to push from a local to a regional level.
- 5.37 PE responded by asking if Area Action Plans (AAP) are in place.
- 5.38 DO confirmed that Kingston have provided a strong vision of how to develop locally through their Area Action Plan (AAP). In fact, south London has led on many issues, including AAPs and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), which demonstrate that they are active in addressing and integrating growth in the sub-region. Croydon makes sense as a growth hub for the region, due to the level of access by transport. However, Croydon and Kingston have an excellent retail offer, as well as a university in the latter. He maintained that specialisms are not needed and that grand plans have a potentially inhibitive effect, despite best efforts. For instance, the London Plan identified areas for growth, leaving other areas without such designations potentially receiving less investment. He went on to emphasise that the role of the night time economy should also be considered in suitable locations.
- 5.39 CSt suggested, and there was general agreement from the Panel, that if the Mayor were to extend the tram network, improve the overground rail network and improve links to the M25, then most of the sub-region's needs would have been met.
- 5.40 The Chair made it clear that the Mayor and the OLC have sympathy with the aspirations of outer London, and that the London Plan will be different to the past. In particular the mix of policies is likely to be different for the different quadrants of London. In summary of the **policy direction of travel** from the Panel so far, the Chair said that connectivity is important, there are other employment centres that are important (not just town centres), and that Higher Education (HE) is relatively poor. He asked what more is needed in the other centres and what university models are appropriate for the sub-region, e.g. how they relate to local businesses, etc.

- 5.41 JR confirmed that the Panel have overemphasised the importance of transport due to its fundamental role. However, in terms of **Higher Education**, JR said that the OLC report will fit in well with the timing of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) 'A new 'University Challenge' ' bids for University Towns (reports are due in June and December). There are currently only two potential bids for new HE centres in London, in Havering and Croydon. South London already has a strong Further Education (FE) provision and they are looking at potential hybrid models, as well as partnerships with other institutions. The OLC report could make it clear how important it is to have HE institutions in a region. The Chair asked if details of partners, locations etc. could be sent to the Commission, which JR agreed to.
Action: JR to send on details of HE bid partners, locations etc. for Croydon
- 5.42 PP summarised other issues, beyond transport, which are important to the local and London economies. This included recognising the role of other centres, including industrial estates. On-site training is needed to replenish the existing skills and to create a new supply of labour. Some areas are looking to become BIDs, which will improve the security of the sites as well as the relationship with the local community. With regards to education, he emphasised that it is not just important to have HE, but also to have specialist models (including apprenticeships), which have specific links to employers. The Chair remarked that there are more models available, including combined HE/FE campuses.
- 5.43 Sir Terry Farrell (TF) stated that the arguments presented by the Panel and the submission was very persuasive, i.e. south London is different to other areas in outer London, it is an attractive place that people want to live. However, **how do proposals for new trams or rail improvement schemes make an area more attractive?**
- 5.44 JR, as a regular tram user, said that the Wimbledon to Croydon tram has opened up a travel to work corridor that previously didn't exist. Furthermore, the tram to New Addington reconnected a settlement where access was poor and people previously had not wanted to live. Transport investment, e.g. in trams, can be built incrementally. However, in addition to connectivity the system needs to have high standards, such as those being introduced on the East London Line and London Overground. In response TF asked where the priorities should be. JR suggested that the Wandle Park provides a key connecting 'spoke' from Croydon to the Thames. It provides opportunities for specialist employment, and could connect green spaces, which would also have the benefits of providing a framework for increasing walking and cycling along the corridor. DO suggested that an advantage of trams is that it is possible to connect places by putting a new station or stop where they had not existed before. They provide access to services, such as employment, education and shops, for socially excluded people, which is a social positive. CSt replied that much of this connectivity could be achieved more easily and cheaper using buses. DO agreed it is possible, but high frequencies are needed as well as access into estates etc.
- 5.45 MD followed up on the issue of increased connectivity, emphasising that there the current TfL business plan is already costed to 2017. Furthermore, buses already exist, but what can be done to make them more attractive? In addition

to this, many trips in outer London have dispersed origins and destinations, and do not go between centres. Modelling suggests there is insufficient demand to pick up the trips using trams. However, as many trips are less than 5km, these have the potential to be undertaken by walking and cycling. MD asked how much more could be done to promote walking and cycling in outer London?

- 5.46 BD said that buses are not always an attractive option to users, due to issues such as anti-social behaviour from young people on the top floors of buses. He agreed that it is not just town centre to town centre movement, but that people should be encouraged to live in and connect places. South London offers large amount of green spaces, a thriving art scene, as well as the international standard Twickenham Stadium. Of key importance is that buses need to be safe and comfortable for people to use.
- 5.47 PP maintained that the business community would not leave their cars for buses due to the poor quality and connectivity of the bus system. A tram system would be more attractive. It could also be used to connect estates to areas of work. MD replied that there is already an extensive rail infrastructure system in south London, acknowledging that more could be done to improve the interchanges. However, businesses do use buses in central London. PP responded by saying that the model in central London, with associated congestion charging (CC), level of service, etc., is not applicable in outer London. The models used in central London should not simply be applied to outer London. JR said that a model of express bus routes between key nodes could be used.
- 5.48 MD outlined some of the potential problems associated with tram schemes, with on-street running, etc. She asked for thoughts from the Panel on schemes such as road improvements or even new roads. PP said that there might be arguments for road improvements in specific areas. MD went on to ask if there could be a case for managing demand; CSt questioned the possibility of a CC scheme for Croydon. JR replied no to a Croydon CC scheme. However, he agreed that there was a case for managing demand, for example through traffic smoothing projects, or other more radical measures. Cllr Mike Fisher (MF) asked for examples of more radical schemes, which JR suggested could include a tunnel to link the M25 from the Coulsdon Bypass to Purley Way. DO agreed that the challenge of road widening is a reasonable one, but that creating schemes similar to the North Circular (A406) would be associated with unpopular losses to housing etc. and are therefore unlikely. There is, however, potential for improving, or providing new walking and cycling routes, but those do potentially exclude some sections of the community.
- 5.49 With regards to MDs remarks about an extensive rail network in south London, DO asserted that the network is extremely poor off the main lines, e.g. Thameslink is particularly slow. MD responded by saying that, importantly, the network exists; it is the issue of how it is used in the future that is important. DO finished by saying that despite the network being there, it needs to be made more attractive to users and cheaper.
- 5.50 BM followed up on MD's comment about no money being available in TfL's business plan, saying that changing behaviour is important (which they have

already done a lot). He said that it is important to improve people's confidence in travel, whether by trains, trams or buses. SB agreed that it is important to be flexible, imaginative and creative in solutions, but the approach needs to be developed to solve south London's problems

- 5.51 TP broadened the scope to suggest that if the challenge is to improve the economy, and that people already want to live in south London, why do businesses not want to locate there? PP said that many businesses come to south London as an attractive place, but that the three issues outlined earlier (see 5.36) are needed. Furthermore, identifying the sectors which can be attracted to south London is important, both from central London and from outside London, and what is needed to get them there. BM re-emphasised the point raised in the submission that economic growth should not replicate patterns of the past. There is scope around some sectors in south London, including tourism, hospitality, education, medicine and related businesses, digital and creative media.
- 5.52 PE asked the Panel what their experiences were relating to district centres facing long-term decline, and what the strategies are to reduce it? In response JR identified some work undertaken by Ian Smith (IS) – Director South London Partnership – that can be shared with the OLC. IS summarised that there are centres in their own rights, with their own associated suburbs. These have been in decline due to poor connectivity and under investment in transport, as well as because of the changing face of retail. JR suggested that it is important to return to the more symbiotic relationship between different levels in the town centre hierarchy. Improve connectivity, and the image/characteristics of an area, and avoid inappropriate competition between centres.
Action: JR or IS to send materials on strategies to reduce decline in district centres
- 5.53 The Chair raised a number of issues for the Panel to consider, including; the potential role of more road schemes (citing the need for businesses to be served by lorries, and an example from Thameside where road improvements made it more attractive to business); the issue of employment zoning and the resistance to accept B8³ alongside B1³ (suggesting that flexibility is needed); their attitude to changing and reconfiguring space, including thoughts on tall-buildings and the densification of housing around hubs to justify the levels of transport investment.
- 5.54 DO responded that in Kingston they are constantly reviewing the changing needs of retail, and are prepared to change. Citing the example of the Eden Quarter, where there are ambitions for a new shopping street, anchor store and 300+ homes within Kingston's central area. They are looking to develop an iconic building, modernise the office space, and introduce a two-tier shopping street, all within the historic centre of Kingston. Other boroughs have their own approaches, including a design competition in Croydon. However, in addition to exploring new ways of approaching design, it is important to anchor the existing offer, e.g. the Rose Theatre in Kingston has helped secure regeneration of an area. DO said it was important not to look at maintaining the suburbs as they are, as they are simply the remnant of urban creep. Instead

³ Use Class Order B8: Logistics and storage; B1: Offices

they should look to make them vibrant in terms of businesses and improved public realm, which will attract more people, including those making shorter journeys.

- 5.55 The Chair asked if there are lessons which could be shared with the OLC relating to the causes of loss of office occupiers, for example in Wallington, Croydon. He asked who the office occupiers of the future would be in outer London? In response to the example, JR suggested that the main causes were the changing nature of businesses, with fewer back office functions needed, as well as the desire for businesses to locate in areas with good car access and parking, e.g. on industrial estates. The latter was confirmed by PP, who went on to say that another issue is the speed of change of IT and the associated upgrades. If these do not happen fast enough then businesses will go elsewhere.
- 5.56 DO said that companies from the travel industry, such as Crystal Holidays, have located in the Kingston area. PP said that the attractiveness of these locations is that people work atypical hours and want to be able to get back home quickly. SB agreed with this, going on to say that adaptability is key and that places need to be fit for purpose. Improving the quality of life, includes responding to the challenging of having sustainable centres through LDFs, where each borough will respond differently. SB also asked what the Mayor's definition of high-rise is.
- 5.57 The Chair asked whether the office space could be filled, or whether it might need to be converted to residential? JR suggested that a flexible approach is needed, with a more organic/mixed use approach rather than simply applying rigid zones. It is likely that some of the centres should be converted or completely redeveloped to meet future needs.
- 5.58 In response to PE asking whether the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) help sub-regions get the quality of life they want, SB said that the partnership is working, alongside the use of Local Area Agreements. PE asked for papers on the Hackbridge exemplar development (PE to advise), which SB agreed to send on.
Action: SB to send on papers on the Hackbridge exemplar
- 5.59 The Chair invited final comments from the Panel and Commissioners.
- 5.60 JR wanted to emphasise that the south London business community is unusually vibrant, with trade and contributions (including via charities) to the local community. There are many LSP-led initiatives in the borough, which is associated with a high level of commitment and loyalty in south London.
- 5.61 DO raised the issue of Park and Ride (P&R) in London, suggesting that a consistent P&R policy (similar to the Oxford P&R Model) could be implemented on the outskirts of London (not just at Christmas). The Chair responded that other stakeholders had agreed that managing demand was important, but only if similar measures were applied to competitors beyond London. JR agreed that this would be necessary, for instance the proposed 2% levy for Crossrail means that investment is earmarked already, whereas other authorities can choose to spend locally.

5.62 The Chair thanked everyone for his or her contributions and summarised that the evening had provided a constructive dialogue. He emphasised the importance of sending on additional materials to the OLC, to help in preparing the evidence for the final report. In particular, he said that whilst the draft paper submitted to the OLC was useful, it is important that specifications of key policies and investment decisions are included, as well as general enabling statements.

5.63 SB ended by thanking the OLC for meeting with them and asking fair and searching questions. Their position is 'work in progress' and they are willing to work in partnership. To achieve success, it is important that the political will, business will and third sector will exist. The Panel tried to present a united message on behalf of the five outer boroughs in south London. They are motivated, flexible and keen to cooperate in order for growth to succeed in their sub-region.

6. Business of the Commission

6.1 No business of the Commission was raised.

7. Any other business

7.1 No other business was raised.

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