Infrastructure Plan consultation: Draft Regeneration Committee submission to the Planning Committee

Introduction

The Planning Committee is coordinating the Assembly's response to the consultation on the London Infrastructure Plan 2050 (IP). The Regeneration Committee has been asked to contribute to the consultation questions relating to digital connectivity.

The relevant consultation questions are:

- What else can we do to ensure we achieve universal digital connectivity?

- Are you able to suggest examples of alternative ways of providing digital connectivity to local areas with poor or no broadband provision?

Draft response from the Regeneration Committee

The Regeneration Committee has considered the Mayor's objectives for improving digital infrastructure as set out in the IP. The Committee's response is based on the recommendations set out in its letter of March 2014 to the Mayor regarding digital connectivity in the London Plan.[1] This followed evidence the Committee received at its meeting in January 2014 with expert guests from the communications and digital sectors and London government.

We welcome the Infrastructure Plan's emphasis on improving digital infrastructure. As outlined in the IP, London lags behind other major centres. The Committee heard in January that London was ranked sixth from bottom in a recent survey of broadband provision in European major cities, and that failure to act quickly could risk London's competitiveness. That said, we support the IP's emphasis on enhancing digital connectivity (rather than a narrow focus on broadband), given the fast-moving nature of connectivity technology which will require London to facilitate investment in a range of modes. As we highlighted in our letter in March, improving a range of digital connectivity modes is particularly key for London's small and medium enterprises.

We broadly support the measures outlined in the IP to enhance digital connectivity, however we would like to see a number of changes reflecting the priority and urgency that the Mayor must place on upgrading digital connectivity as London's essential fourth utility.

We back the Mayor's decision to establish a Connectivity Advisory Group to work with the London Infrastructure Delivery Board (LIDB). We that think the Mayor's plans for the Group could be strengthened by **establishing a timetable for the city-wide mapping exercise** proposed in the Plan. Given the urgency of London's need for better connectivity, we suggest that the Advisory Group should be established in early 2015 and complete the mapping exercise by the end of December 2015. Furthermore, we would encourage the Mayor to **involve Ofcom as a key stakeholder in the Connectivity Advisory Group**. As set out in the Committee's letter to the Mayor in March, the Mayor should invite the regulator to examine the incentives facing suppliers, and to investigate the scope for addressing any factors which disincentivise private investment.

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[1] Letter from the Regeneration Committee to the Mayor, 4 March 2014

Equally, we would like to see the Mayor establish a lead digital champion to implement the recommendations of the Connectivity Advisory Group. Currently, it is unclear who is responsible for spearheading improved digital connectivity. The IP should commit the Mayor to nominate **a Mayoral lead to provide accountability** for delivering the step change in digital connectivity that London needs.

The Committee welcomes the Mayor's objective to prioritise digital connectivity in new developments, and in particular in Opportunity Areas. Gathering evidence in January 2014, the Committee heard that new developments often lack effective connectivity, largely because individual sites are not linked to arterial broadband infrastructure. We strongly support the Mayor's aim to charge the LIDB explore how communications providers and developers can work together to prioritise digital connectivity at an early stage in planning Opportunity Areas.