**South West Board meeting 5 February 2018**

The South West Board met in Taunton on 5th February and had a good turnout, with 28 people attending including guest speakers.

The main business was a further discussion about options for Sub-national Transport Boards(s) for the region. Nigel Riglar fed back from the SW Councils Chief Executives’ discussion a few days earlier – they had been very positive about the work done by and for ADEPT on regional growth, infrastructure, and transport priorities. It is recognised that the pressures and drivers vary considerably across the region, which weakens the case for a single STB. There was a presentation by Chris Olsen, STBs Lead at the DfT, who emphasised the need for improved connectivity between big cities outside London, and the strong case for STBs to give a single voice for a region to talk to Government and influence others. A coherent rationale and narrative means describing a functional economic geography, with ‘no white spaces on the map’. The meeting agreed that a two STBs model is probably viable for the South West, but will need further development to emphasise the corridors into and between them, and to consider the positions of those councils on the margins of the traditional SW region but with very strong ‘pulls’ towards neighbouring regions including England’s Economic Heartland and the South East.

The second part of the meeting covered future highways issues, with two further contributions from DfT colleagues. The first was on shaping the future of the SRN – the Highways England initial report had been published in December and consultation was just ending. The Government will respond to this in the Spring, and it is then expected that RIS2 will be published in mid-2019, with business and delivery plans to follow. The second was on the current MRN consultation, looking at defining the network, developing regional evidence bases to inform investment planning (with a key role for STBs), and scheme funding and eligibility. There was a wide-ranging discussion, with plenty of questions about how evidence base work will be funded, and whether the total amount of investment funds available for major roads will be increased once vehicle excise duty income in included. Answers awaited!