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European Transport Funders Fact Finding Visit to Ashford

Key members of European partnership which provides funding to improve train station access, integration and appearances visited Ashford as part of a fact finding tour last week.

Two High Speed Train projects, HSTconnect and HSTintegration, lead by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) are European funded projects that work to improve the appearance of station areas and improve the links between high speed train stations and town centres.

On Wednesday 13 and Thursday 14 February it was Ashford's turn to host a 'best practice' visit by the HSTintegration European partners including delegates from the UK, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany.

The visit, hosted by Ashford's Future included presentations from the partnership on future plans for the town, a tour of the public realm works in Bank Street and Elwick Road and a trip to the Hitachi Trains depot to view and ride on the prototype Hitachi bullet trains due to come into service from December 2009.

Ashford's Future Transport Manager Andy Phillips, who is managing Ashford's project investments, explained: "The HSTintegration project is bringing in around £1million of investment to help Ashford realise its potential as a business gateway between Britain and the rest of Europe.

"The funding has been used in Ashford toward the public realm improvements in Elwick Road and Bank Street including the public art 'flume' which marks the route between the station and the town, improved pedestrian links to the International Station area and to and from Beaver Road, and improved cycle parking and other transport connections to the domestic side of the station.

"We received many positive comments about the work being undertaken now, the ambitious plans for Ashford's future and the partnerships that are being forged to promote a more 'joined up' approach to improved transport and development opportunities in the town."

Egon Walesch, manager of the two HST projects explained: "The HST partnership brings together partners from across North West Europe co-operating to ensure that regions are well-placed to benefit from high speed train services.

"Through research, pilots, sharing of best practice and influencing policy developments, the HST projects make a clear case for better integration of public transport provision and facilities in order to improve regional prosperity and competitiveness.

"Seeing first-hand developments such as the improvements to the public realm supported by HSTintegration and the preparations for the introduction of domestic high speed services in 2009, this visit brought home to the partnership the great strides being made in Ashford."



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Notes for editors:

For more information about HSTintegration visit www.hst4i.net or www.hstconnect.net

Ashford has been identified by the Government as one of the key growth areas in the South East and is now the fastest growing town between London and the Continent. It is set to double in size by 2031, creating 28,000 extra jobs and 31,000 new homes. For further information visit www.ashfordbestplaced.co.uk

Ashford's Future is a partnership of government and private sector bodies working together to achieve sustainable growth and to stimulate investment.

Ashford's Future partners comprise Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council, SEEDA (South East England Development Agency), English Partnerships, Environment Agency, Learning and Skills Council, South East England Regional Assembly, The Housing Corporation and the Highways Agency.

ASHFORD FACTBOX

Key aspects of Ashford's £650m investment programme include:

- 2 million sq ft of commercial office development available
- Introduction of high-speed rail services to London in 2009, reducing travel time to 37 minutes
- A £65m extension of existing County Square Shopping Centre, opening spring 2008
- Some of the best leisure and sports facilities in the South East, including a multi-million-pound redeveloped leisure centre and international standard athletics stadium
- Development of large-scale residential neighbourhoods
- £28m investment in transport schemes, including transformation of the Ashford ring road, M20 / J10 widening improvements, a new J10a costing £56m and park-and-ride scheme
- £24m investment to improve water supplies

About SEEDA

1. The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) is the Government funded Agency responsible for the sustainable economic development and regeneration of the South East of England – the driving force of the UK's economy. Our aim is to create a prosperous, dynamic and inspirational region by helping businesses compete more effectively, training a highly skilled



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workforce, supporting and enabling our communities while safeguarding our natural resources and cherishing our rich cultural heritage.

HSTintegration and HSTconnect focus on enhancing the HST network throughout North West Europe specifically through targeted infrastructure investment, upgrading of stations to improve their accessibility, and the creation of multi-modal transport hubs linked to the HST network.

The projects are led by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and are co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the INTERREG IIIB for North West Europe. Projects have a total value of €48 million, which represents some of the most significant INTERREG IIIB project investments to date.

SEEDA sees sustainable and innovative transport solutions as essential to deliver its vision of the South East of England as a world class region maintaining its global competitiveness. Our collaborative projects with partners across the North West Europe play a key role in achieving this.

2. The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) for South East England 2006-2016: a world class region achieving sustainable prosperity.

The RES has three headline targets. Progress towards all three of these will provide evidence of overall progress against the vision:

Global Competitiveness: Achieving an average annual increase in GVA (Gross Value Added) per capita of at least 3%.

Smart Growth: Increasing productivity per worker by an average 2.4% annually, from £39,000 in 2005 to at least £50,000 by 2016 (in constant prices).

Sustainable Prosperity: Reducing the rate of increase in the region's ecological footprint (from 6.3 global hectares per capita in 2003, currently increasing at 1.1% per capita per annum), stabilising it and seek to reduce it by 2016.

For further information on SEEDA contact:

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