



# Strategic Transport Forum

29<sup>th</sup> March 2019

## Agenda Item 8: Business Unit Update

### *Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the Forum note the update on the work programme**

#### **1. Context**

- 1.1. The EEH Business Unit's work programme is focused on development and delivery of the Transport Strategy Framework document in summer 2019, and the full Transport Strategy, with supporting evidence and documentation by summer 2020.
- 1.2. Surrounding that programme of work is a continued emphasis on securing opportunities and maximising the value of England's Economic Heartland for partners locally and nationally.
- 1.3. This paper provides an update on additional activities that EEH Business Unit is engaged with at present.

#### **2. Spending Review**

- 2.1. The spring statement confirmed a Government Spending Review will commence shortly, to conclude alongside the autumn budget. The announcement of the Spending Review also confirmed its focus on outcomes – supporting a high-growth economy with public services that work for everyone.
- 2.2. EEH is well prepared for the Spending Review, both in terms of its clearly defined role within the delivery of the Oxford-Cambridge arc and also work currently being commissioned to develop a long term investment plan.
- 2.3. It is clear that the Spending Review – when it comes – will be challenging, not assisted by the fact that investment in the national programmes (both Highways England Road Investment Strategy and Network Rail major infrastructure) is taking longer and costing more than anticipated.
- 2.4. Work has been commissioned that will ensure the Forum is in a position to have an evidence-led submission prepared for the Spending Review: one that will set out how investment in strategic transport infrastructure is required to support the delivery of planned growth and support realisation of the shared ambition for economic prosperity.

#### **3. Major Road Network/Large Local Majors Programme**

- 3.1. As Members are aware, work is underway to develop the prioritisation methodology for the England's Economic Heartland Programme for the Major Road Network/Large Local Majors Funding opportunity. Partners have been asked to submit their business cases for schemes proposed for investment in the first five years of the programme (2020 – 2025) by 17th May 2019.

- 3.2. In June 2018, England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum was invited to put forward packages of proposals for consideration as 'early entries' to the MRN investment programme. Two proposals were submitted: A414 Corridor Hatfield to Watford Capacity Improvements; and Aylesbury Eastern Link Roads.
- 3.3. On 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019, EEH Business Unit received a letter from Graham Pendlebury (Director, Local Transport, DfT) which confirmed that no further 'early entry' MRN schemes would be funded.
- 3.4. DfT has said that schemes identified as 'early entry' schemes can be re-submitted in July as part of the MRN/Large Local Majors prioritisation process, if they remain eligible and are still a priority for the region.
- 3.5. This news will be deeply disappointing for Forum members. While it is respected that the Government does not want to over-commit MRN funding in advance of the wider prioritisation process, the proposals submitted were time-bound (given links with build out timelines for housing developments, for example) and were ready to proceed. The schemes were selected for the significant benefits that they brought to the Heartland and the wider ambitions of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.
- 3.6. Forum Members will want to bear the timing issues relating to these, and other schemes, in mind when reviewing England's Economic Heartland's prioritisation approach. This will ensure that the right schemes are being a) identified and b) delivered at the right time to unlock the benefits they create.

#### **4. Working with Neighbouring Sub National Transport Bodies**

- 4.1. The Government's vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and the joint declaration, published on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019, acknowledged the vital links beyond the Heartland, listing the important relationships with: the Midlands; the M4 corridor and Heathrow Airport; with London and the Greater South East; and with the rest of East Anglia.
- 4.2. England's Economic Heartland has established and strengthening relationships with all of these areas.
  - a) On 7 February 2019, the Chair of the Strategic Transport Forum and EEH Programme Director met with GLA Deputy Mayors Jules Pipe and Heidi Alexander to discuss the interface between the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and neighbouring Sub National Transport Bodies. The discussion reinforced the need for strategic transport issues to be dealt with at this level. The discussion was positive and it was agreed that further Officer level engagement would follow.
  - b) The Programme Director attended the most recent meeting of Transport East on 8<sup>th</sup> March and engagement with the Transport East officer group ensures that linkages continue to strengthen.
  - c) All seven of the Sub-national Transport Bodies meet on a quarterly basis – the most recent meeting taking place on 14<sup>th</sup> March in London. Areas of common interest – for example the Spending Review, the Major Road Network and rail review – are the focus for on-going collaborative working.

#### **5. Bus Operators Association**

- 5.1. EEH Business Unit has commenced work to explore options for collaborating innovation and ambition across the EEH bus operators' network. Included in this is exploration of how EEH might develop a Heartland-wide integrated ticketing offer, building on some already established and successful schemes that exist within the Heartland. A report on this work will be brought to the Forum on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

## **6. Innovation Work Programme**

- 6.1. The focus of England's Economic Heartland's Innovation work to date has been developing the Regional Evidence Base – through the database (Project View) and the emerging 'what if' policy scenario modelling tool. These projects are gaining significant traction, both in terms of national interest and their increased uptake by partners to help shape strategic transport planning as well as wider spatial place-making and economic growth decisions
- 6.2. In addition, the work programme explores and seeks to exploit emerging innovation opportunities – such as developing a potential rural CAV testbed.
- 6.3. Most recently, the EEH innovation work strand submitted a proposal to DfT's Open Local Authority Data Competition. The proposal, Heartpark, aimed to open pan-regional parking data for around 164,040 parking spaces across the Heartland area, allowing local people to access information about parking spaces in a much broader geographic area. We await the outcome of the proposal and will update the Forum in due course.

## **7. Delivery Capacity/Capability**

- 7.1. As part of its focus to look at how to improve the development and delivery of strategic investment proposals, the Transport Officer Group has recently completed a review of the processes and skills required. This work drew heavily on the experience and knowledge that currently exists across the partners.
- 7.2. The output from this work identified the potential benefit of developing a 'centre of excellence' for the planning, development and delivery of major infrastructure projects: the development of such a capacity/capability at the Heartland level will provide the Heartland partners with access to skills, experience and resource that it currently does not.
- 7.3. The Transport Officer Group supported the output from the initial work and on that basis a further piece of work – again involving partners – has been let, the purpose of which is to develop a detailed proposal for consideration by the partners. The ambition is to have this proposal ready for the summer.

## **8. Regional Conference**

- 8.1. Members will be reminded that the England's Economic Heartland Annual Conference is due to take place on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2019, at the University of Hertford.

**Naomi Green**

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**March 2019**