



Vision 2050 competition – March 2020

By Deborah Keary

Transport can redefine an area

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is home to valuable resources such as world leading innovators, tier-topping universities and young, skilled professionals. Despite an abundance of these skills, knowledge and resources, the region currently remains heavily characterised by car-dependent communities and as such, if action is not taken now, it is in danger of limiting its potential for sustainable future growth by 2050.

The EEH region has been successful in the past due to the realisation of economic potential. Naturally, this has resulted on infrastructure being centred on economic sustainability, aiming to maximise the economic output.

Although this is a vital element of development, I believe the overarching focus on economic growth has hindered other elements of the region and its society. In my opinion, the key way to transform this region to its maximum potential in 2050 is to not simply focus on the economy, but to boost each element of sustainability: economic, social and environmental.

Social sustainability can be achieved through the creation of spaces which promote a high quality of life and wellbeing, by studying and understanding the needs of residents. This modern concept has only been developed in recent decades, and therefore has not been a central aspect of the implementation of transit systems. For 2050, through considering social elements such as affordability, inclusive infrastructure, and social cohesion, EEH's transit systems could provide an appropriate service which provides accessibility to all members of society. Through doing so, new opportunities and resources are made available to all residents of EEH, maximising choice for all.

Environmental sustainability focuses on the preservation of natural environment and the reduction of pollution. Research shows that the provision of sustainable transport alternatives underpins a regions ability to contribute to environmental sustainability. For example, well-connected rail lines naturally attract high-density development, which in turn encourages individuals to utilise the train as their primary mode of transport, as well as providing an opportunity to introduce active modes of transport into the first / last mile of transit.

With environmental sustainability being a core priority within the region's future development to 2050, carbon emissions must be combatted, while also increasing resident's quality of life, through a focus on development that promotes active travel within clustered residency.

The EEH region has been heavily influenced by the dominant economy of London, located 20 miles south of the region. This dominance has been propelled through extensive high-quality rail infrastructure linking economic nodes such as Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge to London in under an hour.

This hub-and-spoke railway system has facilitated the development of growth corridors along these north to south lines, bringing with it the expansion of suburban towns such as Watford, Cheshunt and Bishop's Stortford. The growth of these towns provides a concrete insight into the economic opportunities provided by reliable and well-connected transport services. Although many well-connected towns have flourished, others within EEH are slowly becoming dormant, characterised by rural migration, unskilled populations, and depleting economies.

This has occurred due to inadequate connections and opportunities. In the nearer term the true potential of these depleting towns could be harnessed through capitalising on the instruction of East-West rail, the primary rail priority within the region's growth strategy. This development could provide a chance to not only enhance the economic sustainability for the area, but also boost social and environmental sustainability. Better exploiting these aspects and the power they have, could alter the direction of the region's development, leading to a more appropriate, durable and effective transport system.

Deborah Keary, Graduate Transport Planner, WSP