



MK Futures Team
Milton Keynes Council
Civic Offices
1 Saxon Gate East
Milton Keynes
MK9 3EJ

EEH Business Unit
c/o Buckinghamshire County Council
County Hall
Walton Street
Aylesbury
HP20 1UA

Email: MKFutures@milton-keynes.gov.uk

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Dear Sir/ Madam,

MILTON KEYNES STRATEGY FOR 2050 CONSULTATION RESPONSE

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is the Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the region stretching from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire, and Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire, incorporating the area defined by Government as the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

EEH advocates a user-centred approach to strategic transport planning, as set out in the draft regional Transport Strategy. This reflects the need for a new approach to the planning, development and delivery of infrastructure priorities: one that harnesses innovation to effect the changes required in order to meet the legal requirement to achieve net-zero carbon by 2050. Milton Keynes Council's (MKC) plan to put people at the heart of the city's planned growth is complementary to the regional approach and is therefore to be welcomed.

Strategic Context

The Government has identified the Oxford–Cambridge Arc as a national economic priority. Milton Keynes is at the heart of this this arching sweep of land, benefiting from access to economies in Bedford and Cambridge in the east, Oxford via Aylesbury in the west, the opportunities within Northampton to the north, and those to the south/south-east in Bedford, Luton and Hertfordshire. This makes it particularly important to ensure that proposals for the long term future of Milton Keynes are developed in close working partnership with adjoining local authorities.

Milton Keynes' strategic location and good connectivity makes the city an attractive location for economic activity, with service and technology industries a particular strength. It has also seen the city grow to be an important hub for logistics, with a number of national distribution centres serving both the regional and national economy.

In terms of the six key aims set out in the MK2050 document, this response focuses on key

aim number four, that being to make travel easier around the city, particularly on public transport, by walking and cycling and reducing congestion.

In developing the detailed infrastructure proposals for Milton Keynes it will be necessary to demonstrate how they contribute to realising the economic potential and delivering net environmental gain. In this context it will be important to consider the implications for the transport system of proposals in other policy areas, including but not limited to long-term land use planning.

The delivery of the East West Rail project will provide a step change in connectivity across the region. At the same time, delivery of HS2 will enable capacity on the existing West Coast Main Line to be reallocated, with a regional priority being to develop a new strategic axis linking Northampton – Milton Keynes/Bletchley – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common.

The location of Milton Keynes/Bletchley at the inter-section of these two corridors provides the city with a significant uplift in its strategic connectivity, one that will need to be complemented by improved local connectivity within the urban area.

Building Mobility into Place Making

To date, Milton Keynes has flourished because of the way it has provided easy movement of people and goods since its incarnation over fifty years ago.

Sustainable place-making within Milton Keynes on the scale identified within the consultation document provides an opportunity for the city to personify its 'different by design culture'.

Despite the city's 320km network of cycling 'redway' routes and porous walking environment, it is paradoxically reliant on cars as the main mode of transport. Its grid network of streets and wide boulevards operate with little congestion outside of the peak, consequently making the ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 all the more difficult without strong policy intervention supported by investment.

In developing detailed proposals full and proper consideration needs to be given to ensuring the freight and logistic needs of the communities, including businesses, are properly reflected.

The assumption that freight related jobs will reduce due to trends in automation needs to be tested against a range of future scenarios: as the experience of the COVID-19 lockdown has highlighted, freight and logistics are fundamental to society. The sector continues to be a source of innovation for the transport system.

This potentially provides Milton Keynes with a competitive advantage with the development of new business models that provide access for servicing and delivery activities. As part of any such considerations there may be added value in exploring the potential to cluster supply chain activity.

A Mass Rapid Transit Network

A low/zero-carbon powered, high frequency mass rapid transport system has the potential to offer an attractive and viable alternative to the private car, as well as supporting improved social mobility. It also has the potential to address social inequalities by providing improved connectivity for those who do not have access to a car.

Segregation of the MRT from other road-users, be it alongside traffic or dedicated routes, will enable services to run with the confidence of reliability, something important if the city is to create a viable alternative to single-occupancy car use. The need to include orbital services to provide connectivity between communities within Milton Keynes is supported in principle.

It is noted that the illustrative network for the MRT extends beyond the administrative boundaries of Milton Keynes. The planning and development of any strategic infrastructure proposal that crosses administrative boundaries must be taken forward in partnership. This is particularly the case when transit systems are being considered given the need to consider how such proposals might relate to longer-term land-use planning.

The output from the EEH commissioned first/last mile project offers insight on best practice in improving local connectivity and may be helpful in developing proposals that enable the potential of a MRT proposal to be realised. Similarly the analysis undertaken as part of that project to segment the region's population is available to Milton Keynes as part of the Regional Evidence Base.

East West Rail

Delivery of the initial East West Rail project is an agreed regional priority, as is realising the longer-term potential of the East West Main Line.

The strategic significance of both Milton Keynes Central and Bletchley Stations is reflected in the proposal for East West Rail. The East West Rail Consortium has actively supported the case for the proposed eastern entrance to Bletchley station (and associated road reconfiguration) to help maximise the benefit of EWR investment to the local community.

EEH is actively working with the East West Railway Company to ensure the full potential of the East West Main Line is realised. EEH supports the need to explore the potential of an east-north rail connection to enable services to connect to Central Milton Keynes from the east, negating the need to change or reverse at Bletchley.

Furthermore, EEH continues to work with Network Rail and the Government to ensure the reallocation of released capacity on the West Coast Main Line post HS2 benefits the region: in particular the potential to develop a north-south axis connecting Northampton, via Milton Keynes, Aylesbury, High Wycombe and on to Old Oak Common.



Mayor Dave Hodgson
Chair, Strategic Transport Forum