

Programme Office  
c/o Buckinghamshire County Council  
County Hall  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
HP20 1UA

[RISFuture.consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:RISFuture.consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

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Dear Sir,

**SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND'S STRATEGIC ROADS  
CONSULTATION RESPONSE: ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND**

England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance established the Strategic Transport Forum in February 2016. Membership of the Strategic Alliance covers the area from Swindon, through Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire across to Luton and Hertfordshire.

The Strategic Transport Forum is the emerging Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland region. It is the focus for a single conversation on strategic transport issues and maintains the overview of strategic investment priorities. The Forum works closely with the Department for Transport, Highways England and Network Rail, all of whom are members of the Forum.

We welcome reference in the consultation document to the engagement that has been carried out with the Sub-national Transport Bodies and desire a continued involvement in shaping the SRN and MRN in and around the Heartland. It is noted that the consultation states that the Sub-national Transport Bodies will be statutory partners in both the road and rail investment process and this is welcomed.

The consultation report also correctly identified the role the Sub-national Transport Bodies have in supporting growth, and that the realisation of the economic potential of the Heartland is a priority for the UK. This will require transformational infrastructure and we will continue to work collaboratively with Highways England and the DfT to identify investment priorities.

***Strategic Context***

The National Infrastructure Commission's (NIC) report on the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor identified the economic potential of the region as being of national significance to the long term future of the UK economy. The Commission identified the

potential to increase the value of the economy (currently £92.5bn per annum) by an additional amount of between £85bn and £163bn over the next 30 years. The Commission identified improved connectivity as being one of two critical issues that needed to be addressed in order to realise that opportunity.

The Government's response to the NIC in the Budget 2017 endorsed the Commission's view as to the national significance of realising the economic potential of the Heartland area. This Highways England consultation reassuringly states that in setting RIS2 the NIC findings will be taken account of generally and through studies of specific infrastructure needs, including the Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor.

### *Response to consultation*

The SRN strategy in RIS2 and beyond must take account of both user and business needs, safety, journey time reliability, and a feeling of control are important to users of the SRN. Business requirements and wider economic growth will need to be facilitated by both ongoing operation, maintenance, and renewal of existing infrastructure, and delivery of truly transformational schemes which will change how and where we travel, and the pattern of economic growth.

The key aims of RIS2 are identified under the headings of economy, network capability, safety, integration, and environment. Therefore the schemes and studies delivered in the RIS2 period must lead and maximise growth in jobs and homes in a way that is cognisant of the national agenda. It must also be recognised that the SRN does not operate in isolation, and therefore emerging proposals for the MRN and understanding of first mile/ last mile requirements should be factored into thinking. Longer term technological advances will change the way we think about travel, and therefore planning in RIS2 must be resilient and consider future RIS periods.

To support the need for improved integration of the network, England's Economic Heartland has been commissioned by the Government to commission a study to explore connectivity to and from the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. This will explore schemes that support housing growth and business productivity in the area through tackling bottlenecks and congestion hotspots which will improve access to the network. Identifying investment priorities which facilitate growth will allow them to be delivered via the DfT's national roads fund and/ or the local priorities fund.

Whilst this consultation focuses on RIS2, there are still projects being delivered during the current RIS1 period, of which the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway, A1(M), A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet, and M25 South West Quadrant are important to the Heartland.

Based on the presumption that the output from the next stage of the development work for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway is required to report in 2018/19, provision should be made within the RIS2 programme for funding to enable a commencement of works.

Provision should also be made within the RIS2 programme for funding to enable delivery of both the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet and A1(M) improvements is also important.

There is also a large section of the A1 East of England corridor which is not to motorway standard. Whilst there is a need to address current deficiencies there is also a need to consider opportunities for planned growth along this corridor that are being brought forward in the Local Plan process. In taking work on this corridor forward it is important to also consider the linkages with the expressway work. The Heartland will look to explore connectivity as part of its wider work on developing the overarching Transport Strategy. This will identify where there are opportunities for synergy in the transport improvements. The consultation reports state that there could be a study of the potential benefits of upgrading the entire A1 to motorway standard. The Heartland would support such a study and would be happy to support the steering of this.

Improved east-west connectivity is a key issue identified by the National Infrastructure Commission as needing to be addressed. It is essential that consideration of improved connectivity is not limited to a single corridor. It is on that basis that the Forum supports proposals to improve connectivity from the A505 to the A1(M) by extending the A5-M1 and M1-A6 routes across to the A505, and consider it to also be a priority for the Heartland.

There is an implied assumption with the work surrounding the Oxford to Cambridge 'expressway' that implementation of the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet scheme will be sufficient in order to provide an 'expressway' standard route between Milton Keynes and Cambridge. However, given the scale of economic opportunity in and around the immediate Cambridge area, the Strategic Transport Forum promotes the need for a new strategic study for the RIS2 period – one specifically targeted at looking at the longer-term requirements of the Major Road Network supporting the Cambridge economy. If commissioned as a priority at the start of the RIS2 period it may be appropriate to identify some initial funds to enable implementation of the funding at the tail end of the RIS2 period.

The final report of the M25 South West Quadrant Study was published in March 2017. Its recommendations focused on opportunities to reduce pressures and provide parallel capacity. The intention is that these would help relieve the motorway network rather than widening existing roads. It is important that any improvements help to relieve strategic issues on the wider local network (connecting to and affecting the M25), such as the A404, where schemes at the Bisham Roundabout and Handy Cross would no doubt provide benefit. We would like to see schemes in the A404 corridor progressed during the later stages of RIS1 and through RIS2.

In addition to the above, network issues that may also be identified as being of strategic significance, and worthy of study during the early part of RS2 include:

- Improvements to the M1 corridor where these are required to enable delivery of planned growth, focussing on:

- junctions - in particular Junction 14 and Junction 10A; *and*
- the southern section (into Hertfordshire)
- Improvements to junctions on the M11 corridor (potentially picked up as part of a new strategic study)
- Improvements to junctions on the M40 corridor where these are required to enable delivery of planned growth - in particular Junction 9 and Junction 4.

The Strategic Transport Forum welcomes the engagement with Sub-national Transport Bodies that is shaping the work on RIS2. There is genuine opportunity to deliver transformational infrastructure in the Heartland which will facilitate significant growth in housing and the economy. The Strategic Transport Forum looks forward to continuing the close working relationship with both the Department for Transport and Highways England.

Yours sincerely,



**Cllr Heather Smith**

Chairman, Strategic Transport Forum

Leader Northamptonshire County Council