



Strategic Transport Forum

5th February 2021

Agenda Item 5 –Rural Transport: Call for Evidence

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Group agrees, subject to amendments agreed by the meeting, the EEH's response to the Government's Future of Transport: Rural Strategy call for evidence

1. Context – Future of Transport: rural strategy

- 1.1. In December 2020, The Department of Transport (DfT) published its call for evidence to inform the Future of Transport: rural strategy. The call for evidence marks the first step towards a Rural Transport Strategy.
- 1.2. DfT recognises that the country has seen and continues to see significant shifts in the way that people and goods move around. DfT identifies a number of changes as the key drivers and opportunities for change:
 - Changes in transport technology, such as increasing levels of automation, the emergence of new transport models, the transition to cleaner vehicles and the growing availability of transport data
 - Changes in demand for transport, with change arising from more flexible/hybrid business models for significant sectors of the economy (particularly in light of COVID19), an acceleration in availability and use of online services and e-commerce more generally, an increasingly diverse and ageing population, and changes in terms of what is acceptable in terms of accessible transport
 - Changes in transport business models, as new (digitally enabled) business models emerge as a result of consumer expectations when it comes to accessing transport services.
- 1.3. It is DfT's intention that a Future of Transport: Rural Strategy will set out how innovation and technological developments in transport can be harnessed to the benefit of rural communities. By increasing the range and choice of transport provision in rural areas, DfT aims to better able address issues of social isolation and transport decarbonisation in rural areas.

2. Consideration: Future rural connectivity in the Heartland

- 2.1. Forum Members have been consistent in their view that rural transport must be a key priority for England's Economic Heartland, and the EEH Transport Strategy reflects this ambition.
- 2.2. Our proposed response to the DfT call for evidence builds on the key themes of the Transport Strategy: that to enable choice in rural transport, there is a need to take a fundamental review of the way rural transport infrastructure and services are designed and operated.

- 2.3. While this call for evidence and the Government's interest in rural transport is welcome, Forum Members will want to ensure decisions about connectivity in rural areas are considered in their totality, rather than through a narrow lens of thinking technology can solve everything.
- 2.4. As a result, England's Economic Heartland has identified the following key themes to underpin our response to the Future of Transport: rural strategy consultation.
- i) That transport connectivity is not the only consideration when it comes to addressing some of the challenges in rural areas. Decisions made in the provision of services, such as health, education or planning have a profound impact on the connectivity, both physical and digital, of residents and businesses in rural communities
 - ii) Investment in digital connectivity in rural areas will enable businesses and residents to operate more efficiently and provide opportunities to conduct business and access services remotely, thereby reducing the need to travel, or at the very least the distances to be travelled.
 - iii) Creating levels of demand for public transport in ways that support commercially viable operations must be part of the solution. Through mobility hubs or rural park and ride facilities, rural communities can travel to a single point from which mass transit solutions more likely to succeed.

3. EEH Response to DfT's Call for Evidence

- 3.1. A draft response to the consultation is set out at Annex 1. This builds upon and incorporates points made by the Transport Officers Group at their meeting held on 22nd January.
- 3.2. Subject to the Forum's views, EEH Business Unit will finalise the written response for submission to the Department for Transport by 16th February.

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