



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

9th December 2021

Agenda Item 9: Business Unit Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting notes the updates

1. Connectivity Studies

- 1.1. A core part of the EEH work moving forward is the programme of connectivity studies.
- 1.2. The first two connectivity studies, Oxford-Milton Keynes and Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford commenced earlier in the year.
- 1.3. Each of the studies have identified objectives, critical success factors and optimal infrastructure scenarios.
- 1.4. The optimal 'infrastructure' scenarios were developed with studies' steering groups, outlining the kinds of interventions they considered important to meeting the objectives of the studies and the timings in which the interventions should come forward. Examples of the types of interventions which were considered important to meet the study objectives were: intra-urban segregated active travel network; network of multi-modal mobility hubs; increased digital connectivity; and bus-based mass rapid transport.
- 1.5. Working with our steering groups, consisting of local authority and LEP partners, we have been developing a long list of interventions. Building on feedback from the steering groups, the studies will need to meet ambitions, such as net zero, but will also need to consider the outcomes of 'committed' schemes.
- 1.6. An analysis showing where there are gaps between the ambition and the outputs will consider how much 'further' the assessed interventions will need to go to meet the ambitions of the study.
- 1.7. Each study has a programme of approximately a year, with final outputs due in March 2022.
- 1.8. A third connectivity study, 'Swindon-Didcot-Oxford' is currently in the process of being procured. It is the ambition that this study will commence in December 2021.
- 1.9. The future programme of connectivity studies, outlined in the transport strategy, will be reviewed over the forthcoming months to reflect lessons learned during the first two studies.
- 1.10. This is likely to result in some consolidation of studies to create more strategic study areas and to minimise duplication. Any consolidation of study areas will result in future studies being brought forward, subject to funding. A further update on the future programme will be provided to the Board in February 2022.

2. Active Travel

- 2.1. In September 2021, DfT confirmed that an additional £125,000 had been allocated to EEH to develop a regional active travel programme. Included in this was £100,000 for the development of an active travel strategy.
- 2.2. England's Economic Heartland is now in the process of progressing the work. The first phase will include work to set the ambition for active travel across the region, while acknowledging the differences in places across the Heartland.
- 2.3. The overarching ambition will capture what an exemplar active travel system would look like for the Heartland. This ambition could form the basis on which local authorities can establish active travel policies. The report will also include a literature review of existing national and local policies.
- 2.4. The first phase of the active travel work is due to be delivered in a short, time-bound stage by February 2022.
- 2.5. In addition to the regional active travel strategy, the remainder of the DfT funds will be used to work with Sustrans, the sustainable travel charity, on a condition report and options assessment of the Varsity Way route.
- 2.6. Varsity Way is a cycle route linking Oxford and Cambridge, some of the route is formed of the National Cycle Network (Routes 51 and 66). Some sections of the route are off road while some are on road and the route is of varying standard.
- 2.7. Maximising the potential of the Varsity Way is an ambition contained within the regional transport strategy.
- 2.8. The report will seek to identify opportunities for route improvements and integration with other cycle networks. The report is due to be delivered at the end of May 2022.

3. Transport for Counties Report

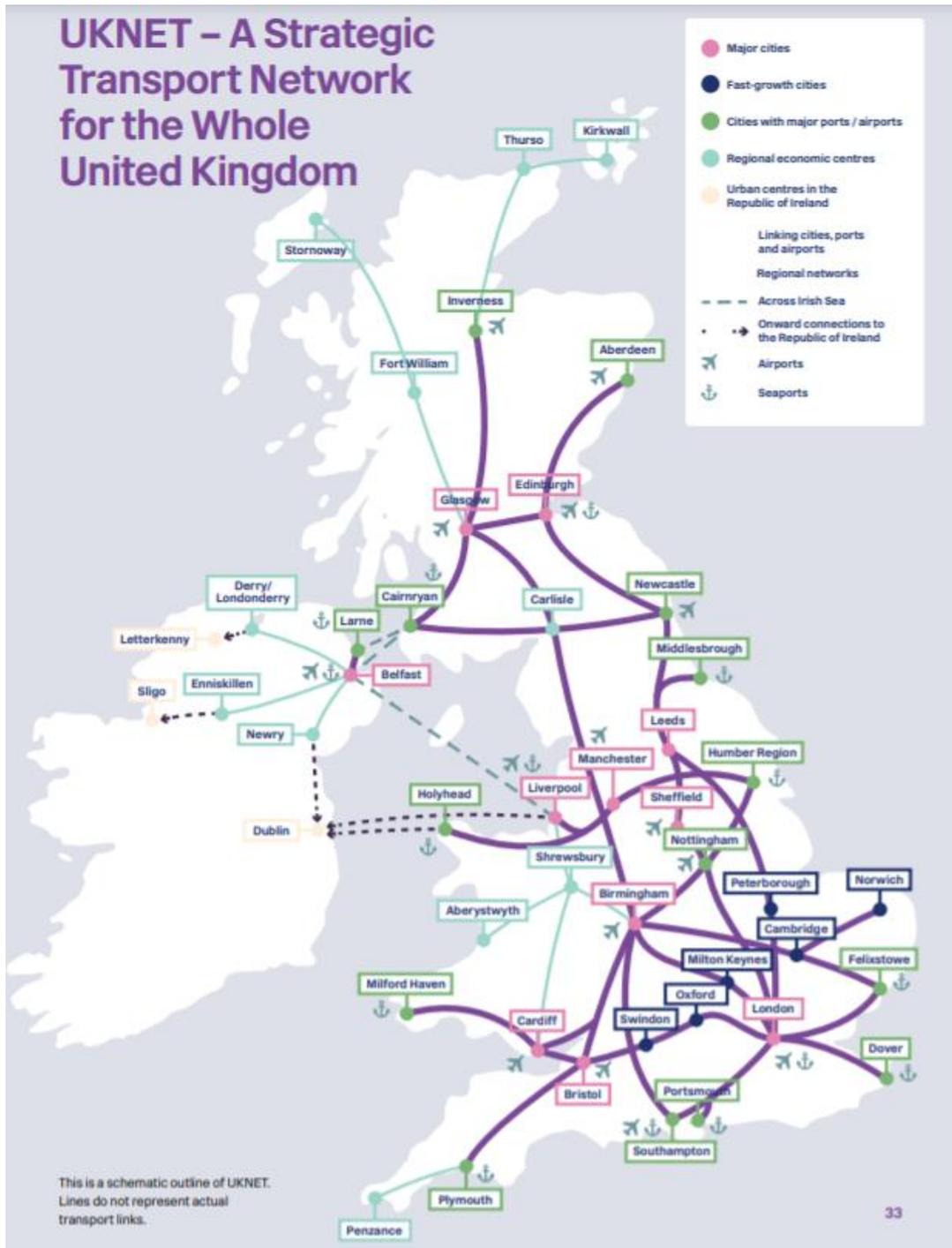
- 3.1. During 2020 the University of Hertfordshire's Smart Mobility Unit undertook a series of roundtable discussions focussing on transport for 'shire' counties – areas characterised by market towns, small villages and the hinterlands of cities. This is a pattern which is prevalent in many areas of the Heartland.
- 3.2. The roundtables were part sponsored by EEH, the DfT, Hertfordshire County Council and others and focussed on themes such as smart mobility, placemaking, decarbonisation, short journeys, DRT and public transport.
- 3.3. The aim was to discuss challenges for shire counties, address and suggest solutions to transport issues. Challenges identified included rising carbon emissions, social isolation, car dependent developments, poor access to services and congestion.
- 3.4. Outcomes of the workshop highlighted that interventions should be tailored to communities but there are interventions or themes which may be successful, including on demand transport, e-bikes and shared transport schemes. Examples of improved public transport schemes were noted, however, required increased funding from the government.
- 3.5. The report can be found on the [University of Hertfordshire's website](#).

4. Union Connectivity Review

- 4.1. Members will be aware of the Union Connectivity Review, commissioned by the Prime Minister in June 2020.
- 4.2. In November 2021, DfT published the final report of the Union Connectivity Review. Amongst the core recommendations is the idea of 'UKNET', described as 'a multi-modal, pan-UK network based on a series of principal transport corridors'.



4.3. The Heartland is included in the geography of a number of these corridors, including Felixstowe-Nuneaton; Cambridge to Norwich; London-Milton Keynes-Birmingham; and Oxford-Swindon-Bristol:



4.4. The report recognises the economic contribution of the towns and cities within the 'Fast Growth Cities Group', five of which – Peterborough, Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Oxford and Swindon – are in the Heartland. The sixth, Norwich, is a key link to the east of the region.

4.5. It says these places 'have a disproportionate impact on overall UK economic performance', adding: 'While there is no direct link that currently joins all of these cities, work on links between them is continuing, including East West Rail between Oxford and Cambridge'.

- 4.6. The Union Connectivity Review therefore provides another layer of evidence as to the importance of transport connectivity in the Heartland to the rest of the UK.
- 4.7. In particular, it is apparent how an East West Main Line from East Anglia across to South Wales, alongside the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link (which opens up a new rail corridor from Birmingham, Northampton, Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and London) and investment in the Felixstowe to Midlands freight corridor would improve connectivity along several of the corridors in the above map. All of these are priorities within EEH's transport strategy.

5. Conferences

- 5.1. England's Economic Heartland's conference took place on October 20.
- 5.2. A total of 117 delegates attended the event, around a quarter using the free bus shuttle from Bicester Village and Milton Keynes, provided by EEH.
- 5.3. Post-conference survey feedback has been very positive. The highest-rated sessions included those on the transport strategy, inclusivity in transport, East West Rail and National Highways, and transport enabling place-making.
- 5.4. Based on feedback, we will be exploring options for an alternative venue for the 2022 conference, which is likely to again take place in the autumn.
- 5.5. Photos, videos and presentations from the conference are available on the EEH website: <https://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/eeh-conference-2021-videos-photos-and-slides/>
- 5.6. EEH is also playing a leading role in the development of an inaugural STB conference, which is being held on 26 May 2022 at the Vox in Birmingham.
- 5.7. The event will champion the work and role of STBs, demonstrate the importance of an integrated approach to transport planning, and showcase best practice and innovation in both the public and private sectors.
- 5.8. The DfT is fully onboard with the conference and are represented on its advisory board, which is being chaired by Martin Tugwell. Invites for the event are planned to be sent out before Christmas.

6. Communications priorities

- 6.1. The EEH business unit has produced a communications strategy which will be used to guide communications activities over the next year.
- 6.2. Within this the following 'action areas' for 2022 have been identified:
 - **MP engagement:** Working with the EEH Chair, Vice-Chair and the wider Strategic Transport Leadership Board, EEH will look to strengthen its approach to working with MPs. This will be aimed at informing MPs of our work; ensuring their views and support are captured; and providing them with the relevant evidence to advocate for infrastructure priorities on behalf of the region. The first phase of this work includes sending MPs information about the EEH evidence base.
 - **Member-level engagement:** Alongside MP engagement, EEH also needs to strengthen its political engagement across the region. It must ensure that, given the change in governance structure, lead members for transportation remain fully engaged in EEH's work. Succinct and localised quarterly briefing notes, which senior officers can share with members, will be produced.
 - **Stakeholder management:** In late 2021/ early 2022 EEH will procure specialist stakeholder management software. This will allow the EEH business unit to significantly improve its engagement, allowing it to record, update, categorise, track, target and contact stakeholders much more effectively and efficiently.
 - **Conferences:** EEH is playing a leading role in the organisation of an inaugural STB conference in May 2022 in Birmingham. The event has ministerial backing from the DfT. It will be a high-profile opportunity both to showcase the work of STBs, and provide leadership on the big issues facing the nation's transport system. The business unit is also thoroughly reviewing the way EEH's annual conference is held.



- **Reports and responses:** The business unit is changing the way reports and consultation responses are structured to make them more readable and impactful. They will be shorter and include summaries at the top.
- **Realising thought-leadership opportunities:** In 2022 EEH should reach its full complement of staff. This will enable business unit colleagues, alongside the Chair and Vice-Chair where applicable, to represent EEH at a greater number of events than has previously been possible, and to contribute more fully in terms of opinion pieces and blogs.
- **Managing communications on high profile studies:** A number of high-interest studies are being published by EEH/ its partners during 2022, which will contain recommendations for packages of potential investment in specific places. This provides an opportunity to further raise EEH's profile among key stakeholders.
- **Addressing 'engagement fatigue':** Officer time to engage with both EEH work and external studies/ consultations is limited. EEH is therefore reviewing the way it uses officer time on its studies. This is likely to involve a tiered approach which identifies the most important studies for officers to be fully engaged with, while other studies will have lighter touch engagement approach.

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