



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

18 February 2022

Agenda Item 8

Digital - Next steps to Ubiquitous Digital Connectivity

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

a) Supports the approach to the Heartland 'twining' with other regions in order to enhance the case for digital connectivity and capacity and support 'levelling up'

1. Purpose of the report

1.1. This report seeks agreement to a positive next step in seeking to secure investment for ubiquitous digital connectivity in the Heartland, drawing on EEH's strong relations with LEPs and other STB regions.

2. Context

- 2.1. In July 2021, EEH Leaders received a report and presentation prepared by Satellite Applications Catapult. The need for and value of 'always on' or ubiquitous digital connectivity (UDC) has long been highlighted from all sectors of the economy.
- 2.2. The EEH transport strategy recognises the role of digital and increasingly the sector sees 'digital as a mode' narrative being developed by government. This mirrors the 'avoid, shift, improve' approach to planning a net zero transport system.
- 2.3. EEH continues to work with officers from the Arc and Satellite Applications Catapult, the culmination of this was a letter that was sent to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Since writing to the Secretary of State, a meeting has been held with DCMS Officials and a further meeting has been accepted by the Secretary of State (pending diary availability).
- 2.4. The initial meeting with officials secured agreement to continue discussions, including consideration of any proposals developed by the region.

3. Working with other regions

- 3.1. Working with Satellite Applications Catapult, EEH has continued to support the development of the offer of an investment in UDC to DCMS. However, it has been suggested that a more strategically astute approach would be develop the UDC proposal in partnership with other regions, allowing knowledge sharing and supporting national levelling up.
- 3.2. The EEH region is home to many of the UK's premier technology clusters including Westcott, Harwell, and Cranfield. Positioning the region as centre of excellence in digital, space, and communications that is poised to support levelling up across the UK would make a strong case for investment.

- 3.3. There have been several potential partnerships mooted with regions that are more clearly in line for levelling up funding. EEH is continuing to explore these discussions and is keen to encourage the LEPs acting in this space to engage with us.
- 3.4. DfT has been clear that any work taken forward needs to be in the context of transport and transport enabling infrastructure. In this framework, EEH are keen to develop several 'off the shelf' demonstrator proposals that highlight the opportunity UDC brings to the transport system.
- 3.5. This could include improving connectivity on public transport enabling better journey experience for travellers, tracking freight goods to improve and streamline logistics operations, improving pan regional journey times through better traffic management or enabling HGV platooning demonstrators.

4. Stakeholder Implications and Next Steps

- 4.1. EEH business unit continues to engage with the Satellite Applications Catapult and support the development of further proposals to DCMS outlining this approach.
- 4.2. Through engaging with the wider STB community, EEH will work to identify any possible 'easy wins' regarding collaboration opportunities in the wider regions.
- 4.3. EEH will work with officers - through the EEH Innovation Working Group - to begin to develop and outline project ideas that could be developed under this work stream.

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