



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

18 February 2022

Agenda Item 9: Business Unit Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Agrees the proposed consolidation of the connectivity studies programme going forward (section 1, annex 1)**
- b) Agrees the following consultation responses: NIC call for evidence (section 2, annex 2); Transport East transport strategy (section 3, annex 3); Oxfordshire LTCP (section 4, annex 4)**
- c) Supports the proposal to create an EEH All-Party Parliamentary Group (section 5)**
- d) Notes:**
 - **EEH's successes in securing in year funding (section 6);**
 - **the Transport Committee's report on road pricing (section 7); and**
 - **Progress with the EEH bus strategy (section 8);**
- e) Supports EEH business unit's ongoing work to raise issues with bus funding to DfT (section 9)**

1. Connectivity Studies

- 1.1. A core part of the EEH work programme is the connectivity studies. The studies are multimodal, including digital connectivity. The outputs of the studies are a critical part of shaping the regional investment pipeline going forward.
- 1.2. The first three connectivity studies are now underway, working with local authorities in the study area.
- 1.3. Reflecting lessons learned during the earliest studies, there has been a recommendation that the programme be reviewed to: better consolidate study areas; to create a more strategic approach; and to minimise duplication of geographies.
- 1.4. As a result of this review, the Strategic Transport Leadership Board is recommended to agree a small number of larger connectivity studies, to commence as soon as possible.
- 1.5. The proposed updated study geographies are attached as annex 1 to this paper.
- 1.6. The revised geographies build on the initial programme and consolidates some of the original separate study areas.

- 1.7. The proposed Western North South corridor encompasses the previous corridors 'London – Bucks – MK – Northampton', 'Luton – Milton Keynes – Daventry', 'Milton Keynes – Northampton' and 'Milton Keynes – Northampton'. The geography has several North South parallel corridors giving scope to think about North south movements in the West of the EEH region, this includes, but is not limited to, M1, A5, A6, West Coast Mainline and the Midland Mainline.
- 1.8. The proposed Southern East West corridor incorporates the previous Watford – Aylesbury – Bicester corridor. The geography mirrors that in policy 12 of the transport strategy: *'We will prioritise improvements to east-west connectivity to support economic activity and planned housing growth, including: a southern corridor that links Buckinghamshire with Hertfordshire, providing an orbital passenger transport route between the Chiltern Main Line and West Anglia Main Line'*.
- 1.9. EEH is aware that there are a number of existing studies in the areas, the intention is to build on work underway by Authorities (such as the HERT mass rapid transport project in the Southern East West corridor), rather than re-do or undermine projects in development.
- 1.10. Practically, a revised programme would bring the benefits of:
 - An accelerated programme
 - Fewer geographic overlaps in study areas (although taking a programme level approach to the studies overlaps in geographies can be managed).
 - Larger geographies allow a focus on strategic movements and linking places of strategic importance

2. National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence

- 2.1. In November the National Infrastructure Commission announced the three strategic themes which will frame the second National Infrastructure Assessment: reaching net zero; reducing environmental impacts and building resilience to climate change; and helping level up communities across the UK.
- 2.2. It also announced the topics that will sit at the heart of the next major assessment of the UK's long term infrastructure priorities, to be published in 2023.
- 2.3. These include identifying the infrastructure needed for hydrogen and carbon capture and storage to decarbonise parts of the economy, improving recycling rates, and the long term investment needs for surface transport within and between cities and towns.
- 2.4. The commission also announced it will undertake focused work to help address 'unanswered questions' around the net zero transition, such as defining the limits of heat pumps for home heating, the role of hydrogen in heat and the future of the gas grid and exploring ways of reducing congestion and future demand on roads.
- 2.5. At the same time it launched a call for evidence process, with interested stakeholders invited to submit data to inform work on the topics identified by the commission.
- 2.6. EEH's draft response to the commission, for the Board's approval, is in annex 2.
- 2.7. Amongst points raised in our response are:
 - The need to consider rural infrastructure needs alongside more urban areas
 - The need for certainty of funding
 - The importance of digital connectivity in improving the transport system
 - The key role that sub-national transport bodies can play in 'joining up' transport planning across modes.



3. Transport East transport strategy consultation response



- 3.1. In December Transport East – which covers the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex – launched a public consultation on its draft transport strategy.
- 3.2. As neighbouring sub-national transport bodies, there are significant economic and demographic linkages between the EEH and Transport East regions, making the performance of our transport networks of mutual interest and importance.
- 3.3. EEH and Transport East already have a strong record of working together on cross boundary issues and items of common interest. For example, we collaborated on the recent successful bids for in-year funding from the Department for Transport, for work on decarbonisation, electric vehicles and buses.
- 3.4. It is considered that the Transport East transport strategy aligns well with EEH’s transport strategy. For example, both strategies have a strong focus on reaching net zero as early as 2040. The Transport East document also highlights a number of strategic transport corridors which align well with EEH’s priority corridors.
- 3.5. The draft response to the consultation is in annex 3.

4. Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan

- 4.1. In January Oxfordshire County Council launched its consultation on the new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).
- 4.2. The LTCP is Oxfordshire’s long term vision for transport in the county and the policies required to deliver this. It will be used to decide how it manages transport and the types of schemes it (or other transport organisations) implement.
- 4.3. Supporting strategies for freight, active travel and innovation are also included, which provide more detail about the proposals and how they will be delivered.
- 4.4. EEH’s proposed response to the consultation can be found in annex 4.

5. England’s Economic Heartland All-Party Parliamentary Group

- 5.1. A priority identified in the EEH communications plan for 2021/22 is to improve engagement with MPs. A key aspect of this is the creation of an all-party parliamentary group (APPG).

- 5.2. As of December 2021, there are a number of APPGs which cover various parts of the Heartland region. These include East of England; UK Innovation Corridor; South East; South West; and Western Gateway. However, there isn't currently a single APPG which covers an entirety or even a majority of the Heartland geography.
- 5.3. This differs from other sub-national transport bodies. For example, Transport for the North has both the Transport Across the North APPG (of which it is secretariat) and the Northern Powerhouse.
- 5.4. In 2018 the East West Rail APPG was 'relaunched' as the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Corridor APPG, at an event close to the Houses of Parliament. EEH provided the secretariat support. It was last registered in May 2019 and has in effect become defunct.
- 5.5. Given the Heartland's distinct economic narrative, the national importance of our region and the unique opportunities around improving east-west connectivity, it is proposed to create an 'England's Economic Heartland APPG' with EEH acting as secretariat (with this function performed in house).
- 5.6. While the priorities of England's Economic Heartland as a sub-national transport body would naturally be a significant area of the APPG's focus, it need not be limited to this. Indeed, a strength of our name is it is 'geographical' rather than transport-specific.
- 5.7. The proposed purpose of the APPG is therefore proposed to be: 'To bring together Heartland-based MPs and Peers with elected local leaders and the private sector, to give a strong political voice for the infrastructure required to support the region's continued contribution to the economic success of the UK and its place on the global stage'.
- 5.8. Subject to comments from the Board, it is proposed that the Chair and Vice-Chair work to identify an MP in the region to approach to become chair of the APPG.
- 5.9. It is proposed that the first APPG be held following the local elections in May 2022, and that it be used to highlight the importance of East West Rail to the region.

6. In year funding

- 6.1. As previously outlined to the Board, DfT confirmed that additional in year funding for 2021/22 was to be made available to sub-national transport bodies to support key DfT priorities including: decarbonisation, buses, electric vehicle infrastructure and local authority capability and capacity.
- 6.2. In January, DfT confirmed that all of EEH's funding bids had been approved. EEH has therefore secured an additional £425,000 of in year funding. This is broken down as:
 - Decarbonisation: £100,000 (as part of a package of £300,000 for EEH, Transport East and Transport for the South East). EEH will commission and deliver the package on behalf of all three STBs.
 - Electric vehicle infrastructure: £100,000 (as part of a package of £200,000 for EEH and Transport East). Transport East will commission and deliver the package on our behalf.
 - Buses £100,000 (as part of a package of £300,000 for EEH, Transport East and Transport for the South East). TfSE will commission and deliver the package on behalf of all three STBs.
 - Capacity and capability: £125,000 for EEH to deliver inhouse. We have lined up a secondee to come from the EEH delivery partners for three days a week to support the creation of a regional hub to assist local authorities in scheme development.
- 6.3. EEH also received £125,000 in year funding from DfT for active travel, meaning our total additional in year funding is £550,000 (a 60% uplift on our initial programme). The projects need to be planned and committed to by 31 March 2021 with a now revised expectation that most of the work delivers during 2022/23.
- 6.4. EEH is now working with the relevant policy teams within the DfT to agree programme specifics and the approach to commissioning and delivery



7. Transport Committee report on road pricing

- 7.1. The Parliamentary Transport Select Committee has published a report and findings on road pricing. The ban on the sale on new petrol and diesel vehicles due to be introduced in 2030 will leave a significant deficit in taxation revenue as neither fuel duty or vehicle excise duty are levied on electric vehicles.
- 7.2. The committee reported that they saw 'no viable alternative' to charging motorists by the mile and urged the government to develop a replacement taxation scheme that charges drivers of electric vehicles to use the roads.
- 7.3. The committee recommended that the government take into account the impact on vulnerable groups, and rural communities. It suggested that data captured be subject to 'rigorous governance and oversight' to protect privacy. It highlighted that improvements to active travel and public transport are important.
- 7.4. The committee chair, Huw Merriman MP, noted that it is now 'time for an honest conversation on motoring taxes' with the uptake of zero-emission vehicles ahead of official government forecasts.
- 7.5. EEH's policy position is that any road pricing should be delivered at a national level - and whilst some local determined and locally agreed demand management interventions may be appropriate, road user charging needs to be delivered in an equitable and proportionate manner at the national scale.

8. Bus Strategy

- 8.1. Further comments have been received from officers and the EEH Bus Operators Association (BOA) regarding the draft EEH bus strategy.
- 8.2. As a result of these comments, the consultant has been asked to carry out additional validation of their data analysis and address specific issues raised by the BOA regarding current levels of bus services.
- 8.3. EEH is therefore delaying bringing the final draft report to Strategic Transport Leadership Board for approval until its next meeting in May 2022.

9. Bus funding

- 9.1. EEH has engaged with the DfT regarding the challenges facing bus operators in the region.
- 9.2. This is due to several factors including delays and cuts to the overall bus service improvement plan (BSIP) funding pot, which has reduced from £3 million to £1.4 million; uncertainty over COVID-19 recovery grants; and the wider operational difficulties that the industry is facing.
- 9.3. In the context of these challenges and the Transport Committee's views on road pricing, EEH recognises the need for a wider conversation with government regarding the way that all transport is funded and paid for.
- 9.4. An approach which would see a regional funding allocation that supports growth and the transition to net zero has for some time been proposed by EEH and the other sub-national transport bodies.
- 9.5. The business unit will continue to raise these issues with the DfT, both individually and collectively with the other STBs. The Board will be updated on progress in this regard at the next meeting in May.

EEH Business Unit
February 2022

