

# Strategic Transport Leadership Board

14 July 2023

## Agenda Item 4: Strategic Rail Update

*Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the Board:**

- a) **Endorses the STB proposal for the Wider South East Rail Partnership, as set out in detail in Annex 1 and proposed governance arrangements for this.**
- b) **Endorses the strategic rail objectives, included in the report in Annex 2, as the basis for on-going EEH rail work priorities, including those progressed through the new partnership proposal.**

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the EEH strategic rail work, asking for both endorsement of the proposed new partnership arrangements between EEH, other STBs and the rail industry, as well as key strategic objectives for rail lines within the EEH area to inform further more detailed work.

### 2. Key points

- 2.1. England Economic Heartland, alongside other STBs, are playing an increasingly important role in defining regionally important rail priorities, helping to co-ordinate and bridge the gap between local and national rail planning.
- 2.2. In particular, EEH and England's other sub-national transport bodies (STBs) are uniquely positioned to work with the proposed new body that will oversee the management and development of Britain's rail network, Great British Railways (GBR).
- 2.3. Working with our neighbouring STBs, Transport East and Transport for South East; Transport for London; and Great British Railway's Transition Team, we have developed a proposed framework for future partnership working on rail priorities.
- 2.4. EEH has also undertaken a specific piece of work on consolidating rail objectives for each main rail route through our area, building on our existing rail evidence base.

### 3. Context

- 3.1. In March 2023, the EEH Board received an update on rail reform, including the creation of a new public body to manage an integrated rail network, Great British Railways (GBR).
- 3.2. GBR is planned to have three core functions:
  - To plan and manage access to, and ensure safe and effective use of, the Great British Railways Network, consistent with Secretary of State guidance
  - To manage Great British Railways infrastructure

- To manage and secure delivery of high-quality, reliable Great British Railways passenger services and be accountable for the customer offer.
- 3.3. Whilst the legislation to enable this reform has not yet come forward, Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) continue to work on how a new framework for the rail industry could be delivered. They recently consulted on a number of position papers, and an update on these was given in the business unit update to Board in June. This included a summary of the EEH response, which noted the importance of recognising STBs and their priorities within any new framework.
  - 3.4. The need for a Wider South East Partnership has been identified as key to ensuring that the Strategic Transport Leadership Board's priorities are at the forefront of decisions on rail services and infrastructure made within the new rail operating framework.

#### **4. Wider South East Rail Partnership**

- 4.1. Following Board endorsement in March, EEH, working with our neighbouring sub-national transport bodies (STBs) Transport East and Transport for the South East, and Transport for London (TfL), has developed proposals for a Wider South East Rail Partnership which will enable closer working with Great British Railways and Department for Transport.
- 4.2. The proposal, which has been discussed with Network Rail and GBR and is included in Annex 1 provides more detail on the proposed governance, structure and remit for the partnership.
- 4.3. Creating a Wider South East Rail Partnership will ensure the agreed transport strategies for regional connectivity are embedded in GBR's approach. The partnership can work alongside GBR to take a strategic planning approach to facilitating economic growth, enabling social benefits, and increasing connectivity.
- 4.4. Both Transport East and Transport for the South East's senior officers have shared the proposals with their Leadership Boards and both Boards have endorsed the approach.
- 4.5. GBR has advised that the governance we propose is in line with partnerships they are forming in the North and Midlands.

#### **5. Rail Strategic Objectives**

- 5.1. As noted by the Board in March, EEH has already undertaken several studies that help identify priority areas for improving rail connectivity. This includes the Passenger Rail Study Phases 1 and 2 undertaken with Network Rail in 2020 and 2021, and the freight study undertaken in 2019. We also have the strategic priorities for rail as outlined in our Transport Strategy agreed in 2021.
- 5.2. Using this work as the basis, and undertaking further engagement and discussion with Officers across the region, EEH has completed work to consolidate evidence and set out in a single report the key strategic objectives across the different rail lines within the EEH area. It is expected that this will give us a firm foundation for input to both the proposed new rail partnership arrangements, as well as further detailed work undertaken by EEH, our partners and the rail industry (both Network Rail/ Great British Railways and the operators).
- 5.3. The full report is in Annex 2.
- 5.4. The report gives useful context on the rail network through the EEH area. Figure 1.2 sets this out graphically, showing that the network across the EEH area is complex, with nearly all major western, northern and eastern routes running through parts of the EEH area, as well as the developing East West Main Line running east-west. This brings opportunities for rail improvements, but also challenges such as local and long-distance trains competing for the same available track capacity in places.
- 5.5. The report notes that patterns of rail patronage following the pandemic have changed, broadly away from business and commuter travel to more leisure travel. This means there are opportunities to look again how rail services can be planned to best meet customer demand going forward.



- 5.6. The main part of the report sets out strategic objectives for improving rail connectivity across all the main rail lines running through EEH. These have been identified following a review of our rail evidence base work, and are split into short, medium and long-term, as well as between freight and passenger.
- 5.7. The strategic objectives reflect opportunities for improvement that build on confirmed rail investment such as East West Rail, as well as opportunities associated with other potential rail investment projects. However, it does not identify the scope of all required investment needed to achieve identified objectives: this will require further engagement with the rail industry and others, as well as further technical work to be undertaken.
- 5.8. The objectives have also been refined and finalised following three partner authority workshops, at which Network Rail planners have also been present. These workshops have been important to ensure local rail priorities are appropriately reflected in the strategic objectives.
- 5.9. The analysis outlines areas of work that could be taken forward to help achieve objectives. Examples include work to better define multimodal interchange requirements at stations; assessment of opportunities for better express logistics; further work on rail traction decarbonisation; East West Rail related work such as on the Aylesbury link; and maximising local service benefits from HS2 released capacity. In the longer-term there are also opportunities to support major project infrastructure such as Heathrow Western Rail link and Crossrail 2.
- 5.10. Funding is not currently available to take forward all of these proposed actions. However, EEH will use this analysis to help inform the Board's decision making around future work programmes. The work will also be used to inform wider EEH workstreams such as the connectivity studies, and those led by partners such as Network Rail and East West Railway Company.
- 5.11. A particularly useful part of the work was the workshops, which allowed EEH and partners to reflect on the future of the rail industry and what was seen as required from the rail network to achieve wider outcomes. We would like to continue this cross authority and rail industry engagement through the setting up of an EEH officer rail forum. Key points arising out of this work will be fed back to Board members as appropriate.

## **6. Next steps**

- 6.1. Improving rail connectivity is increasingly important to achieving wider EEH outcomes. The partnership and rail strategic objectives work will help ensure EEH rail connectivity priorities are at the forefront of planning for rail connectivity improvements.
- 6.2. Subject to Board endorsement of the proposed partnership, it is intended that EEH, alongside Transport East and Transport for the South East, will jointly write to Hew Merriman - the Minister for Rail and HS2; and Andrew Haines - Great British Railways Transition Lead and Network Rail Chief Executive to proactively request how we can formalise this partnership.
- 6.3. We will use the rail objectives report to help us define our programme of future rail work, building on the suggested areas of work identified for the short, medium and longer-term. This will also build on proposals being developed and championed by partner authorities. Much of this will include joint working with both the rail industry, neighbouring sub-national transport bodies and other key stakeholders involved in developing opportunities that help deliver an integrated de-carbonised transport network.
- 6.4. We will establish the EEH Rail Officer Group. This is proposed to meet quarterly and is an opportunity to share best practice, discuss challenges and collaboration opportunities, as well as hear updates from industry experts and local authority partners on rail matters.

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**National Networks and Freight**  
**13 July 2023**

## List of Annexes

1. STB Wider South-East Rail Partnership Proposal
2. EEH Rail Strategic Objectives - June 2023