



Sent via online submission

EEH Business Unit
c/o Buckinghamshire Council
Walton Street
Aylesbury
HP20 1UA

23rd December 2020

Dear Sir / Madam,

OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD STRATEGIC VISION: CONSULTATION

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is the Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the region covering Swindon and Oxfordshire through to Cambridgeshire, and Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire, including the nationally significant Oxford – Cambridge Arc. EEH provides leadership on strategic infrastructure and services in support of the Arc initiative through its leadership of the Arc connectivity work stream.

EEH works closely with partners across the Heartland and actively seeks to support and align with local priorities. We welcome the opportunity to comment on Oxfordshire Growth Board's developing strategic vision.

As the Sub-national Transport Body, EEH is responsible for setting the strategic vision for the region's transport system. In October 2020 we concluded consultation on our draft Transport Strategy. The final version of the strategy will be published in February 2021.

The EEH Transport Strategy sets a bold framework for ensuring our transport system achieve the requirement for net zero carbon in a way that delivers economic and inclusive growth within the region.

It sets out a 'five-point plan' to transform connectivity in the Heartland:

- Decarbonise the transport system by harnessing innovation and supporting new business solutions which in turn create green economic opportunities
- Champion investment in digital infrastructure as a means of improving connectivity, in order to reduce the need to travel
- Use delivery of East West Rail and mass rapid transit as the catalyst for the transformation of our strategic public transport networks
- Champion increased investment in active travel and shared transport solutions to improve local connectivity and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential
- Ensure that our freight and logistics needs continue to be met whilst lowering the environmental impact of their delivery.

It is in this context that EEH welcomes and supports Oxfordshire Growth Board's emerging desired outcomes, its definition of good growth, and the guiding principles, all of which closely align with the regional Transport Strategy.

Outcomes

EEH supports the Growth Board's outcome-focussed approach and the recognition that the mechanisms for achieving those outcomes must remain both flexible and cross-cutting.

Connectivity and strategic infrastructure play a fundamental role in ensuring the successful delivery in five of the identified outcomes (Better Natural Environment, Carbon Neutral, Successful and Sustainable Economy, Connectivity and Mobility and Flourishing Communities). It also has a contributing role in the remaining two outcomes (Happier, Healthier & Inclusive and Quality Homes). The synergy between connectivity and strategic infrastructure with Oxfordshire Growth Board's broadest ambitions serves to emphasise the importance of joint working and collaboration between Oxfordshire Growth Board and sub-national bodies such as England's Economic Heartland.

We strongly support the outcome for Oxfordshire to be carbon neutral by 2040 and carbon positive by 2050. However, the scale of transformation required to achieve this outcome cannot be underestimated.

Transport emissions are the biggest contributor of greenhouse gases in the region, equating to 47% of the Heartland's total carbon dioxide emissions, compared with 37% nationally. In addition, the scale of planned growth if delivered in a similar way to that previously allowed will serve to further exacerbate the scale of the challenge, and by extension increase still further the need for a step-change in approach, not just in terms of the transport system but more generally. In this context the focus on 'place-making' within the Strategic Vision is essential, as is the understanding that changes in the way people and businesses access services and opportunities has the potential to significantly change the need and nature of travel moving forward.

EEH's work on identifying pathways to decarbonisation (for the transport system) has highlighted the necessity of aligning investment in strategic transport with that for digital infrastructure and indeed the investment made in broader utilities, especially energy systems. It has also begun to identify the scale of the investment required.

EEH is continuing to work with its partners to establish the means by which the requirement to achieve net zero carbon can be best reflected in the identification of future strategic infrastructure requirements. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Oxfordshire Growth Board on this topic moving forward.

The Growth Board's outcome for 'Connectivity and Mobility' states: *'The way we move around our county will be transformed, with greater connectivity and mobility in and between places in ways that enhance environmental, social and economic well-being'*.

This aligns with the ambition set out in the EEH Transport Strategy and we strongly encourage the Growth Board to consider how the acceleration of trends in the way people and businesses access services and opportunities might be harnessed to realise this outcome.

Within the narrative the Growth Board may also wish to recognise the importance of improving wider connectivity beyond Oxfordshire's boundaries and the opportunities this creates for the county's people and businesses. In this regard, the transformational impact

of the East West Main Line will extend beyond the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: in particular consideration should be given to improving connectivity to the west given the economic linkages with Swindon in the west, as well as the benefit of improved connectivity along the North Cotswold Line.

The attractive natural, built and historic environment is a key factor in Oxfordshire and the wider region's success. Protecting and enhancing the natural environment through measures such as landscape led design, greening of the transport estate and applying a mitigation hierarchy to avoid impacts on biodiversity at the earliest point will help sustain the integrity and attractiveness of the environment.

Connectivity will also play a key role in achieving happier and healthier places, particularly the increased use of active travel modes, and improved sustainable access to green spaces.

Good growth

We support the Growth Board's ambitions for 'good growth' within Oxfordshire.

We particularly welcome the ambition for sustainable development that enhances 'quality of place and at locations that enable people to live and work nearby'. Through this approach, we can reduce unnecessary travel, and increase opportunities for sustainable and active modes of travel when needed.

Reducing the need to travel and ensuring a high-quality digital network for everyone are fundamental requirements of a decarbonised transport system. Land-use planning has a key role to play but needs to be considered alongside an understanding of changes in the business models employed by companies both in terms of how their workforce deliver services and how customers will access those services.

It is increasingly clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a number of trends that have been noticeable for some time; trends that have consequences for the need and nature of travel. In seeking to deliver on the outcomes set out in the Strategic Vision it will be important to harness these changes as opportunities to repurpose existing settlements. The COVID-19 pandemic has also demonstrated the potential for significant parts of the economy to adopt more flexible ways of business: the adoption of a hybrid business model moving forward could have significant benefits in support of achieving the Strategic Vision. In particular opportunities to spread demand across the day have the potential to significantly change the nature of future investment.

'Embracing innovation' strongly aligns with the Transport Strategy's vision for the region's transport system to 'harness the region's globally renowned centres of innovation to unlock a world class, de-carbonised transport system'. Our ambition is for the region to become a living laboratory for the trialling and successful roll-out of clean and smart mobility. This builds on the successes that Oxfordshire is already experiencing, for example, Oxbotica is one of the world's leading autonomous driving software companies; RACE at Culham is at the forefront of Connected Autonomous Vehicle testing; and Arrival in Banbury has developed smart electric vehicles for the logistics sector.

Guiding Principles

The Growth's Board's guiding principles closely align with the principles of the EEH Transport Strategy, the latter being:

- Achieving net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050, with an ambition to reach this target ahead of time
- Improving quality of life and wellbeing through a safe and inclusive transport system accessible to all which emphasises sustainable and active travel
- Supporting the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities
- Ensuring the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways, in a way which lessens its environmental impact.

As stated above, we commend the priority the Growth Board is giving to reducing the impact of climate change and enhancing natural capital assets.

We particularly welcome the Growth Board's principle to 'proactively and positively engage and collaborate beyond Oxfordshire'. England's Economic Heartland is committed to working with the Growth Board and other partners in the county to ensure the Oxfordshire Plan and regional Transport Strategy are complementary, and that our work on connectivity in the Arc is joined-up with that taking place on the environment, natural capital and spatial plan.

Beyond Oxfordshire and the Heartland region, EEH also maintains strong working relationships with the Sub-national Transport Bodies which border Oxfordshire: Western Gateway, Midlands Connect and Transport for the South East. Given Oxfordshire's geographical location it is essential to take into consideration the importance of Oxfordshire's infrastructure in support of the wider UK economy.

We support the guiding principle to improve overall health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities. The narrative for this principle may wish to explicitly reference creating safer places and infrastructure – an important factor in its own right which improves inclusivity and wellbeing.

We support the guiding principle of creating the conditions to support an inclusive, successful and sustainable economy based on world-leading innovation, and the emphasis in the narrative on both improved physical and digital connectivity. Trends in consumer behaviour – accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – are changing the way the economy functions with important consequences for connectivity, most noticeably in the freight and logistics sector.

As part of the work to develop a vision and long-term investment priorities for inclusion in the regional Transport Strategy EEH has identified (with the help of its partners) a number of investment priorities as essential in support of Oxfordshire's ambition, these include:

- Delivery of the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study, including increased capacity at Oxford Station
- Identifying and delivering a long-term solution to the A34
- Investment in the capacity to support improved connectivity between Southampton-Oxford and the West Midlands as a nationally significant corridor
- Delivering an enhanced Oxford suburban public transport system, including bus rapid transit and the re-opening of the Cowley branch line
- Identifying and delivering improved connectivity between Oxford and Swindon

In addition, there remains a pressing need to explore how connectivity (digital and physical) can be improved between Oxford and Milton Keynes, a key strategic issue for the region. EEH is leading work alongside partners in the region and nationally to identify the most appropriate infrastructure solutions required to support the delivery of planned growth in this area, consistent with the vision and principles of the EEH strategy and the priorities of its partners.

England's Economic Heartland looks forward to continuing to work with the Growth Board as it develops and then delivers the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Hodgson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'D' at the start.

Mayor Dave Hodgson
Chair, Strategic Transport Forum