

Draft letter to Nadine Dorries MP  
Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

## **Digital Connectivity – enabling the future of mobility Transition – A Proposal for Change**

Congratulations on your new appointment as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. We are delighted to be writing to you in your new position, and to present an investment opportunity that has the backing of political leaders from across the region.

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is the sub-national transport body for the region stretching from Swindon to Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire to Hertfordshire. Our geography incorporates the entirety of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, a government priority. In February 2021, EEH published our vision-led, evidence-based regional transport strategy.

The EEH transport strategy is ambitious is setting out our vision for the region's connectivity. The strategy is predicated on the fact that decarbonisation of our transport system is central to the region's success. To achieve this, the strategy sets out an ambition to harness our unique eco-system of science and technology-based innovation as a solution and as a means of economic growth for our businesses.

Building on that, the strategy also recognises that improved digital infrastructure – through ubiquitous digital connectivity – is critical to delivering user focused transport solutions, as well as enabling continued use of flexible/hybrid working as a means of reducing the need to travel. The need for improved digital connectivity is a well-reported issue for businesses across the region and one that has been a long-standing challenge to resolve.

We believe that your Department, working collaboratively with the Department for Transport, is critical in terms of acting as a driver of change in the way we plan for, develop and then implement connectivity in the UK.

We also believe that there is a need for a fundamental shift towards embedding 'systems' thinking at the heart of planning future infrastructure needs.

As part of our 'Pathways to Decarbonisation' work we commissioned the universities of Oxford and Southampton to use the National Infrastructure Systems Model (NISM), embedding systems thinking into our regional transport strategy.



More recently we've worked with the Satellite Applications Catapult to develop the strategic case in support of the need for a step change in approach to achieving ubiquitous digital connectivity. The involvement of the Catapult reflects our appreciation that for large parts of our region new and emerging space technologies will be a critical component of providing future mobility solutions. In this regard we are particularly keen to explore how we might harness the government's investment in the OneWeb system.

I attach a copy of the proposition for investment that the Satellite Applications Catapult has developed for the Oxford to Cambridge region, one that we are seeking your support for. We believe that the strategic case – Transition – sets out a practical and viable way forward, Not only will it act as a means of supporting our shared endeavour when it comes to transport, but as importantly it will serve as a pilot the output from which could be applied more widely across the UK.

Our response to the pandemic illustrated that change is possible within the way we use our transport system. The evidence underpinning our collective work on de-carbonisation demonstrates that change is needed, and that we need to accelerate the pace of change. And we have seen that ubiquitous digital connectivity needs to be at the heart of our communities in much the same way as our highways and byways.

The proposal set out within Transition is worth pursuing and we are keen to work with you to develop the detail of the proposition and to develop the case for securing the funding required to make it happen. The need for the investment to take forward digital connectivity is also central to EEH's proposition for the Comprehensive Spending Review, of which I also attach a copy.

On that basis, I would be delighted to meet with you, or your ministerial team, to discuss the proposition further and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours etc