



# **Strategic Transport Leadership Board**

18 February 2022

## **Agenda Item 6: Regional Active Travel Strategy**

### *Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the meeting:**

- a) Agrees the ambition for active travel in the region, as set out in the 'EEH Active Travel Strategy: The Ambition'**
- b) Notes that there will be a phase two of the active travel strategy**

### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. To update the Board on the final draft version of the regional active travel strategy (phase one); and work to assess options for improving the Varsity Way cycle route.

### **2. Key points to note**

- 2.1. Subject to the Board's agreement, the 'EEH Active Travel Strategy: The Ambition' will be published later this month.
- 2.2. The strategy considers the current national and local picture on active travel, opportunities and challenges, and a vision for the future.
- 2.3. The vision is: 'To create an exemplar active travel network and culture that encourages mode shift for both shorter journeys and for the first and last mile of longer journeys'.
- 2.4. Scoping of phase two of the strategy will commence shortly. Phase 2 will consider how the vision can be achieved.
- 2.5. An options assessment of the Varsity Way cycle route by the end of May 2022.

### **3. Context**

- 3.1. A key action point in EEH's transport strategy is championing investment in active travel and shared transport solutions to improve local connectivity.
- 3.2. The DfT's 'Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) 1', covering the period 2017-2021, outlined the government's ambition to make walking and cycling the natural choice for shorter journeys.
- 3.3. Following this, in summer 2020, the government launched 'Gear Change: a bold vision for cycling and walking'. Included in the announcement was £2billion of additional funding over this parliament for active travel. The report also outlined the desire for a long-term approach to funding for active travel.
- 3.4. In September 2021, DfT allocated £125,000 to EEH to develop its active travel programme. Of this £25,000 was allocated for the Varsity Way conditions report and options assessment and £100,000 for the development of a regional active travel strategy.
- 3.5. Working with partners, EEH has been developing an active travel ambition, outlined in phase one of the active travel strategy.

#### **4. Active travel strategy**

- 4.1. The first phase of the active travel strategy consists of a high-level piece of work, which undertook a literature review of local, regional and national policy, assessed the opportunities and challenges for active travel in the region and set an ambition for the region based on its people and places.
- 4.2. The proposed overall ambition is 'to create an exemplar active travel network and culture that encourages mode shift for both shorter journeys and for the first and last mile of longer journeys.'
- 4.3. Embedding active travel into the region's transport system will help contribute to reducing our carbon emissions in line with EEH's net zero ambitions. It will also improve air quality; support residents' physical and mental health; improve safety for users; increase access to opportunities for all to reduce inequalities; and support sustainable growth across the region. These themes align with those in the EEH transport strategy.
- 4.4. The 'EEH Active Travel Strategy: The Ambition' report is attached as Annex 1 to this report.
- 4.5. Phase two of the strategy, which will consider how the vision can be achieved, will be scoped with the study steering group of local authority officers, following the publication of Phase 1.

#### **5. Varsity Way**

- 5.1. The Varsity Way is a cycle route linking Oxford and Cambridge. Some of the route is formed of the National Cycle Network routes 51 and 66. Some sections of the route are off road while some are on road and the route is of varying standard
- 5.2. Maximising the potential of the Varsity Way formed part of the narrative of our transport strategy, published in February 2021.
- 5.3. The sustainable travel charity Sustrans has now been commissioned to undertake an options assessment of the Varsity Way cycle route.
- 5.4. The scope of works for the delivery of a network assessment and options development for the Varsity Way will consider standard of the route and options for future improvements.
- 5.5. The brief also outlines a requirement to consider how the Varsity Way could link with wider local authority aspirations and East West Rail.
- 5.6. The DfT has provided £25,000 of funding to undertake the project by spring 2022.
- 5.7. The ambition is to have the options assessment report complete by the end of May 2022.

#### **6. Stakeholder implications**

- 6.1. Phase two of the active travel strategy is likely to include a steering group of local authority officers.
- 6.2. A small steering group of local authority officers, East West Rail, Bedford, Milton Keynes Waterway Trust and other organisations such as environmental bodies has been identified for the Varsity Way project. There will be a workshop later this month to discuss aspirations as the project commences.

#### **7. Programme implications**

- 7.1. In year funding of £125,000 was provided by the DfT for both the active travel strategy (phase one and two) and the Varsity Way options assessment.

#### **8. Next steps**

- 8.1. Following the Board's comments/ approval, the 'EEH Active Travel Strategy: The Ambition' will be published and publicised via a press release and social media.
- 8.2. The Board will continue to be updated with progress on phase two and the Varsity Way work as appropriate.



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