

Agenda Item 3, annex 1

# England's Economic Heartland Annual Review 2021/2022

Foreword [to come after Board meeting]

## **Introduction**

England's Economic Heartland is at the forefront of planning and promoting the transport infrastructure and policy framework required to realise our region's economic potential while reducing the transport system's impact on the environment.

As one of seven sub-national transport bodies covering the entirety of England outside of London, we are jointly funded by the Department for Transport and our local authority partners.

This annual report reviews the progress made on our 2021/22 work programme under the following themes:

- Supporting the Heartland region
- Decarbonisation of the transport system
- Improving strategic connectivity in support of planned growth
- Improving local connectivity

It also details the changes which have taken place to EEH as an organisation.

## **A commitment to collaboration**

England's Economic Heartland is committed to working collaboratively on issues of strategic importance.

Meetings of the Strategic Transport Leadership Board, chaired by Cllr Richard Wenham (Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council), are held in public, its reports and minutes are publicly available on our website. Interested parties have the ability to address the Board on any relevant matter.

Our small core team of dedicated staff – operating as the EEH business unit – continues to provide EEH both a capability and expertise that enables the region's ambitions to be realised.

With a strong focus on the power of collaborative working as a means of 'getting things done', the business unit, led by managing director Naomi Green, keeps bureaucracy to a minimum whilst being accountable to the partners for its work.

The business unit's work is greatly assisted by the support provided by officers drawn from our partners. Meeting as the Transport Officer Group, they provide advice and guidance on the EEH work, including participation in steering groups overseeing commissioned work.

The continued commitment of partners to invest in the work of EEH as the sub-national transport body – amounting to £420,000 in contributions in 2021/22 – unlocks funding from the Department for Transport.

For 2021/ 22 the DfT gave an initial funding settlement of £900,000. This was supplemented with three in-year funding awards totalling £550,000, bringing the total income from DfT to £1,450,000 – an increase of 60% on our original funding.

## **2021-2022 in review: Strengthening EEH's contribution to the region**

### **Organisational changes**

#### **Strengthening EEH governance**

In July 2021, local authority leaders reviewed the governance structure for England's Economic Heartland. They agreed to consolidate EEH's two political-level meetings – the Strategic Transport Forum and EEH Leaders – into one single meeting. The inaugural meeting of the new group – the Strategic Transport Leadership Board – took place on 24 September 2021. The new format ensures a renewed clarity of purpose, increases transparency and accountability, and removes any risk of duplication of effort. The ambitions of the new Board – attended by local authority leaders or their nominated representative – remain framed by a shared commitment to the principles of partnership working in order to drive better outcomes for the region.

#### **A new chair and vice-chair**

In September 2021 members elected Cllr Richard Wenham (leader of Central Bedfordshire Council) and Cllr Liz Leffman (leader of Oxfordshire County Council) as chair and vice-chair of the new Strategic Transport Leadership Board.

Cllr Wenham graduated from the University of Cambridge having studied physics and electrical sciences and began his career in the automotive and transportation sectors specialising in technology and particularly environmental innovation. He has worked internationally on projects, including the development of hybrid cars and on a feasibility study for hydrogen powered trains in Canada. He became leader of Central Bedfordshire Council in January 2021 and is vice-chair of the Local Government Association's Resources Committee.

Upon being elected, Cllr Wenham paid tribute to the achievements of his predecessors in spearheading EEH's development: Chair of the EEH Leaders' group, Cllr Martin Tett (leader of Buckinghamshire Council) and Chair of the Strategic Transport Forum, Mayor Dave Hodgson (elected mayor of Bedford Borough Council).

#### **A new managing director**

In March 2022 Naomi Green was appointed as England's Economic Heartland's managing director.

A former civil servant, Naomi has extensive Whitehall experience, leading policies and capital investment programmes to deliver better approaches to planning infrastructure and support economic growth. Working in both the Cities and Local Growth Unit and the Department for Transport, her roles have included: head of LEP policy and governance; head of cycling; and head of the DfT's approach to housing growth policy. Since joining EEH in September 2018 as head of technical programme, Naomi led the preparation and implementation of the regional transport strategy published last year. In August 2021 she became interim director following the departure of Martin Tugwell to Transport for the North.

### **New colleagues at the EEH business unit**

Following successful recruitment campaigns, four new members of staff joined England's Economic Heartland during 2021/2022, taking the overall number of colleagues in the business unit to nine. Their arrival has strengthened capacity and skills and will support EEH as it looks to deliver its ambitious three-year business plan.

## **Our work during 2021/2022**

### **Supporting the Heartland Region**

#### **Regional evidence base**

EEH continues to update and maintain a comprehensive evidence base on behalf of the region, which informs our work as we identify and prioritise the investment required to support sustainable growth while planning for net zero. It includes a GIS data platform and a 'first mile, last mile' online tool. The evidence base is available to our partners to freely use. A priority for the new Chair of EEH was to raise awareness of the evidence base and to ensure it was as accessible as possible. During the winter of 2021 the business unit engaged extensively with members, senior officers, members of parliament and other partners to showcase the evidence base and provide them with easy access to it.

#### **Connectivity studies**

EEH's first two connectivity studies – Oxford-Milton Keynes and Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford – made significant progress during 2021/22 enabling them to complete later this year. This includes development of a land use model which can be used for future studies. A call for evidence for both studies was held in June 2021 allowing interested parties to help shape them. A third connectivity study, Swindon-Didcot-Oxford launched in early 2022 with a call for evidence held in March.

#### **Alternate futures**

In order to address future uncertainty in scenario development, EEH developed a series of 'alternative futures' which the Heartland may face. Our 'alternative futures', published in October 2021, ensure our work can be tested for its resilience. They are not predictions of the future, rather they are plausible 'futures' that reflect different drivers of change (for example, socio-economic changes in society or technological change). To develop the

alternative futures, two workshops were held with officers and partners across the region. They will be applied, as appropriate, across our technical programme, beginning with the connectivity studies.

### **Centre of excellence**

In January 2022 EEH received confirmation that its bid for DfT in-year funding to create a regional hub to assist local authorities in scheme development had been successful. The £125,000 funding has enabled EEH to appoint a secondee to help establish the centre of excellence during 2022. The Centre of Excellence will be a small dedicated team comprising specialist technical and professional skills upon which all partners can draw to support their development of detailed scheme proposals. Such an arrangement will achieve significant economies of scale, providing value for money for taxpayers. The team will accumulate knowledge and experience that can be retained within the region to the collective benefit of partners.

### **Spending Review submission and regional narrative**

In September 2021, in consultation with our partners, EEH submitted to government its priorities for the Spending Review. Following the Spending Review's focus on levelling up other parts of the country, Board members expressed their frustration as to the lack of recognition of the need to also invest in places such as the Heartland as a net contributor to the economy. The levelling up white paper, published in February 2022, has also caused uneasiness about future levels of investment in the Heartland. As a consequence, the EEH business unit developed a regional narrative with key messages as to why investment in the Heartland is so important for the region and wider UK prosperity.

## **A Net Zero Transport System**

### **Net zero roadmap**

EEH is developing a standalone 'roadmap' setting out a realistic pathway to reducing transport emissions in our region, including a trajectory and non-binding carbon budgets/targets for transport. The initial stage has focused on translating the Climate Change Committee's (CCC's) Sixth Carbon Budget, transport decarbonisation plan and Tyndall Centre pathways into a regionally specific decarbonisation roadmap. The first phase of the roadmap, setting out the emissions baseline in the region, was published during COP26 in November 2021.

### **Net zero playbook**

In January 2022 EEH received confirmation that its bid for DfT in-year funding to develop place-based approaches to achieving net zero had been successful. The £100,000 funding (part of an overall package of £300,000 between EEH, Transport for the South East and Transport East) will show how net zero policies and plans will likely have differing scales of impact depending on the nature of the location of where they are applied. Place-based typologies will be developed alongside the interventions which will have the greatest impact for these typologies. A further project will involve diagnosis of the EEH region, including the application of the relevant typologies to our places alongside the development of a bespoke report for each transport authority with a suggested suite of high-level interventions to

meet the chosen pathway(s) for each authority area. Work to commission the project began towards the end of the financial year.

### **Electric vehicle sprint**

A successful bid for in-year DfT funding has provided EEH and Transport East with £200,000 to undertake an 'electric vehicle sprint', working with local authorities and organisations to better understand and coordinate the delivery of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The work, being led by Transport East, will bring together partners to understand their role and contribution to the regions' transition to net zero and identify how we can collectively accelerate electric vehicle uptake.

## **Improving Strategic Connectivity in Support of Planned Growth**

### **Strategic Roads**

Towards the tail end of the financial year EEH began commissioning work to support the prioritisation of future roads investment, including providing detailed input into the Roads Investment Strategy 3 (RIS3) preparation, informing future Major Road Network investment priorities and ensuring EEH has the right technical support to inform the next phase of the Oxford to Cambridge road study (see below).

### **Oxford to Cambridge road study**

England's Economic Heartland has been working with DfT and National Highways to take forward this work. It will define what constitutes an appropriate level of service for the strategically important road network and consider how investment should best be prioritised to deliver that level of service in the region.

### **East West Rail**

The construction of East West Rail between Bicester and Bletchley has made significant progress during the last year and remains on track to be open by 2025. During 2021 we were able to secure funding to ensure that this section of the track is built as a digital spine – benefitting both passengers and nearby rural communities.

However, a number of factors including national funding pressures (as demonstrated by the Spending Review), levelling up white paper, and the changed position of the government on the 'top down' delivery of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, has reinforced the need for continued emphasis of the benefits of investing in the full delivery of East West Rail for the region, and the country as a whole. As a result, during early 2022 EEH was involved in commissioning three packages of work to update and reemphasise the strategic narrative for East West Rail being delivered to Cambridge, including the link to Aylesbury. This work includes consolidating the existing evidence for East West Rail and how it aligns with local housing and economic plans (commissioned jointly with East West Railway Company); strategic modelling using the model developed for the connectivity studies (commissioned jointly with the East West Main Line Partnership); and securing business advocacy for the scheme (commissioned by EEH on behalf of the East West Main Line Partnership).

### **Freight mapping**

During 2021/22 data was captured to better understand the movement of freight in the region. The evidence provides an important baseline for better planning freight movement by road and rail in the future.

## **Improving Local Connectivity**

### **Active travel strategy**

In September 2021, DfT confirmed that additional funding had been allocated to EEH to develop a regional active travel programme. The first phase, published in March 2022, includes a literature review of local, regional and national policy, and an assessment of the opportunities and challenges for active travel in the region. Phase two of the strategy, which will consider how the vision can be achieved, is in scoping phase.

### **Varsity Way**

A portion of the additional DfT active travel funding (see above) is being used to work with Sustrans on a condition report and options assessment of the Varsity Way route between Oxford and Cambridge. Maximising the potential of a segregated cycling and walking route as a 'green spine' will act as a focal point for developing a region wide network of cycle routes. Some of the Varsity route is formed of the National Cycle Network (Routes 51 and 66): the report will seek to identify opportunities for route improvements and integration with other cycle networks.

### **Aylesbury Garden Town**

EEH has contributed towards an ongoing study being led by Buckinghamshire Council which includes improving local connectivity in and around Aylesbury.

### **Buses**

In 2021 EEH commissioned a regional bus study which will identify the gaps in the region's strategically important bus/coach network coverage to provide an evidence base that will support future investment. It will identify a list of cross-boundary priority bus corridors which, by virtue of not being adequately served by rail, could become the focus of bus service improvements. To support the technical analysis, the report will also set out a supporting vision and strategy for regional bus services in EEH based on user and industry needs.

In addition, as part of the DfT's in-year funding, EEH secured £100,000 (as part of a package of £300,000 for EEH, Transport East and Transport for the South East) to identify the support required by local authorities with regards bus provision. This work is being led by Transport for the South East.

### **Transport for Counties**

EEH co-sponsored The Future of Transport Outside Cities report, published in 2021, which summarises the findings of 12 roundtable discussions led by the University of Hertfordshire's Smart Mobility Unit. Over 180 people took part from a range of sectors, including national and local government, the transport sector, business, academia, and non-governmental organisations. The aim was to address and find solutions to transport issues in rural parts of the country.

## **Collaborative working**

The underlying philosophy of EEH is to realise the added value of working collaboratively on issues of genuine strategic importance. This philosophy is embedded throughout our work and reflected in our ongoing partnerships with other groupings.

### **East West Main Line Partnership**

The EEH business unit continues to provide the Partnership's secretariat function, working with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, sub-national transport bodies and the East West Railway Company.

In September the East West Main Line Partnership replaced the East West Rail Consortium, with a renewed focus on 'championing the ambition for East West Rail'. A document was produced which outlines the six areas of strategic interest for the Partnership. In the same month the Partnership welcomed the Western Gateway STB to its Board as it looks to progress its aspiration for coast-to-coast services from Norfolk and Suffolk through to Swindon, Bristol and South Wales.

The Partnership has played an active role in supporting the work to re-emphasise the strategic narrative for East West Rail between Oxford and Cambridge, leading the work on securing business advocacy for the project.

During 2021 it also facilitated conversations regarding the current construction of East West Rail, with a view to ensuring lessons are learned for when building work starts on the next phase east of Bletchley.

### **Sub-national transport bodies**

During this year EEH has continued to strengthen its relationships with its neighbouring sub-national transport bodies, to ensure a coherent approach to cross-boundary infrastructure issues.

The chairs of EEH, Transport East and Transport for the South East – the three STBs which neighbour London – have created a Greater South East STB grouping. This covers a combined population in excess of 16 million with a GVA of more than £400 billion.

During the last year EEH and Transport East have also held a series of stakeholder workshops to understand where cross boundary interests are shared and how mutual interests can best be jointly achieved.

During 2021/22 EEH has led the decarbonisation workstream on behalf of the STBs and also chaired the STB communications group. This has meant EEH has played a leading role in establishing the inaugural STB conference due to be held on May 2022.

### **The Oxford-Cambridge Arc**

The entirety of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc falls within the Heartland geography. Identified by the government as a national economic priority, the work of EEH as the sub-national transport body provides leadership on strategic transport infrastructure requirements.

During 2021/22 EEH provided a comprehensive response to the Arc spatial strategy consultation and will continue to support leaders on their approach to the Arc.

### **Delivery Partners**

Right from the start EEH partners recognised the importance of harnessing the knowledge and experience within the private sector companies providing consultancy and professional

services to each of their constituent members. The resulting Delivery Partners Group has been part of our extended network of collaborative working arrangements.

### **EEH Bus Operators Association**

Established in 2018, the EEH Bus Operators Association enables EEH to engage the sector on issues of strategic importance. The significance of this relationship is reflected by the association having a seat on the Strategic Transport Leadership Board. The association has played a key role in EEH's bus study during 2021/22.

### **National agencies**

Our close working relationship with Network Rail as system operator enables us to harness the skills, knowledge, and expertise within the rail sector in support of implementation of the transport strategy. We have used our strong working relationship with Network Rail as the basis for developing an equally strong relationship with Great British Railways transition team. In a similar vein, our relationship with National Highways strategic planning team enables us to align our activity on the Major Road Network with their activity on the Strategic Road Network.

### **EEH conference**

England's Economic Heartland was pleased to welcome more than 150 visitors to its conference at Silverstone in October 2021. The event received extremely positive feedback from delegates.