

# Strategic Transport Leadership Board

30 September 2022

## Agenda Item 5: Centres of Excellence

*Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the meeting:**

- a) **Notes the Department for Transport's plan for regional Centres of Excellence and provides a steer on how EEH can best meet this region's needs.**
- b) **Notes the current work and timeline for EEH's capacity and capability project**

### **1. DfT proposal to establish STBs as Regional Centres of Excellence**

#### **Background**

- 1.1. The government has identified a need for greater support to local areas in planning the delivery of key local transport programmes and investment. DfT has identified STBs as the opportunity to develop a response, creating regional centres of excellence as part of an STB's core function.
- 1.2. The region is in a very strong position to respond to the proposal: work completed by EEH and its partners in 2020 identified a clear opportunity for sharing resources in order to speed up local transport infrastructure delivery.
- 1.3. Through the project, local partners worked with EEH to identify 'pinch points' in the infrastructure delivery process. The conclusions of the work identified a number of areas of focus, primarily a result of depleted technical and professional capacity and capability within local authorities' client-side function.
- 1.4. Local partners have therefore already committed to the principle of England's Economic Heartland (EEH) becoming a convenor of best practice. We have since demonstrated the value of such a role through the peer review and critical friend process adopted during the development of business cases for the EEH region MRN bids.
- 1.5. In January 2022, EEH secured additional funding<sup>1</sup> from DfT to create a regional centre of excellence specialising in early-stage major scheme development and 'enhancing regional client-side capability'.

### **2. DfT Proposed Regional Centres of Excellence**

- 2.1. It is DfT's ambition that regional centres of excellence will build on the already collaborative approach between the STBs and local partners and would enable STBs to provide future tailored support in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> In January 2022, EEH was awarded £125,000 additional in-year funding by DfT

- 2.2. Centres of Excellence are intended to focus on STBs bringing local transport authorities together to share best practice; develop common approaches among one another; develop tools for LTAs to use; provide guidance on specific areas; or leading on work on behalf of LTAs.
- 2.3. In the EEH region, our work on the capacity and capability workstream as well as the other areas of work on decarbonisation, buses, active travel, and future work on developing our infrastructure priorities, puts us in a strong position to respond to DfT's new aspirations for STBs.
- 2.4. DfT has identified four core areas of work which would focus on maximising local transport authorities' capability over the next two years. These are:
  - a) Producing updated local transport plans, which plan for the transport systems of the future and are in line with your regional transport strategy.
  - b) Providing support on quantifying carbon reductions, a key requirement of new local transport plans, following the guidance which is due to be published later this year.
  - c) Developing effective business cases, as and when these are required to secure investment.
  - d) Ensuring each local transport authority develops and maintains a pipeline of future schemes.
- 2.5. DfT has asked STBs to explore the levels of support that could be provided in these four core areas within the current spending review period (2022-2025) and within our existing funding allocation.
- 2.6. Given the synergies that already exist, EEH officers have reviewed our current programme of work and three-year business plan, as agreed by the Strategic Transport Leadership Board in May 2022, against the four focus areas.
- 2.7. The review we have undertaken, summarised in Annex 1, captures where work is already underway or planned. The review also identifies where there is scope to deliver further activity, making use of resources currently available to us (column 2); and thirdly those opportunities that with further funding (either now or in future spending periods) could enable us to make a much greater impact on our levels of support for local authorities (column 3).
- 2.8. While balancing delivery of the centre of excellence, it will be key for EEH to continue to deliver the core areas of focus of the work programme in order to drive through the outcomes of our transport strategy. This includes: the development of a robust regional evidence base and multi-criteria assessment framework; future connectivity studies; development of infrastructure investment programme; and work to keep driving forward the decarbonisation agenda.
- 2.9. DfT has asked STBs to resource any new 'core' regional centres of excellence development and associated workstreams within the existing settlement envelope. This may require minor revisions to our three-year business plan and work programmes for 2023/23 and 2024/25. Any amendments to the EEH business plan will be brought forward for discussion and agreement by the Strategic Transport Leadership Board as part of its consideration of the EEH work programme for 2023/24.

### **3. Capacity and Capability Project Progress**

- 3.1. EEH's Capacity and Capability work directly supports the DfT aspirations for the establishment of a Centre of Excellence in the development of business cases.
- 3.2. The outputs of this work includes strengthening client-side skill sets of partner authorities in the delivery of major transport infrastructure projects. We are delivering this through a six-month programme of support, focusing on the development of improved business cases.

- 3.3. Local authority partners have provided feedback on their current capacity and capability to develop business cases via a short questionnaire. The top three areas where they are seeking support include: Support with technical assurance (economic and financial dimension), support to gather data and build evidence base for schemes, and support with business case writing and project plan development. The results of the questionnaire are outlined in Annex 2.
- 3.4. In addition, EEH have completed a round of peer reviews and a deep dive into MRN and LLM scheme development to identify where LTA partners would benefit from specific support, which included discussions with partner authorities.
- 3.5. To enhance this project, we are also holding discussions with other sub-national transport bodies (STBs) to establish their approach to supporting their local authority partners and share best practice and guidance from previous work which can be built on to provide bespoke support to partner authorities in the EEH region.
- 3.6. In line with the governance required for this project and approved at the Transport Officer Group we are establishing a capacity and capability forum.
- 3.7. The forum will include: local authority partners; EEH's delivery partners; and other relevant agencies such as the DfT and National Highways.
- 3.8. The forum will also oversee delivery of the regional capacity and capability project (including agreeing outputs and levels of support provided to each LTA partner). It is intended the initial focus of the forum will be around the development of major schemes development as the focus of our current capacity and capability work. It will also provide an opportunity for MRN LLM and major scheme promoters to come together to share local best practice and share solutions to local challenges. EEH is keen to establish qualitative feedback loops with partner authorities on effectiveness of interventions and support provided. The forum will facilitate and peer-review the proposed support for partners and oversee the delivery of the support.

#### **4. Next Steps**

- 4.1. In terms of the regional centres of excellence, EEH has provided the information contained within this briefing note, feedback from the TOG meeting, and plans for the continued work within this Spending Review period to the DfT on 9th September 2022 and we are waiting their feedback and confirmation of next steps.
- 4.2. For the current Capacity and Capability project, we will continue to progress the initial project through phases as planned, with the first phase of this project running from June 2022 until November 2022 which will gather feedback and reviews from our partner authorities and also include establishing the capacity and capability forum.
- 4.3. The second phase of this work will commence in November 2022 and will set out the support for partner authorities which will be determined by the outputs of phase one.

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**September 2022**

## Annex 1 – Assessment of Current Capability

EEH’s approach to accommodating the additional core function of a centre of excellence is through:

- i. adaption of our existing work programme to align to centre of excellence areas of focus;
- ii. to work smarter to more effectively share data and best practice with other STBs;
- iii. to work smarter to more effectively share data and best practice with our LTA partners;
- iv. to establish an STB-led working groups to ensure we share best practice;
- v. To recognise that resources in local authorities are limited and overall the greatest impact in this work can only be achieved if there are enough people in the STB and in local authorities to enable its success.
- vi.

Centre of Excellence Core area	Activity already underway	Opportunities to strengthen offer within current financial settlement	Opportunities that can be unlocked with additional funding
<p><b>Local Transport Plans</b></p> <p>There remains uncertainty in the planning of this theme as we await DfT’s LTP guidance and clarity over requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EEH transport strategy has been used as strategic narrative and structure behind recently updated LTPs (Local Transport Plans)</li> <li>• EEH represents local partners in ensuring LTP guidance is: well-developed, clear in its requests; reasonable on timescales</li> <li>• The EEH evidence base provides a basis for individual local authority’s LTP development.</li> <li>• The De-carbonisation Playbook will be key in assessing Carbon impact of LTPs.</li> <li>• Working with the University of Hertfordshire to strengthen policy solutions for connectivity in rural and peri-urban communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual 1-2-1 discussions and workshops with local authorities to review capability gaps that are affecting delivery of a strong LTP.</li> <li>• Smarter sharing of data and work practices to improve local authority capability through the creation of a dedicated online platform.</li> <li>• Regular dissemination events to ensure EEH evidence base is being used to its full potential by LTAs (Local Transport Authorities).</li> <li>• Review of EEH evidence base to ensure it provides as much evidence as possible for local partners to use.</li> <li>• Practical support for authorities in areas such as consultation and engagement – disseminating information about tested tools and expertise within the supply chain.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The greatest impact will be achieved if EEH can provide additional resource to provide expert advice and technical reviews of emerging work being developed by each local authority.</li> <li>• Thought leadership and collaboration across sectors to drive application of theory and transport planning methodologies, such as triple axis planning.</li> <li>• Development of a long-term plan to improve the availability of transport planning skills across the sector as a whole.</li> </ul>

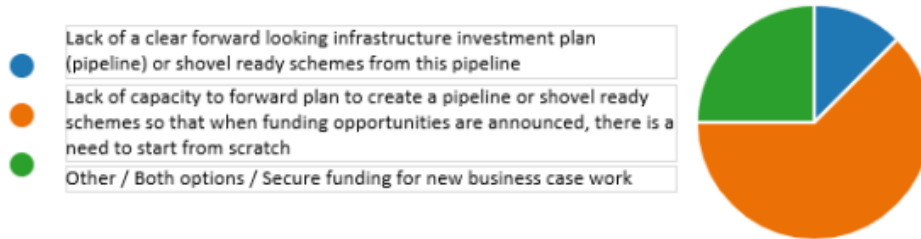
<b>Quantifying Carbon Reductions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EEH has been leading the work in the development of the Decarbonisation Playbook which will provide local authority partners with a key means of assessing the carbon impact of their plans and schemes.</li> <li>• The Playbook commission has engagement with local members built in.</li> <li>• EEH is working closely with the DfT in developing the project, particularly around consistency of data methodologies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of the Decarbonisation playbook and case studies will give ensure local partners are aware of the evidence and tools available to them.</li> <li>• The EEH decarbonisation subgroup will increase its profile as a forum for developing greater knowledge and understanding across all local partners.</li> <li>• Collaboration and sharing of expertise across the STB community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In year funding resource has made development of the Decarbonisation Playbook possible.</li> <li>• Further funding will allow EEH to work with officers from across the partnership to embed best practice, review implementation and undertake impact assessment- creating a fuller life cycle for change.</li> <li>• Thought leadership and collaboration across sectors to drive application of theory and methodologies.</li> <li>• Creation of a UK wide specialism in planning for net zero in transport that could leveraging and showcase expertise across universities as well as the public and private sectors.</li> </ul>
<b>Business Case Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EEH's current capability and capability work strongly aligns to this core area of work.</li> <li>• The top three challenges to developing business cases identified by local authority partners are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lack of local authority resources and technical know-how</li> <li>○ Lack of funding to undertake bespoke assessments</li> <li>○ Lack of clear understanding of criteria and requirements</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The top three areas where partner authorities would like support are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support with technical assurance (economic and financial dimension) through stage gate reviews</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will continue to review the current scope of work and ensure that it is as effective as possible for delivering capacity and capability improvements.</li> <li>• EEH is collaborating with other STBs and DfT (e.g. OxCam Road study) to ensure an effective lessons learnt process and best practice sharing ethos can be established.</li> <li>• Investigation is underway with partner STBs into the capabilities needed to develop an EEH Common Analytical Framework to enable strategic narrative development of regional schemes to pre-SOBC level.</li> <li>• Using emerging skills in the region more effectively, such as facilitating work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers have identified support with business case development as one of the most effective ways STBs can add value.</li> <li>• Dedicated support through expert advice and technical reviews requires additional capacity. Our 'enhancing regional client-side capability', submitted to DfT in 2021 provides an evidenced-based justification for the level of investment required to deliver this support in the long term.</li> <li>• Addressing the sector skills gaps by developing a long term plan, including transport planning apprenticeships in our region.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support to gather data and build the evidence base for schemes</li> <li>○ Support with business case writing and project plan development.</li> <li>● We have also established a regional capacity and capability forum to share best practice and offer support to partners.</li> </ul>	<p>placements for University of Hertfordshire's MSc</p>	
<p><b>Pipeline of future schemes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The development of a good pipeline of future schemes is a precursor to strong business case delivery, therefore some of our practices in the section above will support this too.</li> <li>● EEH's evidence base, including the connectivity studies and OxCam road study will contribute to supporting the development of investment pipelines for individual authorities.</li> <li>● The regional evidence base includes a number of models and tools that LTAs can use to complement locally developed processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Developing a greater understanding of the barriers to developing pipelines of future schemes.</li> <li>● Ensuring the Multi Criteria Assessment Framework developed for the connectivity studies and regional investment pipeline can be transferred for use at LTA level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Development of online tools and platform to make MCAF application, and resultant scheme prioritisation easier to update.</li> <li>● Additional resource to provide expert advice and technical reviews of emerging work being developed by each local authority.</li> </ul>

## Annex B – Survey Results

What are your current barriers to develop a successful business case?

[More Details](#)



Do you have a prioritised infrastructure programme and do you have a plan to develop the business cases for these?

[More Details](#)



What are your top three key challenges to develop a successful business case?

[More Details](#)



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