



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

8 December 2022

Agenda Item 8 - Business Unit Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

a) Notes the business unit update

1. EEH Conference

- 1.1. EEH held its annual conference at Stadium MK on 16 November. The event was EEH's most well-attended yet, with 208 delegates – up by around 90 on the 2021 conference.
- 1.2. A full round-up of the day, including photographs and videos, is available on our website: <https://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/eeh-conference-2022-round-up/>
- 1.3. Feedback from the event, collated from conversations with delegates, social media and a post-event survey, has been very positive. Of those who have responded to the survey, 96% rated it 'excellent, very good, or good', while 79% rated it 'excellent' or 'very good' (approval levels are similar to those given for the 2021 conference).
- 1.4. Comments included:
 - "An interesting day spent at the England's Economic Heartland Conference in Milton Keynes today. Fascinating to hear more about the region from a connectivity perspective."
 - "Excellent and thought provoking speakers and great opportunity to network with EEH's authority partners."
 - "A really great day, some great speakers around some fantastic topics."
 - "The venue, content and delegates seemed to be really good and appropriate, so well done to all who played a part in delivering it"
 - "I found the sessions and panels really insightful and it was great to hear about EEH'S priorities and progress."
 - "Lots of good points being made about the benefits of unlocking the potential of the Cambridge - Oxford - London triangle, bringing about clarity of funding, enabling flexibility of funding, and putting Public Transport first."
- 1.5. The survey asked respondents to rank sessions. Sessions which scored particularly highly were:
 - The opening presentations by Cllr Richard Wenham and Naomi Green

- The innovation session, led by Cllr Emily Darlington
 - The 'next 12 months' session with Cllr Liz Leffman, Cllr David Renard and Patsy Dell
 - The innovation breakout sessions (a choice of Google Maps, Podaris and Vivacity)
 - Infrastructure updates (East West Railway Company, National Highways, Great British Railways).
- 1.6. Planning for the 2023 event is already underway and the business unit hopes to confirm the date shortly. We are currently looking for this to be mid-October.
- 1.7. Based on feedback, ideas and improvements for the 2023 conference have been identified. These include:
- Using Board members to introduce and champion sessions and panels as Cllr Darlington did for innovation.
 - Retaining breakout sessions (which were popular new additions) but having these in separate rooms to improve audio quality.
 - Planning for more EEH announcements on the day and generally providing delegates with more detail about specific elements of EEH's work programme (this came up in feedback).
 - Potential sessions/ breakouts on the 'future of mobility'; 'operation of new infrastructure (East West Rail will be a year from delivery and Luton DART will be in operation); planning for electric vehicles.
 - Inviting regional MPs to speak.
 - Introducing a 'debate' session maximising participation and audience interaction.
- 1.8. We would value feedback from the Board and ideas for how to improve for 2023.

2. Smart Junctions

- 2.1. Given the well-known challenges of east-west road-based connectivity in the region and the high cost/high carbon and long lead times for new online and offline highways capacity, the better management of existing road space through the application of digital technologies has long been a priority for EEH.
- 2.2. By leveraging and scaling smart junction technology, local transport authorities could manage the prioritisation of specific modes at different times of day. Adopting this approach has the opportunity to bring improved efficiency of strategically important junctions and corridors which in turn result in a reduction of carbon emissions; improvement in journey times; improvement in journey time reliability and more efficient use of existing transport assets.
- 2.3. A number of 'smart junction' real world test sites have been deployed in the UK, including in Cambridge where a junction is currently being managed under test conditions by smart cameras and a machine learning algorithm. The outcomes so far have been positive with the AI broadly matching traditional 'scoot' and 'mover' enabled junctions
- 2.4. EEH is in the process of commissioning a study with City Science that will look to quantify the possible benefits of scaling smart junction technologies across the region. The study will explore opportunities for better environmental outcomes and better connectivity which, by implication could bring economic benefits across a scaled up "test site".
- 2.5. The EEH commission focuses on maximising the use of the existing highway network. It will remain largely technology-agnostic but will review the current effectiveness of current smart junction technology as part of an assessment of application solutions for a scaled up area, like the EEH region.



2.6. The project is due to start in January 2023 and will be completed by April 2023. The conclusions of the study will provide the next step in an evidence base on which EEH can work with local authorities across the region to develop a proposition. If viable, EEH will lead the exploration of funding opportunities for a region-wide pilot, exploring both innovation funding and conventional government funding routes.

3. Active travel and Varsity Way

- 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. Working with partners, EEH developed [Phase 1 of the Active Travel Strategy](#), agreed by the Strategic Transport Leadership Board in February 2022. Phase 1 of the work outlined the ambition for active travel in the Heartland: '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'.
- 3.3. Phase 2 of the Active Travel Strategy has now commenced, working with a steering group of local authority and industry partners. Its aim is to identify missing strategic cross boundary or multi modal opportunities which would provide large benefits for the region.
- 3.4. There are five elements of Phase 2 of the strategy:
 - Baseline and (place based) target setting – this section of the project is largely complete
 - Understanding the regional active travel network and future ambitions ('missing links' – network based) – this section of the project is underway
 - Challenges to achieving the ambitions (location specific examples of challenges)
 - Modal integration
 - Delivery plan
- 3.5. It is anticipated the technical work will conclude at the beginning of the new year (January/February 2023). Once complete, EEH will work with partners and DfT to act on the delivery plan, including seeking new funding opportunity to support investment in the region's active travel network.
- 3.6. EEH's transport strategy also supports maximising the potential of an Oxford-Cambridge Varsity Way as a 'green spine' across the Heartland: 'one that can act as a focal point for developing a region wide network of greenways across the region'.
- 3.7. Working with the sustainable travel charity Sustrans, partners and stakeholders along a high-level options assessment of the route spanning from Oxford to Cambridge was undertaken.
- 3.8. The options assessment provides a starting point to work with partners on realising the potential of the Varsity Way as an east-west active travel route, with the potential to build a network of active travel routes.
- 3.9. The report 'Introducing the Varsity Way' was launched at the EEH Conference on 16 November and [has been published on the EEH website](#).
- 3.10. During the development of the options assessment, there was stakeholder support to investigate wider scale re-alignment of the route in the Marston Vale area, to align with communities and Marston Vale rail stations more closely. Assessment of wide scale realignment was out of scope (and budget) of the original assessment work, however EEH is working to identify potential funding sources to undertake the additional work.



4. Places of Strategic Importance

- 4.1. EEH's transport strategy identified places of strategic importance, including regionally significant hubs, economic assets (for example, enterprise zones), universities, smaller settlements identified by local authorities as a focus for significant planned population and/or economic growth relative to their size, garden towns/villages and areas of potential.
- 4.2. Building on the places of strategic importance in the transport strategy, we will be undertaking a short piece of work which will help us understand how we can further categorise places of strategic importance based on data.
- 4.3. The benefits of the projects are:
 - It will help focus our places of strategic importance in a data led way
 - It will allow places to be analysed against specific metrics.
 - Help inform the future investment pipeline iterations
- 4.4. Transport and wider socio-economic and environmental metrics linked to the transport strategy will be utilised in the development of the project.
- 4.5. The output of the project will be a spreadsheet and technical note for use in future projects.
- 4.6. The project will last approximately two months and includes a workshop with transport officers to discuss the methodology being applied to the project.

5. BEIS Net Zero review - EEH response

- 5.1. On 29 September, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy launched a review into Net Zero. The independent review was commissioned to ensure the government was delivering its net zero target in a way that was pro-business and pro-growth.
- 5.2. Changes in government have not altered the remit of the review. A call for evidence closed on 27 October 2022.
- 5.3. The granular nature of the questions included in the review meant a technical response from EEH officers was the most appropriate approach.
- 5.4. EEH's response set out the explicit and significant role that high quality strategic and regional connectivity had in delivering both net zero and sustainable economic growth. The region's approach to collaboration and the need for local, placed-based delivery was identified as an approach that should be leveraged and reinforced if we are to deliver and escalate net zero policy outcomes.
- 5.5. The response set out the opportunity for further investment into the region's world class testbed facilities, highlighting the strategic role played by Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Cambridge in this space.
- 5.6. EEH also argued for further policy commitments supporting behaviour change initiatives and again set out the case for providing better, low carbon travel choices for or residents.
- 5.7. Finally, EEH made the case that clearer funding for local and regional bodies would allow us to make better and more informed choices about infrastructure spending for the benefit of both the economy and the environment.
- 5.8. The BEIS review <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-net-zero-call-for-evidence> is underway and will report at the end of 2022

Suzanne Winkels
Principal Technical lead
December 2022

