



## Strategic Transport Leadership Board

3rd March 2023

### Agenda Item 8

#### Business Unit Update

*Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the meeting:**

**a) Notes the business unit update**

**1. Places of Strategic Importance**

- 1.1. Our 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.
- 1.2. The exercise of identifying the places of strategic importance for the transport strategy was largely based on stakeholder views.
- 1.3. Building on these identified places of strategic importance, we are undertaking a short, data-led piece of work which will help us understand more about our places in the Heartland region in relation to several data sets, utilising transport and wider socio-economic and environmental metrics linked to the transport strategy.
- 1.4. These include Local Plan data, GVA, deprivation, air quality and transport sector reliant jobs. Data related to tourism and health is also being explored to understand if there are appropriate datasets for use in the project.
- 1.5. The output of the project will be an excel spreadsheet and technical note for use by the business unit and local authority partners in support of future projects and investment proposals.

**2. Active Travel Strategy**

- 2.1. A key action point in EEH's transport strategy is championing investment in active travel and shared transport solutions to improve local connectivity.



- 2.2. Working with partners, EEH developed [Active Travel Strategy: The Ambition](#) (phase 1), which was agreed by the Board in February 2022 and 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'*
- 2.3. Building on this work, EEH and its partners have been working on a second phase of the strategy to identify cross border 'missing links' with high potential and large benefit for the region. It is a data led phase, underpinned by network mapping, officer engagement and a delivery plan.
- 2.4. Phase 2 of the Active Travel Strategy is now nearing completion. The draft report will be reviewed by the steering group ahead of being presented to Board.
- 2.5. The outputs of the study will be one of the technical reports which will be considered as part of the investment pipeline iteration.
- 2.6. In addition, a clear and evidence-based focus on high potential cross boundary active travel links will provide a basis for feeding into any future calls for investment. The work will not undermine Local Authorities work on Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plans but seeks to build on the good work being undertaken by authorities.

### **3. Investment Pipeline**

- 3.1. As the sub-national transport body (STB) for the region, EEH's role is to work with local partners to identify priorities for future investment discussions with government and scheme promoters.
- 3.2. At the December Strategic Transport Leadership Board, EEH outlined the intention to update our investment pipeline. A first version of the investment pipeline, building on priorities of partners and 'known' investment priorities, was outlined in the transport strategy. The intention was for this initial pipeline to be iterated as future technical studies concluded and priorities emerged.
- 3.3. Following the December Board meeting, EEH has been developing a brief of work, building on comments from Board members. EEH is currently procuring consultant support to begin the project shortly, with the aim to conclude the project by end December 2023.
- 3.4. The overall outcome will be a simple to understand pipeline, proportionate to regional scale working and underpinned by a strong evidence-based rationale for the interventions included. The pipeline will not rank schemes but will give an indication of their significance in contributing to a series of outcomes for the region, defined by the ambitions of the transport strategy.
- 3.5. The Department for Transport has indicated that stakeholder acceptability is an important element of developing investment pipelines which are deliverable. Therefore, we are keen to work with the Board to ensure we present a pipeline which contains interventions of regional significance which are seen as high priority by Board members.
- 3.6. The investment pipeline process will be brought to the Board at appropriate intervals during its development, ensuring board members are in agreement on the outcomes that it is seeking to deliver.

### **4. Connectivity Studies**

- 4.1. Following December's Strategic Transport Leadership Board the connectivity study reports for EEH's first two connectivity studies 'Oxford – Milton Keynes' and 'Peterborough – Northampton - Oxford' were published on the EEH website.



- 4.2. A third study for 'Swindon – Didcot – Oxford' has been in development for the past year and the project is nearing completion. The ambition is to present the study at the May Strategic Transport Leadership Board.
- 4.3. The fourth and fifth studies in the connectivity studies programme have recently commenced. These cover the geographies 'Thames Valley – Buckinghamshire – Milton Keynes – Northampton' and 'Southern East West movements'.
- 4.4. Building on lessons from earlier studies, we are keen to liaise with Board members at the beginning of the studies to understand Board member priorities for the study areas. The EEH team will seek to work with officers to arrange the meetings.

## **5. Transport Select Committee: Future Areas of Interest**

- 5.1. The EEH business unit responded to the January 2023 Transport Select Committee request for future areas of interest by challenging them to ensure that we are prepared for digital roads revolution.
- 5.2. The UK economy is dependent on its road network. Government projects a 22% increase in traffic between 2025 and 2060. While technological advances such as the rollout of electric vehicles will support the country's journey to net zero, the continuous need for new capacity and improved levels of service on our roads (including, importantly, for public transport) must also be addressed.
- 5.3. A future network, for all road-based transport, needs to be planned differently. The principle of extracting maximum value from existing assets should be central to the way we design, fund and manage roads.
- 5.4. In 2023 87%<sup>[1]</sup> of new vehicles are considered 'connected'. Smart technologies offer a new opportunity to extract maximum value from what already exists. A Transport Committee inquiry could help ensure the pace of change is escalated, considering:
- Whether Government is prepared for the digital roads revolution –are funding allocations and decision making across Whitehall agile enough for a solution-based future?
  - The extent to which digitisation of assets and traffic control could reduce the need to invest in high-cost and high carbon, physical network improvements
  - The skills challenge facing the transport sector, where depleting levels of transport planning and delivery skills need to be supported by new data and technology competences
  - Whether National Highways' steps to deliver smarter roads on the Strategic Road Network (SRN) through its 'digital roads' programme and deployment of 'internet of things' (IoT) enabled infrastructure is ambitious enough?
  - The growing gap between smart capabilities on the SRN, Major Road Network (MRN) and A-road network. Given that A-roads are fundamental to local and regional economies and delivering an integrated network, how can this gap be narrowed?
  - Whether technology can support better management of roads. Can vehicle use be planned differently in terms of the way we prioritise modes, times of the day and corridors: supporting better more reliable journeys by bus, coach and for our HGV operators?
  - Could real time information be better managed? Could there be regional or national management of data and prioritisation of routing - something that's currently largely controlled by Google's algorithms.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/993364/new-connected-vehicles-on-roads-uk/>



## 6. Transport Select Committee: Response to RIS Call for Evidence

6.1. EEH business unit provided a technical response to the Transport Select Committee's call for evidence on RIS programme in our region.

6.2. For reference, the National Highways RIS2 (2020 – 2025) Programme in EEH Region includes:

1. A47 Guyhirn (completed)
2. A47 Wansford to Sutton (DCO decision recently extended);
3. A428 Black Cat (DCO granted but is subject to a legal challenge);
4. A5 Towcester relief road (developer delivered scheme within input from NH who are working with the LTA and developer to include signing and traffic management through town as an alternative to the current SRN route through town centre);
5. M25 Junction 25 (completed);
6. A34 Newbury to Oxford Safety Improvements (completed)
7. A34 Technology Enhancements/ A34 Botley and Pear Tree Interchange improvements (not progressed)

6.3. Strategic Studies

- OxCam Arc Road Study
- A34 Improvements North and South of Oxford – on hold, awaiting decisions on RIS3

6.4. RIS 3 (2025 – 2030) priorities

- Taking forward the recommendations of the OxCam Road Study
- Junction improvements that are previous commitments of National Highways
- Developing an agreed approach to addressing long term challenges on A34

6.5. Key messages included in the response were:

- Welcomed improved partnership working with both DfT and National Highways
- However, there remains inconsistency as a result of there being no reference to STBs in the National Highways license, leading to a lack of clarity in the way that National Highways engages and reflects STB transport strategies
- The need for integrated funding that is prioritised and planned in partnership with local, regional, and national bodies. It is only through this approach that we will be able to deliver a more affordable future-ready transport network
- The need to plan for net Zero and look at whole life carbon
- Recognition that transparency and a clear process for developing, assessing, and delivering the Roads Investment Strategy in partnership will be vital if we are to ensure future roads programmes, including RIS3, deliver
- The requirement for better integration between strategic and local roads as part of whole route planning
- Particularly highlighting the impact of the strategic road network where it passes through local communities
- The need for a more multi-modal approach to future RIS programmes including provision for public transport services on the strategic road network
- Greater need for the assessment of the strategic road network's impact on environment, health, well-being and carbon
- Concern over where schemes have not been progressed the lack of input and oversight – naming the A34 as an example
- The increasing costs due to inflation and resulting considerable tail of the RIS2 programme that may impact future programme
- Embracing new technology such as digital roads and linking these to the major road network.



## 7. Capacity and Capability Project Update

- 7.1. The key objective of the EEH Capacity and Capability work is to strengthen client-side skill sets of our Local Transport Authority (LTA) partners when delivering major road network (MRN) transport infrastructure projects.
- 7.2. One of the key aspects of this work was the establishment of a Capacity and Capability Forum to support and review the outputs of this project and to share best practice.
- 7.3. The forum has already met three times and is made up of local authority partner officers leading on MRN schemes and representatives from different departments of the DfT and National Highways. The forums have been well attended and have been instrumental in identifying the areas where they local authorities most need support in progressing their MRNs. This has formed the basis of the support package offered. Namely:
- Identification and enabling effective project management review: This is to de-risk the critical path of the project to expedite what is required from the business case process and accelerate delivery.
  - Peer Review support: To support partners to be intelligent clients. This support will enable a robust review of deliverables to ensure minimal revisions to submissions to meet key government submission criteria.
  - Pipeline development support: This support to local authority partners to identify what is required to develop and maintain robust pipelines. This will enable faster responses to future funding opportunities and support the LTP process.
  - Wider specialist support: This support is tailored to the particular requirements of the local authority partners. This would include support with the development and inputs into procurement frameworks which will enable better commissioning of support and resources to efficiently deliver work.
  - Business case development guidance: This document includes a more user friendly summary business case guidance to provide concise and relevant key information required at each phase of the business case process.
- 7.4. Considering the limited budget available, peer review and project management support, were identified as being the highest priority that LTAs required. Consequently, briefs have been drafted and forwarded to our business partners with the intention that work will be commissioned and initiated in early March.
- 7.5. It is hoped that future funding from the DfT for the capacity and capability project would allow for other identified priorities including pipeline support to be progressed in the new financial year.
- 7.6. One of the forum sessions was a dedicated DfT MRN surgery session. We are the first STB to offer this approach and it allowed LTA officers to bring their questions, challenges and issues on their MRN schemes to be addressed directly by DfT specialists from the business case assessment team. The surgery was considered a success as it also outlined the process that DfT also need to go through to get approvals so provided greater clarity all round and allowed people to meet the DfT team. An FAQ guide is being developed by DfT, assisted by EEH, for all LTAs with MRN schemes. This is will be replicated with other STBs.
- 7.7. A key part of the C&C project will be in evaluating the effectiveness of the support in achieving the project outcomes. This will be done through a feedback session following the second phase.



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