

England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance Strategic Transport Forum

13th May 2016

Agenda Item 3c: East-West Connectivity: Strategic Issues

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) **Note the progress to date with Expressway Study, and the timeline for the next steps for the study**
- b) **Welcomes the progress being made in delivering the Western Section of East-West Rail, and calls for the work to identify a preferred route for the Central Section to be taken forward as a national priority**
- c) **Identifies those strategic issues relating to East-West Connectivity that it wishes to have taken into consideration in the development of the overarching Transport Strategy for the Heartland area**
- d) **Reaffirms its willingness to actively engage the National Infrastructure Commission on issues of strategic (sub-national) significance in support of its work on east-west connectivity.**

1. Strategic Context

- 1.1. This agenda item has been preceded on the agenda by two briefings: the first by the study team undertaking the Expressway Study on behalf of Highways England, the second by Network Rail on the development and delivery of East-West Rail.
- 1.2. Both projects reflect the importance of improved east-west connectivity across the Heartland area. In particular they reflect the need for improved connectivity in support of economic activity, and as an enabler of economic growth. Improved connectivity will help raise productivity to a level that is closer to that of global competitor regions. It will also support delivery of Enterprise Zones across the Heartland area.
- 1.3. East-West connectivity is a strategic (i.e. sub-national) issue, as such it is one on which the Strategic Alliance's ability to enable a single strategic conversation is invaluable.
- 1.4. Work is already underway on preparing an initial draft of the overarching Transport Strategy for the Heartland area – an update on progress will be given later to this meeting. The emergent overarching transport strategy will in due course be used to shape the Strategic Alliance's response to potential options identified by the Expressway Study Work.
- 1.5. At the same time as part of the work on developing the overarching Transport Strategy officers are looking at how to incorporate the concept of a Major Road Network. Members of the Forum will recall that the briefing on this concept at the meeting held on 13th February.

- 1.6. A Major Road Network reflects the reality that economic activity across the Heartland area is enabled by a combination of Highway England's Strategic Road Network and the strategically more significant local authority owned roads. Many of the emerging 'county based devo deals' already incorporate the principle of such a network, albeit often referred to as a key road network.
- 1.7. Members of the Forum were supportive of the principle of a Major Road Network. Incorporating the concept within the overarching Transport Strategy will enable the Alliance to provide strong leadership on the preferred way forward for the Expressway Study.
- 1.8. The work programme for this Forum identifies the Major Road Network as underpinning the development of a system-wide approach to improving network resilience: another key consideration in terms of improving economic productivity.
- 1.9. The Strategic Alliance partners see the investment now being delivered and planned for as part of East-West Rail as being complementary to the need for improved connectivity by road – a key principle that the Alliance partners will need to emphasise in its work with the National Infrastructure Commission.
- 1.10. East-West Rail in its entirety continues to be seen by the Alliance partners as a key piece of enabling infrastructure for the Heartland area. In this regard it will be an important consideration in the development and realisation of spatial strategies that underpin Local Plans being prepared across the Heartland area.
- 1.11. With Government requiring Local Planning Authorities to submit their Local Plans by March 2017, it is essential that the timing of East-West Rail is reaffirmed at the earliest opportunity. .
- 1.12. It is in this context that the Alliance supported the East-West Rail Consortium's submission in response to the Hendy Review that every effort should be made to meet the original delivery deadline of 2020/21. It is also why the Alliance supports the need to move forward with the development of the central section of East-West Rail as a matter some urgency.
- 1.13. Set against this backdrop this agenda item offers members of the Forum the opportunity to identify strategic issues that they wish to have considered by the officer group in developing the overarching Transport Strategy.
- 1.14. It is important to emphasise the importance of looking at the transport infrastructure on a system- basis: a point that is reflected in the legislative framework for Sub-national Transport Bodies which enables such a body to co-ordinate transport functions on a statutory basis.
- 1.15. It is also important to ensure that the issue of east-west connectivity is considered in the context of wider infrastructure requirements that are in themselves linked with emerging spatial plans.

2. National Infrastructure Commission: East-West Connectivity Study

- 2.1. In March 2016 the Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote to the Chairman of the National Infrastructure Commission (Appendix 1) asking him to look at the issue of east-west connectivity across the 'global cluster' that stretches across the arc from Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford.
- 2.2. Whilst the Commission's work is in its early stages, it is clear that there are a number of issues that the Forum needs take into consideration:
 - a) There is a need to set out the Alliance's understanding of the characteristics of the Heartland area, and in particular the nature (and potential) of the economy.
 - b) There is a need to set out the Alliance's views on the potential risks to continued economic success due to pressures on infrastructure, as well identifying opportunities for investment in infrastructure to support those parts of the Heartland area that are currently underperforming
 - c) There is a need to set out the Alliance's views as to the extent to which the Heartland area's relationship with London (facilitated by the largely radial nature of strategic infrastructure centred on the capital) has been a contributory factor to economic success, as well as the extent to which that relationship might evolve over the medium/long term
- 2.3. The Commission has been asked to make an interim report (expected to be before the end of 2016) with its substantive recommendations to be submitted to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by autumn 2017.

3. Providing a Strategic Input on East-West Connectivity

- 3.1. The Strategic Alliance – and by extension this Forum – was established to provide the forum in which a single strategic conversation between the Alliance partners and national agencies can take place. As such the Alliance is looking to work collaboratively with the Commission throughout its work.
- 3.2. The Strategic Alliance Leaders (Local Transport Authority Leaders and Local Enterprise Partnership Chairman) have set out that as an initial series of steps the Alliance will:
 - Submit a short overview narrative of the Heartland area to the Commission – one that conveys the nature of the challenge facing the Heartland area, and in particular the challenge of dealing with economic success as well as the pressures of realising growth potential. In this regard the Alliance will draw on the work to develop an overarching economic narrative for the Heartland area as part of the work to refresh the individual Strategic Economic Plans
 - Use the work to develop the overarching Transport Strategy for the Heartland area as the basis for engaging with the Commission. Whilst it is likely that the Commission will look to commission its own work, the evidence base held by the Alliance partners should be a key foundation block in the development of a common evidence base.

- Set out how the Strategic Alliance is looking to link the Commission's work on east-west connectivity with its related work on 5G infrastructure – the latter is crucial to the economy that exists across the Heartland area: making the connection between the two pieces of work is important if the implications for travel need and requirements of changes in business models enabled by a world class digital infrastructure is to be taken into account in the Commission's work

Programme Director

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