

Transport Strategy Introductory chapter (work in progress)

A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY FOR REAL CHANGE

Our ambition

England's Economic Heartland is an economic powerhouse, home to world-leading universities and innovators. It is blessed with a unique natural, historic and built environment. But its future potential is constrained by a transport system which cannot meet demand, contributing to carbon emissions which are significantly above the national average and limiting opportunities for sustainable growth.

This Transport Strategy provides the step-change in approach required to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges present in our region. It supports green economic recovery and growth, preserving and enhancing our natural, historic and built environment, creating opportunities for residents no matter their individual circumstances, and, crucially, responding harder and faster to the climate change imperative.

Our ambition is **to realise sustainable growth opportunities by improving the quality of life and wellbeing for Heartland residents and businesses, and harnessing the region's globally renowned centres of innovation to unlock a world class, de-carbonised transport system.**

This ambition is deliverable. It requires a shared commitment between our partners in the region and national government, with bold decision making that puts people and the environment at its centre, and which achieves synergies with other policy areas which have a major impact on the way people travel, including spatial planning and the provision of wider infrastructure and services such as digital, utilities, education and health.

This Transport Strategy sets the policy framework, supported by an initial investment pipeline, which will be required to deliver the ambition. This is guided by four key principles:

- **Achieving net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050, with an ambition to reach this by 2040**
- **Improving quality of life and wellbeing through a safe and inclusive transport system accessible to all which emphasises sustainable and active travel**
- **Supporting the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities**
- **Ensuring the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways, in a way which lessens its environmental impact.**

There is now a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape the future in ways that might otherwise have taken many years to achieve.

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly accelerated trends that were already being driven by all of us as consumers. It has showed the considerable scope for the business community to increase its use of flexible and remote working while continuing to function, with consequential implications for the transport system.

This opportunity is amplified by ongoing wider changes in societal expectations and attitudes. Changes to the way in which businesses provide access to services and opportunities are having their own influence. The traditional town centre has changed as a consequence of changes in retail business models, driven by consumer choice.

The choices made by consumers can – and do – have significant implications for travel choices and behaviours. Business delivery models used by the majority of retail, commercial and professional service companies continue to undergo significant and rapid change, powered by the digital economy.

Our future investment choices will reflect the needs of our existing communities and businesses, the needs of future generations and the needs of an ageing population.

Our five-point plan of action:

Decarbonise the transport system by harnessing innovation and supporting solutions which create green economic opportunities

Our current pattern of travel and consumption of resources is not compatible with delivering net-zero greenhouse emissions. Indeed, carbon emissions in the region are higher and increasing faster than the UK average.

There is a legal requirement to achieve net zero carbon by 2050. However, through strong leadership and by harnessing the region's world-leading experience in clean, green and smart growth, we will aim to achieve this sooner.

We will prioritise investment not just on the basis of offering good value for money, but for its contribution towards achieving net-zero, as well as its contribution to wider sustainability and environmental goals.

The focus provided by the four Grand Challenges in the Government's Industrial Strategy will be used to maximise the opportunity for innovation-led solutions and businesses to support sustainable growth and provide the UK economy with a competitive edge in global markets.

We will harness the region's capacity to use 'living laboratories' as the means of developing, trialling and subsequently adopting new transport solutions, ones that provide the user with choice and which secure modal shift, and which create green economic opportunities in their own right.

Champion investment in digital infrastructure as a means of improving connectivity, in order to reduce the need to travel

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the potential for remote working to enable business activity to be maintained in different ways. It is already clear that improved digital infrastructure will be critical moving forward, becoming absolutely integral to the way companies operate and services accessed. Planning for our future transport needs must be taken forward alongside that for digital infrastructure – indeed, our transport system needs to be considered part of a wider system of connectivity – one that embraces both physical and digital access when identifying future infrastructure requirements.

Digital infrastructure allows us to 'connect' with a service, be it to better plan a journey through the use of intelligent transport systems, journey planning technologies or removing the need to travel at all.

The transformative potential of improved digital connectivity to reduce the need to travel is particularly strong in rural areas, where broadband speeds have traditionally been poor, yet where there is often a high reliance on journeys by private car.

Our approach will ensure the Heartland seizes the opportunity for change – change in work patterns, change in travel patterns, change in our approach to connectivity.

Use delivery of East West Rail and mass rapid transit as the catalyst for the transformation of our strategic public transport networks

Investment in transformational infrastructure – particularly East West Rail and mass rapid transit, supported by high quality first last mile provision – is central to supporting the future sustainable growth of the region. What was previously a series of individual economic and housing market areas will become one.

We will champion the principle of inclusive by design, allowing people to travel confidently and with ease through well designed physical infrastructure and accessible information to help aid journey planning. Information should be accessible to all ages and abilities.

Securing the right levels of service provision is crucial, given the varied work patterns of our communities and the need to open up opportunities for all, including those in rural areas with no or limited access to the public transport network.

We will ensure that the offer to the travelling public is to the highest possible standard – that it is safe, clean and high quality: we need to restore confidence, not just for the short term, but the long term.

Champion increased investment in active travel and shared transport solutions to improve local connectivity and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential

Continued change in travel behaviour creates its own opportunities to repurpose our existing infrastructure in favour of public transport and active travel modes, but this must be done in a way that enables safe journeys and a sustainable future for all of our communities

People must have the opportunity to fully integrate active travel into their daily routines with provision built in at the earliest opportunity for well designed, safe and accessible active travel.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown the propensity for uptake in walking and cycling, particularly for leisure. We will harness the current enthusiasm for active travel, which has seen cycling levels at over 300 % increase in comparison to the previous year, with support for the development Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans across the region to help build coherent networks of active travel infrastructure.

Early integration of green infrastructure in transport schemes and planning will not only improve connectivity but also help reduce the need to travel by bringing nature to people rather than bringing people to nature. This whole scale, holistic view of how we want our transport system to look and feel (and the additional benefits the approach can bring) will be at the forefront when planning our transport system.

Ensure that our freight and logistics needs continue to be met whilst lowering the environmental impact of their delivery.

The rise in e-commerce, accelerated by COVID-19, and enabled by investment in digital infrastructure, is changing the way people access services and facilities.

Freight and logistics is one to the largest contributors to carbon emissions but is also potentially the most difficult to implement solutions to reduce emissions.

We will continue to recognise the critical need to plan positively for freight and logistics as part of our transport system.

We are already seeing innovation in action across the region when it comes to servicing businesses and providing customers with novel ways of having their goods delivered – and we will build upon this.

And we will make the strongest case for investment in the capacity on our rail network to accommodate even more of the longer distance trunk movements of freight – not just to the benefit of the Heartland but the UK as a whole.

Climate Change and environmental imperative

As a region, the current pattern of travel and consumption of resources gives rise to a number of environmental challenges:

- Carbon emissions – emissions from transport are higher than the national average, and more worryingly the rate at which emissions are increasing is almost double the UK average
- Air quality – the environmental implications at a local level of our current transport choices is reflected by the number of Air Quality Management Areas in the region. There is a need for urgent action to address poor air quality and reduce the number of avoidable deaths. We support Local Authority partners deploying Ultra Low and Zero Emission Zones and share best practice across the region.

In Oxford the average temperature is already 1.6°C higher than the average recorded in the previous century. This is already above the 1.5°C target agreed at the 2015 Paris Climate Change talks.

In this context, we welcome Government's commitment to bring forward the end to the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid cars and vans from 2040 to 2035, or earlier if a faster transition appears feasible. We also support Government's ambition to remove diesel traction on the rail network by 2040.

However, the evidence is clear: these changes will not be sufficient to enable our region to meet the requirement to be net zero by 2050. Further action is required to change the scale and nature of existing travel demand. The need for action is heightened further by the scale of the region's growth ambition.

Whilst the requirement to achieve a net-zero target by 2050 serves as a key driver for change, it is part of a wider commitment, shared by the region and Government, to ensure that planned growth is delivered in a way that demonstrates net environmental gain. Net environmental gain is an emerging policy area but in the context of this strategy encompasses both natural capital and biodiversity net gain.

The Government's 25-year Environment Plan provides the context within which this strategy must demonstrate its ambition to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

The attractive natural, built and historic environment is a key factor in the region's success. Protecting and enhancing the natural environment through measures such as landscape led design and greening of the transport estate will help sustain the integrity and attractiveness of the Heartland's environment.

Access to the Heartland's rich natural environmental and heritage assets should be considered in the context of their surroundings and access by sustainable modes of transport to these places is expected to be prioritised as a result of this Transport Strategy. The Environment Bill, expected shortly after publication of this strategy, is widely expected to contain the requirement for Local Authorities to create Local Nature Recovery Strategies through which specific plans for improving land management for nature will be set. There is the potential for Local Authorities to link plans for local transport schemes to their Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

In line with the declared government ambitions for the Ox Cam Arc and the Ox Cam Arc Economic Prospectus all new transport-related development in the region should protect and enhance the environment and be based on the principles of net zero carbon, net biodiversity gain, net environmental gain and doubling the land actively managed for nature. We will work with partners to promote these principles within transport proposals.

Linkages with decisions taken in other policy areas are significant in this context. Proposals that support the re-imagining of our urban areas will create opportunities to effect change in travel demand and behaviour. The application of a natural capital approach to the development of transport infrastructure will help create attractive transport corridors for both people and wildlife; maximise the positive impact of the transport soft estate; improve the quality of habitats; and encourage active lifestyles. It will also take account of aspects such as air quality, water quality, flood risk management, soil quality and carbon sequestration.

Appropriate methodologies will be employed in applying this ambition to individual investment proposals. Individual proposals will be assessed as part of a wider package of measures which will take account of both the benefits and the adverse impacts. Where it is appropriate for EEH to do so, net biodiversity and net environmental gain targets will be set for both individual proposals and programmes. Each proposal will deliver an agreed minimum level of net gain whilst the programme will deliver a higher overall level of net gain. Whether gains and losses can be 'traded' across sites depends on the detriments and benefits in question. For example, this may be appropriate for carbon storage but not for publicly accessible greenspace sites.

[ADDITIONAL WORDING ON HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT to be added]

Inclusive by design

Investment must come from a place where the transport and digital systems are inclusive and accessible, creating opportunities to enable individuals to realise their potential. It needs to provide the support for the more vulnerable within our communities, addressing not just physical barriers to connectivity but also issues such as affordability, loneliness and social isolation.

We will champion the principle of inclusive by design, allowing people to travel confidently and with ease through well designed physical infrastructure and accessible information to help aid journey planning. Information should be accessible to all ages and abilities. Service provision will be an important aspect, acknowledging the varied work patterns of our communities and opening up opportunities for all, including those in rural areas with no or limited access to the public transport network.

Whole system approach

It is crucial there is a co-ordinated approach to shaping the future of our places, one that aligns decision making across policy areas to achieve a common vision of the future. By working with partners to adopt a vision-led approach to place-making at the local level, we will embed the philosophy of 'decide and provide'.

There is a need to invest in maintaining our existing infrastructure assets, deliver planned investment in additional capacity to meet future connectivity needs, and plan for the additional investment that enables sustainable growth. Investment is required to both support the existing economy and enable delivery of planned economic and housing growth, while at the same time preserving and enhancing our natural and historic environment, and the sustainable access to it.

This strategy highlights the critical importance of considering future investment requirements for digital and utility infrastructure alongside that for transport, creating a co-ordinated approach to the planning, development and implementation of strategic infrastructure that together delivers connectivity that the region needs.

By taking this whole system approach we can equally provide opportunities to engage with partners outside the transport arena. Opportunities to integrate sectors such as transport and water management can capture benefit for public finance by integrating sustainable drainage solutions and flood management risk at early points in scheme development.

Extreme weather events are the new normal. There is a need to invest in adapting existing infrastructure assets to improve the resilience of our transport system to reduce the impact on individuals (particularly the vulnerable), communities and businesses. Managing, delivering and operating the network so that when incidents occur they can be dealt with in a timely and effective manner, including the provision of information across the transport network and to communities.

The delivery of planned economic and housing growth represents an opportunity to deliver sustainable growth that benefits new and existing communities and businesses. However, this will continue to be dependent upon investment in strategic infrastructure and services, the right provision for public transport and active travel and a shared commitment for better co-ordination at all levels of decision making. Technological solutions will not on their own deliver the wider ambition encapsulated by the place-making agenda. Decarbonising vehicles will not address concerns in relation to congestion on the network, nor the impact of that congestion on our communities and businesses.

In setting the long-term policy framework for our transport system this strategy both supports local authorities with the delivery of current Local Plan proposals, and provides the framework within which to plan for the sustainable development of our communities in the longer-term.

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