



Strategic Transport Forum

5th February 2021

Agenda Item 7: Business Unit Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) Notes the updates on a number of projects across the Heartland**
- b) Agrees that a letter (Annex 1) should be sent to DfT pressing the need to act quickly on enacting the Traffic Management Act 2004 (Part 6) outside of London**

1. East West Rail

- 1.1. On Saturday 23rd January 2021, the Government announced confirmation of £760m investment to deliver East West Rail between Oxford and Bletchley/Milton Keynes, with services due by 2025.
- 1.2. The announcement represents an important milestone in the East West Rail project and means the next stage of construction work can begin. Delivery of this stage is expected to provide work for 1,500 people, injecting an estimated £1.1bn into the local economy.
- 1.3. The investment announcement also saw the East West Railway Company confirm that the project will now be delivered in three 'Connection Stages': Oxford to Bletchley and Milton Keynes; Oxford to Bedford; and Oxford to Cambridge.
- 1.4. Key takeaways from the announcement:
 - *Bletchley/ Milton Keynes:* The Company said that 'in the worst case, it may be that we need to introduce the service to Bletchley first and then extend it to Milton Keynes, once we have proved it will run on time. We would rather be transparent about that now, so people know what we are working hard to achieve'.
 - *Aylesbury-Milton Keynes:* The Company said it continues to 'explore options on how to connect Aylesbury with our colleagues in the Department for Transport and Network Rail. The original plans would not have provided local communities with a reliable service, and this section requires more investment than originally planned. There is further work to do to demonstrate to Government that this connection represents the best value for money for taxpayers.
 - *Bletchley to Bedford:* The Company wants to create a reliable connection for two trains an hour between Oxford and Bedford which can subsequently extend to Cambridge. It said: 'Some works on this section were previously proposed and consented as part of the Western Section, but they are not sufficient to run a reliable 2 tph service to Bedford, let alone extend that service to Cambridge. EWR Co are looking at this holistically, to deliver the full Oxford-Cambridge service, and that is going to require significantly more investment than envisaged by Network Rail for the Western Section – including the remodelling of Bedford Station'. The Company will

put forward proposals as part of the consultation in early 2021 and 'submit our funding bid to Government for the construction of this section of East West Rail in the 2021 Spending Review'.

- *Bedford-Cambridge*: The Company is currently identifying potential route alignments for the new railway between Bedford and Cambridge and will consult with local communities on these proposals in early 2021. Following the consultation, it will be looking to unlock Government funding for this section in the Spending Review.
- 1.5. Following the announcement, EEH released a statement from the Forum Chair welcoming the Government's continued commitment to invest in East West Rail. However, EEH is unequivocal about the importance of delivering East West Rail in its entirety. With the start of main works to deliver Bicester to Bletchley it is important to get early confirmation of the investment to deliver the sections between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury and between Bletchley and Bedford.
 - 1.6. What is also clear from this announcement is the importance attached to the forthcoming Spending Review. As discussed elsewhere on the agenda, in setting out our infrastructure requirements, we should not assume the case for strategic investments has necessarily been made and the funding secured. Notwithstanding the economic importance of the region to the UK it is clear that this Spending Review will be particularly tough.
 - 1.7. Meantime, the EWR Consortium – which the EEH Business Unit supports – is actively developing the longer-term ambition for the East West Main Line. This builds upon the work that the Consortium has done in the past and builds on the framework set out within the Transport Strategy. In this the Consortium is working with both EEH and Transport East to ensure that the wider connectivity east of Cambridge is reflected in the work of both STBs.
 - 1.8. The Consortium has also been supporting Oxfordshire County Council and its partners to take forward work that is looking at potential solutions for the London Road crossing at Bicester – this is a strategic infrastructure issue linked with realising the longer term potential for East West Rail.

2. Traffic Management Act 2004 (Part 6)

- 2.1. At its meeting on 27th November 2020, Forum members discussed the benefits to local partners of being able to enforce and prosecute moving traffic violations. These include better management and flow of traffic, including HGVs, and consequent environmental and safety benefits. Having power of these functions is an important tool in supporting the ambitions of the Transport Strategy.
- 2.2. The provisions relating to moving traffic offences are available in legislation for all local authorities through Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. However, to date the powers have not been activated outside of London.
- 2.3. As part of the Forum's ambition for using the Traffic Management Act 2004, EEH Business Unit committed to explore options to expedite enactment this part of the Act in the Heartland region.
- 2.4. Ministers have confirmed their commitment to take forward the work. However, the moving traffic enforcement powers require a set of statutory instruments to be made. In recent responses to questions, Ministers have indicated that these will take some time to bring into force, after which local authorities would then need to apply for a designation order for moving traffic enforcement. Statutory guidance is being developed for local authorities on how to use the powers, including publicising their introduction in advance, to ensure that enforcement is carried out fairly.
- 2.5. Forum Members will want to see the Department for Transport acting as quickly as possible. It is therefore proposed that the Forum writes to the Department for Transport saying that, while we welcome the Government's decision to commence Part 6 powers outside of London, it is important that the necessary legislative process is completed as

quickly as possible. A proposed letter to DfT minister, Baroness Vere, is set out in Annex 1 for the Forum's consideration and agreement.

3. Freight Programme

- 3.1. Informed by EEH's Freight Study, the Transport Strategy sets a clear plan for taking forward our freight ambitions for the region. Recognising the significant economic contribution that the freight sector has in the region, enabling and supporting key freight corridors – both rail and road and reducing the impact of freight on the environment, in terms of carbon emissions and its impact on communities living in and around freight corridors.
- 3.2. To maximise our knowledge and capability, and in partnership with neighbouring STBs, EEH Business Unit has secured access to DfT's most current freight data. Once processed, aggregated and mapped, we will begin applying this to better understand the potential regional (and local) impacts of the alternative fuelling of freight vehicles on carbon emissions. This will help EEH and constituent partners understand the infrastructure requirements to deliver decarbonisation of freight and logistics. This evidence will be used to support future funding applications to the government as and when new pots become available.
- 3.3. Building on this, EEH Business Unit will shortly commission a further study to understand the impact of the planned strategic infrastructure on road freight demand. This is a significant issue for the region due to: the volume of infrastructure needed to support the region's growth ambitions; the limited number of rail freight heads; and the high percentage of road-based freight in the region. Through a strategic and holistic view of the materials and workforce demand that planned housing and infrastructure generates and key construction materials pathways, we can start to understand what actions could be taken to mitigate impacts – on both the environment and congestion.
- 3.4. Finally, EEH has recently supported a funding application made to the Government's Geospatial Commission. The application, from City Science (an SME based within the Heartland), has resulted in funding being awarded to develop a platform to support national freight decarbonisation. EEH Business Unit is partnering with City Science to becoming a test case/pilot area for any outcome. We are suggesting a focus on first-mile, last-mile freight consolidation and understanding where the utility of urban/peri-urban freight consolidation hubs could be maximised.
- 3.5. Supporting freight is a long-term priority for the region and the Transport Strategy. Beyond these immediate projects, EEH will look to work with the wider STB community to understand the opportunity for rail freight going forward. There is a need for a "root and branch" national approach to understanding what opportunities there are at a strategic level to shift long distance freight from road to rail. While this requires a national approach, EEH Business Unit is working to drive the agenda forward at pace. We envisage this work happening in conjunction with a refresh of National Freight Strategy.

4. Connectivity Studies: Programme Update

- 4.1. Forum Members will recall the core part of the EEH work programme that they approved in order to deliver a programme Connectivity Studies (see Annex 2).
- 4.2. Connectivity studies will identify the interventions (physical or digital) that are required in order to achieve the connectivity requirements of each corridor. It is intended that, once agreed, the outputs of the studies will be included in the Transport Strategy Investment Pipeline.
- 4.3. A rigorous procurement exercise is due to complete soon, and we expect the first two studies to commence in March. These are: Oxford – Milton Keynes; and Peterborough – Northampton – Oxford'.

4.4. In addition, flexibility has been built into the procurement exercise so that the successful suppliers can undertake future connectivity studies if EEH is satisfied with performance and where relevant partners feel that procurement route is the most appropriate. This gives EEH Business Unit the ability to take forward future studies at pace.

5. Highways England: STB Stakeholder Engagement Framework

5.1. Forum Members have previously expressed views about levels, and type, of engagement between Highways England and Local Authorities in the Heartland region. Following concerns expressed by the Forum in November 2020, EEH Business Unit has been liaising with Highways England to move the discussion forward.

5.2. The need for close working between Highways England and STBs is outlined in the Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2) and within Highways England Business Plan and Delivery Plan. This includes STBs playing an active role in articulating the benefits of proposals being examined in their area.

5.3. Highways England is undertaking a project to create a framework for engagement in order to better develop collaboration for the benefit of Highways England, STBs and our constituent members. The project is considering how engagement can be best delivered with STBs across Highways England and in a more consistent manner across regions.

5.4. An update on progress with Highways England engagement and cooperation will be presented to the Strategic Transport Forum in May 2021.

6. Improving First Last Mile Connectivity

6.1. The Transport Strategy set out EEH's ambitions to undertake a discrete number of first last mile pilot projects. The pilots will provide the opportunity to work with partners to put into effect improved first mile/last mile solutions that, together with strategic public transport connections can ensure regional connectivity by public transport is well planned and developed.

6.2. EEH Business Unit has commenced work on an initial pilot. The pilot, in the Marston Vale area between Milton Keynes, Bedford, and Central Bedfordshire will explore local connectivity to/from East West Rail. The study is critical in unlocking the full benefit of the investment in the railway.

6.3. The study commenced in January 2021, with a partnership of WSP, Steer, 5th Studio and the charity CoMoUK taking the work forward. A second pilot – focused on Aylesbury – is anticipated to follow on, again linked with the investment being made in East West Rail.

6.4. EEH Business Unit has put forward a proposal to DfT that, subject to approval, will enable further first last mile pilots to take place during 2021/22.

Naomi Green

Head of Technical Programme

February 2021

Annex 2 Connectivity Studies programme

Study	Programme year (anticipated start date*)
Oxford – Milton Keynes	2020/21 – Q4
Peterborough – Northampton - Oxford	2020/21 – Q4
Swindon – Didcot - Oxford	2021/22 – Q1
London – Bucks – Milton Keynes - Northampton	2021/22
Watford – Aylesbury – Bicester – M40 junctions	2021/22
Luton – Milton Keynes - Daventry	2022/23
North Northamptonshire	2022/23
Oxford – M40 junctions	2022/23
Luton- Bedford – Northamptonshire	2023/24
Northampton – Milton Keynes	2023/24

*Note this is the proposed commissioning year, it is not anticipated that the studies will be complete within the same financial year.