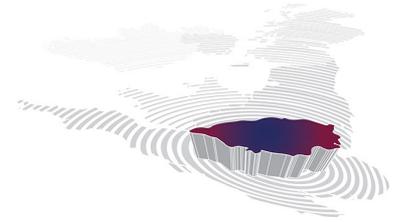




ENGLAND'S  
ECONOMIC  
HEARTLAND



Response submitted via online portal

EEH Business Unit  
c/o Buckinghamshire Council  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
HP20 1UA

29<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Local Transport and Connectivity Plan: Vision**

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is the Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the region covering Swindon and Oxfordshire through to Cambridgeshire, and Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire. Our region includes the Oxford – Cambridge Arc, a national priority for Government.

As the STB, EEH works with partners across the Heartland to both: provide strategic leadership on issues that extend beyond local authority boundaries; and support and align with individual local authorities' priorities. In that context, we welcome the opportunity to comment on the consultation for Oxfordshire's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) vision.

As the Sub-national Transport Body, EEH is responsible for setting the strategic vision for the region's transport system. In February 2021, our Transport Strategy, *Connecting People, Transforming Journeys*, was published.

The Transport Strategy sets a bold framework for ensuring our transport system achieves the requirement for net zero carbon in a way that delivers economic and inclusive growth within the region. Included in this is a 'five-point plan' for connectivity in the Heartland:

- Focus on decarbonising our transport system by harnessing innovation and supporting solutions which in themselves create green economic opportunities
- Promote investment in digital infrastructure as a means of improving connectivity
- Use the delivery of strategic public transport schemes – such as East West Rail, the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro and Milton Keynes Mass Rapid Transit – as the catalyst for a shift towards lower carbon modes of travel
- Champion increased investment in active travel and shared transport to improve local connectivity to ensure that everyone can realise their potential
- Continue to ensure the needs of the freight and logistics sector are met whilst lowering its environmental impact



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It is in this context that EEH welcomes and supports the vision for the LTCP; we particularly note and welcome the way the vision has been developed to closely align with the EEH Transport Strategy.

## **Context**

The transport challenges and opportunities identified in the LTCP vision document align with the regional picture, set out in our Transport Strategy.

Transport emissions are the biggest contributor of greenhouse gases in the Heartland region, equating to 47% of the Heartland's total carbon dioxide emissions, compared with 37% nationally. The scale of planned growth in the region, if delivered in a similar way to that previously allowed, will further exacerbate the scale of our decarbonisation challenge. By extension, this would increase still further the need for a step-change in approach, not just in terms of the transport system but more generally. We therefore support the assertion that 'more radical solutions are needed to transform transport in Oxfordshire'.

Reference in the document to the importance of addressing private car use is also supported. The EEH Transport Strategy includes a policy to prioritise future investment which contributes to a reduction in car journeys by a minimum of 5% per decade (of total traffic flow compared with 2019).

With 34% of the Heartland's population living in small market towns and their hinterlands, connectivity for our rural communities is a strategic issue. In rural areas, a frequent and conventional bus service is becoming increasingly difficult to provide. However, the wider social and economic benefits of local and regional bus services make it essential that we continue to work with Government, local partners and the EEH Bus Operators Association to create an accessible and future-ready bus network across the region. Innovation and digital solutions have a key role to play in rural transport provision in the future.

Investment in digital connectivity enables businesses to operate more efficiently and provide opportunities to conduct business remotely, thereby reducing the need for travel. In addition, digital connectivity offers the potential for innovative solutions to be developed where there remains a need to travel. It is for this reason that EEH considers physical and digital connectivity to be so interdependent.

Equally, and as recognised by the draft LTCP vision, freight and logistics are critical parts of the region's economy. The EEH Transport Strategy looks to support the sector while reducing its environmental impact. Modal shift from road to rail is a core ambition of the strategy and we welcome Oxfordshire's LTCP acknowledgment of the challenge.

## **Engagement – key points**

Feedback from engagement activity relating to the Oxfordshire LTCP broadly aligns with the consultation responses to EEH's draft Transport Strategy, the analysis of which identified six key issues:

- Decarbonisation and the environment
- Alignment with wider geographies/ initiatives
- Reflecting levers for change
- Consideration of the balance of modes/ schemes

- People and safety
- Rural connectivity

An over-riding message from the consultation was the requirement for EEH to be ambitious with regards to addressing the causes of climate change. As a result, the EEH Transport Strategy includes an ambition for the transport system to achieve net zero by 2040, 10 years ahead of the legal requirement.

## **Vision**

We strongly support the LTCP vision, which aligns with the ambition set out in the EEH Transport Strategy:

“To support sustainable growth and improve quality of life and wellbeing through a world-class, decarbonised transport system which harnesses the region’s global expertise in technology and innovation to unlock new opportunities for residents and businesses, in a way that benefits the UK as a whole.”

In particular, we welcome reference to achieving net zero and reducing the need to travel, including through securing high-quality digital connectivity and making active travel, public and shared transport the natural first choice.

## **Policy areas**

The policy areas set out as key priorities in shaping the LTCP vision are supported and align with the EEH Transport Strategy.

EEH has the following additional comments:

*Decarbonisation:* The LTCP vision may benefit from having a clearer area of focus around decarbonisation, which, while sharing similarities with wider environmental issues, is distinct from it. In addition, it would be helpful for there to be explicit reference to achieving a net zero transport system ahead of the 2050 legal requirement (the EEH Transport Strategy has an ambition to achieve this by 2040).

*Innovation:* EEH’s ambition is for the region to become a living laboratory for the trialling and successful roll-out of clean and smart mobility. This builds on the successes that Oxfordshire is already experiencing, for example, Oxbotica is one of the world’s leading autonomous driving software companies; RACE at Culham is at the forefront of Connected Autonomous Vehicle testing; and Arrival in Banbury has developed smart electric vehicles for the logistics sector. In developing the key factors that will contribute towards Oxfordshire’s success in its future LTCP, innovation should continue to play a key role.

*Regional connectivity:* We support regional connectivity being a distinct policy focus area within the LTCP. Improving wider connectivity beyond Oxfordshire’s boundaries creates opportunities for the county’s people and businesses. In this regard, the transformational impact of the East West Main Line will extend beyond the Oxford-Cambridge Arc: in particular consideration should be given to improving connectivity to the west given the economic linkages with Swindon, as well as the benefit of improved connectivity along the North Cotswold Line.

EEH will work with Oxfordshire County Council and other partners on the first two of its connectivity studies which begin in April 2021 – Oxford-Milton Keynes; and Oxford-

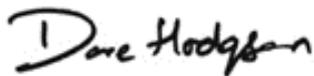


Northampton-Peterborough. Our third study, Oxford-Didcot-Swindon, will also begin this calendar year. These will identify the most appropriate infrastructure solutions required to support the delivery of planned growth in these areas, consistent with the vision and principles of the EEH strategy and the priorities of our partners.

Beyond Oxfordshire and the Heartland region, EEH also maintains strong working relationships with the Sub-national Transport Bodies which border Oxfordshire: Western Gateway, Midlands Connect and Transport for the South East. Given Oxfordshire's geographical location it is essential to take into consideration the importance of Oxfordshire's infrastructure in support of the wider UK economy.

England's Economic Heartland looks forward to continuing to work with Oxfordshire County Council as it develops and then delivers the LTCP for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely



**Mayor Dave Hodgson**  
**Chair, EEH Strategic Transport Forum**