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EEH Business Unit
Buckinghamshire County Council
County Hall
Walton Street
Aylesbury
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Date: 7th October 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE STRATEGIC PLAN – ISSUES CONSULTATION

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Strategic Transport Forum is the Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland region. Membership of the Forum covers the area from Swindon, through Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and across to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire across to Luton and Hertfordshire.

As a Sub-national Transport Body, EEH is responsible for setting a strategic vision for the transport system, supported by a long term strategy for the region.

In July 2019 EEH published its Outline Transport Strategy. The Outline Transport Strategy's vision to 'connect people and places with opportunities and services' is supported by an ambition for the region's transport system to be zero carbon by 2050.

In developing the detail of the overarching Transport Strategy we will use the three key principles set out in the Outline Transport Strategy to guide us. These principles set out the need for the transport system to accelerate the region's economic potential, encourage greater levels of accessibility and inclusion and ensure future growth delivers environmental net gain.

Given this strategic context EEH supports West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit's



(WNJPU) resolute, outcome-driven spatial vision, embodied by the need to integrate sustainable transport in new development.

This approach provides an opportunity to realise the opportunity to align investment in transport with planned growth; delivering attractive places people can afford to live and work, consistent the principles championed by the National Infrastructure Commission. Its location as part of the Golden Triangle of logistics and strategic employment sites, including Silverstone, the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal and high performing Enterprise Zones, provides the foundation on which to deliver economic-led growth.

This response to the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan (WNSP) consultation addresses the spatial strategy, place-making and strategic infrastructure priority themes set out within The Plan. These are all areas that are essential prerequisites when creating healthy, thriving, inclusive places for people to live.

Spatial Strategy

EEH supports The Plan's vision for the future that places the needs of people at the centre of it. This will result in places for people, rather than places dominated by vehicular traffic. Notwithstanding, EEH believe the plan period of 2019-2041 should be extended to 2050 to align with Arc-related growth scenarios.

West Northamptonshire's commitment to become a national example of low environmental impact and high biodiversity encourages focusing development on principle urban areas with existing public transport corridors. As such, Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley feel like appropriate urban locations to develop an enhanced public transport offer.

The identification of Northampton as a principle urban area to concentrate development is appropriate given its links to the Strategic Road Network, rail connectivity (which has the potential for enhancement facilitated by the opportunity to reshape usage of the West Coast Main Line) and public transport corridors. The scale and density of housing development, together with its location relative to employment opportunities, will influence the viability of public transport services, both existing and new.

Place Making and Sustainable Communities

EEH support the Plan's place-based objectives that will steer development towards locations that have (the potential for) high-quality sustainable transport provision. The Outline Transport Strategy's aim is for users to be offered travel choices that are attractive, viable, accessible and frictionless. The WNSP is in keeping with these principles and demonstrably sets out the way places will be designed with active travel and public transport as the preferred choice of transport wherever possible.

Sustainable communities should be designed with inclusivity in mind, championing the way transport and place making contribute to improving social equity. For example inclusive street design and a move away from car-centric urban environments will be



important in this regard. It is pleasing The Plan notes the positive correlation public health has with design of the built environment and access to green space.

The Plan's key principles and 16 policy objectives explicitly support modal shift away from cars to sustainable transport modes and creating places people are proud to live in. Appropriate indicators could be used to measure the success of the ambition to achieve modal shift.

Infrastructure

The Plan's transformational level of economic and housing growth is dependent upon the delivery of timely investment in infrastructure. West Northamptonshire's job growth is not guaranteed and needs to be supported by investment in enabling infrastructure. This approach will realise wider benefits within and beyond the region's boundary.

Of the proposed primary infrastructure projects contained within the existing Infrastructure Delivery Plan, the Towcester Relief Road is included in EEH's MRN/LLM programme of investment, owing to the environmental and air quality mitigation it provides Towcester town centre.

With respect to new strategic transport infrastructure options, EEH is fully supportive of exploring options for a rail corridor linking the West Coast Mainline with the Midland Mainline between Northampton and Market Harborough / Kettering. The case for intervention continues to be coordinated in partnership with interested parties and Network Rail. A strategic case is being developed on which the wider strategic benefits of such a link are set out in more detail.

An aspiration to improve the bus station facilities in Daventry is supported as a method of improving the offer of public transport to residents. However, The Plan should list reference to identifying the interchange needs of users as part of the overall approach to infrastructure. The first/last mile stages of a journey can deter people from accessing public transport infrastructure and a firmer commitment to embrace concepts such as mobility as a service is one way of supporting the realisation of personalised, user centred transport solutions.

Finally, EEH policy is to maximise the use of rail freight by developing a network of freight interchanges in the Heartland. To that end, EEH continue to support, in principle, the two proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges. Our respective representations to the Planning Inspectorate for both proposals highlighted the benefits of investment in rail freight being supported bilaterally with improvements in passenger services, rather than at their expense. Incidentally, a new rail corridor connecting the West Coast Mainline with the Midland Mainline would provide Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal with additional connectivity to Felixstowe.

In summary, EEH is supportive of the approach taken to develop the WNSP. Its vision and objectives set a focused and compelling place-based scenario that has sustainable transport and de-carbonisation integrated from the outset. This is a vision all stakeholders must subscribe to.



Martin Tugwell
Programme Director