



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

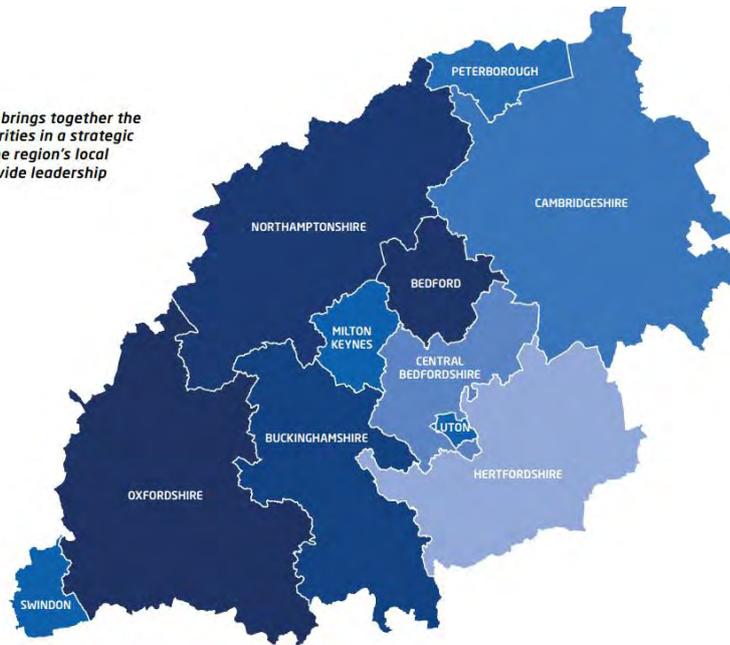
WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	Development Control Committee: Monday 21 September 2020
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 7
Subject	England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Councillor Jeff Haine Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning Email: jeff.haine@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Chris Hargraves Planning Policy Manager Tel: 01993 861686; Email: Chris.Hargraves@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the proposed response to the England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Draft Transport Strategy
Annex	Annex A – Proposed WODC response to the England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Draft Transport Strategy
Recommendation	That the content of the report be noted, and that the Committee decides whether it wishes to submit comments on the proposed response to Cabinet.
Corporate priorities	
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	None

I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. England's Economic Heartland (EEH) brings together the region's Local Transport Authorities in a strategic partnership that works with the region's local enterprise partnerships to provide leadership on strategic infrastructure. It is effectively a strategic partnership of political and business leaders, stretching from Swindon to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire to Hertfordshire. The partnership includes Oxfordshire County Council.
- I.2. The area is covered by EEH is shown on the map below. It includes the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, which has been made a national priority by Government.

England's Economic Heartland brings together the region's Local Transport Authorities in a strategic partnership that works with the region's local enterprise partnerships to provide leadership on strategic infrastructure.



- I.3. EEH is the sub-national transport body for the region and has prepared a draft transport strategy which aims to set out a bold new approach to connectivity which will enable the region's transport system to support a green recovery from COVID-19 and sustainable economic growth in the decades which follow, while reaching net zero carbon emissions no later than 2050.
- I.4. The draft strategy is the subject of public consultation which closes at midnight on 6 October 2020.
- I.5. The strategy includes measures to:
- Work with the area's world-leading innovators to trial and deploy cleaner and smarter connectivity across the region;
 - Champion investment in better digital connectivity to increase people's ability to work from home, reducing the need to travel;
 - Maximise the potential of East West Rail and use it as the catalyst for transforming public transport across the region;
 - Enhance walking and cycling infrastructure and 'shared transport' to improve local connectivity; and
 - Ensure the region's freight and logistics needs continue to be met, while lowering their environmental impact.
- I.6. The purpose of this report is to provide a brief summary overview of the draft strategy together with the general view of Officers. Attached at [Annex A](#) is a suggested draft

response to the consultation. It should be noted that Oxfordshire County Council are proposing to submit a response to the consultation and there will also be a collective response dealing with strategic matters submitted through the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

- 1.7. The Cabinet will agree a response at its meeting on 23 September, and this Committee is invited to consider the proposed formal response to the consultation set out in [Annex A](#) and submit comments to Cabinet as desired

2. **EEH DRAFT TRANSPORT STRATEGY - A SUMMARY OVERVIEW**

- 2.1. The draft strategy aims to sets out a new approach to the planning, development and implementation of strategic infrastructure and services at the regional level. It 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.
- 2.2. It identifies a need to invest in maintaining existing infrastructure assets, deliver planned investment in additional capacity to meet future connectivity needs, and plan for the additional investment that enables sustainable growth, while at the same time preserving the natural and historic environment.
- 2.3. It suggests that only by planning and delivering investment in strategic infrastructure (transport, digital and utilities) as a whole will we have the connectivity that allows us to realise the region's economic potential in a way that respects both local commitments to the environment and the national legal requirement to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- 2.4. The proposed vision is as follows:

'To realise sustainable growth opportunities and improve the quality of life and wellbeing for Heartland residents and businesses, by harnessing the region's globally renowned centres of innovation to unlock a world class, de-carbonised transport system'.
- 2.5. This is supported by four key principles:
 - Achieving net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050;
 - Improving quality of life and wellbeing through an 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; and
 - Ensuring the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways.
- 2.6. The vision and principles are informed by previous consultation which has identified a number of key issues including the imperative of responding to the climate emergency, the importance of harnessing technology and innovation, the need to work closely with local planning authorities, putting the environment at the forefront, being bold not 'business as usual' reducing the need to travel, increasing sustainable modes, supporting health outcomes and the importance of implementation.
- 2.7. As part of the preparation of the strategy, opportunities mapping has led to the identification of the following areas as being of strategic importance:
 - Regionally Significant Hubs – the largest urban areas, centres of economic activity in their own right and where additional growth is planned;

- Areas of Economic Opportunity – areas that form the focus of economic opportunities moving forward, a combination of existing centres of activity and new opportunities (including Enterprise Zones);
 - Areas of Significant Change – existing urban areas where the scale of planned growth is significant relative to their size;
 - Areas of Potential – areas where intervention is required to improve social equality and access to opportunities.
- 2.8. Eynsham is identified as an area of significant change and Oxford is identified as a regionally significant hub. Science Vale/Didcot is identified as both an area of economic opportunity and an area of significant change.
- 2.9. For areas of significant change such as Eynsham and Science Vale/Didcot, the strategy seeks to ensure that they are supported by investment in local connectivity and inter-urban and intra-regional connectivity.
- 2.10. The strategy also recognises the importance of supporting the region’s market towns and their rural hinterland.
- 2.11. Policies in the strategy are divided into four themes. These are:
- A transport system for the future;
 - Transforming journeys;
 - Connecting people with opportunities; and
 - Making the heartland work for the UK.

A transport system for the future

- 2.12. Transport is now the largest sector for UK greenhouse gas emissions (28%), of which road transport accounts for over 90% and this section focuses on the decarbonisation of the transport system to achieve net zero greenhouse emissions by 2050.
- 2.13. Assuming 100% zero-emissions cars, light goods vehicles (LGVs), heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and public service vehicles (PSVs, for example buses and coaches) on the network by 2050, the strategy identifies two main areas of activity:
- Creating a highly connected transport system that provides better transport information to the user, better management of the transport network, and the rapid deployment of connected and autonomous vehicles;
 - Enabling a policy-led behavioural shift where levers are applied to reduce the number of car trips. This approach will require careful consideration in the application of demand management measures. In parallel, it requires a commitment to ensure local communities have real choice in the way they travel.
- 2.14. It is suggested that this provides an affordable alternative to traditional, large-scale road projects that take many years to plan, fund and deliver.
- 2.15. This section also addresses mobility and the need to promote and enable active travel for example through the ‘greening’ of existing transport routes as well as the need to support public transport and other alternative modes of travel.
- 2.16. Policies on decarbonisation focus on issues such as electrification of the Midland Mainline, delivery of East West Rail as an electrified route, infill electrification schemes that enable electric haulage of rail freight services and supporting and planning for the decarbonisation of the road fleet.

- 2.17. Policies on increased mobility focus on reducing reliance on the private car by adopting a hierarchal approach which gives priority to active travel, public transport, low emission/zero carbon private vehicles and then other motorised modes.

Transforming Journeys

- 2.18. The primary focus here is on improving east-west connectivity which is seen as providing the overriding transformational opportunity for the region and also unlocking opportunities to improve north-south connectivity.
- 2.19. East West Rail has been at the heart of the region's strategic priorities for 25 years. The core focus is to achieve a step-change in east-west connectivity, linking Ipswich and Norwich with Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Oxford and beyond that towards Swindon and onwards to Bristol and South Wales.
- 2.20. Policies on the East West Rail Main line focus on the delivery of the East West Rail project (including its Eastern Section), with the expectation that Phase 2 of the Western Section is open from Oxford – Bedford by 2024, Aylesbury – Milton Keynes by 2025 and the Central Section by 2030.
- 2.21. Oxford is identified as one of a number of stations where priority will be given to developing proposals to establish regionally significant transport hubs.
- 2.22. The strategy identifies two additional east-west arcs where improved connectivity will support the delivery of planned economic and housing growth:
- A northern arc that links north Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough;
 - A southern arc that links Buckinghamshire, southern Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, and which improves orbital connectivity.
- 2.23. It also highlights the strategic importance of improving connectivity between Oxford and Swindon.
- 2.24. As such, policies seek to prioritise improvements to east-west connectivity to support economic activity and in support of planned housing growth within these two additional arcs as well as developing proposals that strengthen connectivity between Swindon/Oxford and the South West and South Wales.
- 2.25. The strategy also highlights the importance of improved north-south connectivity along a number of key corridors including Swindon/Didcot – Oxford – Bicester/Banbury which forms part of the strategically important Southampton – Oxford – West Midlands corridor.
- 2.26. Policies include a commitment to working with Government, Network Rail, Highways England and Oxfordshire County Council to develop a long-term solution to challenges on the Didcot – Oxford – Bicester/ Banbury corridor.

Connecting People with Opportunities

- 2.27. This section focuses on improved connectivity, not just physically, but also digitally which is seen as particularly important in areas that currently experience social deprivation, due in part to poor connectivity.
- 2.28. Particular priorities identified include investment in strategic transport infrastructure to improve interregional and intra-regional journeys, opportunities for public transport to create new integration, ticketing and timetabling options and the establishment of 'mobility hubs' that serve local communities within larger urban areas offering the opportunity for 'frictionless' interchange between modes, primarily bus, rail and active travel.
- 2.29. Also identified as a key priority is the need to improve connectivity in small market towns and their rural hinterlands. Particular challenges identified include access to digital

connectivity, the digital economy and traditional business models for providing public transport in rural areas which are becoming increasingly unsustainable.

- 2.30. Policies in this section focus on the opportunities created by investment in strategic transport infrastructure and services to shape the location of future economic and housing growth and the development and delivery of high quality, segregated mass transit systems with priority given to Cambridge (the CAM), Milton Keynes and the A414 corridor in Hertfordshire.
- 2.31. Other policies seek to establish 'mobility hubs' in areas of significance, enable frictionless travel using a combination of travel modes and develop tailored solutions for smaller market towns and rural areas that improve local connectivity.

Making the Heartland Work for the UK

- 2.32. The fourth theme focuses on the importance of connecting the region globally both physically and digitally. The strategy seeks to actively encourage investment in improved surface access connectivity that reduces the environmental footprint of key gateways including Luton Airport and Heathrow Airport with delivery of the Western Rail Access to Heathrow improving connectivity for large parts of the Thames Valley, including Oxfordshire.
- 2.33. The strategy also seeks to develop proposals that increase freight on the rail network setting out a commitment to working with the freight and logistics sector, along with Network Rail and the EWRCo to develop detailed proposals that will enable the potential for rail freight to be realised.
- 2.34. It recognises however that road haulage will remain an important part of the freight and logistics sector and the strategy sets out a commitment to working with Highways England, local highways authorities and the freight sector to ensure the key parts of the Strategic Road and Major Road Networks continue to support the movement of road haulage and thereby minimise the impact of road freight on local communities. The provision of adequate overnight parking for lorries and the associated facilities is identified as a key issue.

Officer Response

- 2.35. Officers are generally supportive of the draft strategy including the overall vision and principles contained therein. The structuring of the strategy into four main themes is sensible and makes the strategy easy to follow and understand.
- 2.36. As a general observation, many of the 'policies' contained within the strategy are effectively commitments to further partnership working or separate projects, rather than specific proposals or requirements.
- 2.37. Given the relatively high-level nature of the strategy this is to largely be expected and is to an extent, addressed by the implementation section of the strategy but the lack of clear, specific proposals for particular priority areas is somewhat frustrating and will need to be picked up and addressed by locally prepared transport plans within the overall context provided by the EEH strategy.
- 2.38. A suggested draft response to the draft strategy is attached at Annex A. The comments are generally supportive but highlight the need for a stronger focus on a number of themes including the role of smaller market towns, the opportunities of Garden Towns and Villages, the importance of healthy place shaping and the post Covid-19 recovery.
- 2.39. Members are asked to endorse [Annex A](#) as the District Council's formal response to the consultation.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. This report has no financial implications.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. This report has no financial implications

5. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The EEH draft transport strategy highlights an imperative need to respond to the climate emergency as one of its key priorities and includes a number of measures and new solutions intended to decarbonise the transport system.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1. The report and response set out the reasoning for the proposed comments. Cabinet is free to add to or vary those comments as it sees fit.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1. England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy - <http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/Documents/Draft%20Transport%20Strategy.pdf>

Suggested WODC Response to England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy

Introduction

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the EEH Draft Transport Strategy before the final version is published at the turn of the year.

Our response should be read in conjunction with the separate representations made by Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

Firstly, we support the vision and key principles contained within the Strategy, including the ambition of developing a net-zero transport network across the EEH region by 2050 and improving quality of life and well-being.

We recognise the importance of developing a strategic and long term strategy to help inform policy and guide the delivery of transport infrastructure across the EEH area. This cannot be done through the electrification of transport only and it is vital for new solutions to be developed to change existing behaviours and to reduce the need to travel. Digital technology and infrastructure will impact on every aspect of our lives, including the way we choose to access services and connect with colleagues and friends.

There will be many challenges which will need to be overcome in order to meet the objectives set out in the Strategy including practical, political, policy and funding challenges. By working in partnership with others across the England's Economic Heartland and the OxCam Arc, we can be strongly positioned to successfully transform connectivity across the region.

As a general observation, many of the 'policies' contained within the strategy are effectively commitments to further partnership working or separate projects, rather than specific proposals or requirements.

Given the relatively high-level nature of the strategy this is to largely be expected and is to an extent, addressed by the implementation section of the strategy but the lack of clear, specific proposals for particular priority areas is somewhat frustrating and will need to be picked up and addressed by locally prepared transport plans within the overall context provided by the EEH strategy.

Notwithstanding, our response is focussed on a range of connectivity themes which are explored in the Strategy and which have particular relevance to our District, as set out under the following headings.

Digital infrastructure

We fully agree that the future of our transport system is as much a consideration of digital infrastructure as a way of connecting as it is physical infrastructure. Therefore we strongly support future investment in digital connectivity across the EEH area. The pandemic has resulted in virtual communications becoming much more dominant across many sectors and this trend is unlikely to be reversed.

Digital connectivity will shape how we communicate and access services/ work and this is ever evolving. There are vast opportunities to utilise digital infrastructure to improve our experience when using our transport network and encourage sustainable travel modes. For example, it could transform how we pay for services, eliminating the need for hard ticketing and allowing other complementary services such as renting an e-bike or even just ordering a coffee to be paid for as one transition creating a much more user-friendly service.

As such, continued and significant investment is critical to ensure digital infrastructure plays a positive role in helping to manage demand but also to promote healthy and sustainable travel choices.

Customer focussed

We agree with the objective of putting the user at the heart of the transport system. This is essential if we are to change travel behaviour and reduce the reliance on private vehicles. Whilst the Strategy recognises the importance of changing travel behaviour (in particular on page 29), it would be useful if this was included as a separate policy given the importance of changing travel behaviour in de-carbonising our transport system.

This policy could include a list of possible tools/ measures which are necessary to achieve this. Initiatives such as improving fragmented active travel routes, reinforcing our town centres as hubs of connectivity and streamlining ticketing for buses and trains are a few possible measures.

Post Covid-19 recovery

The challenges of Covid-19 have also created opportunities to do things differently and this should be harnessed whilst the number of trips remains low. Whilst there is an acknowledgment that the landscape has changed significantly due to the pandemic, there should be a much stronger Covid-19 recovery section within the Strategy given the radical change this is likely to have in the longer term which affects all strands of the Strategy.

As an example, travel patterns have radically changed with a higher proportion of home working and railway season tickets no longer meet the needs of commuters. Moving forward we need to consider how people will access work, services and leisure opportunities and have flexibility in the system to support this through modal share opportunities and advances in ticketing systems which allow multiple travel options to be accessed through one transaction.

Salt Cross Garden Village near Eynsham

We welcome the identification of the Eynsham area as an 'area of significant change' due to the proposed Garden Village to the north of the A40 (previously known as the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village which has now been renamed Salt Cross). However, we have concerns that this terminology could have negative connotations and could be misinterpreted. We would suggest that this should be referred to as a 'key location for growth'.

In addition, we consider that this area should be identified as an 'area of economic opportunity' to reflect the substantial Science and Technology Park proposed as part of the Garden Village. This will consist of 80,000 sq metres of science, technology, engineering and high-tech related B-class business floorspace.

Given the location of Eynsham, close to Oxford and on the edge of the Oxfordshire 'knowledge spine', this area is a key economic 'hotspot' with significant economic growth potential as recognised in the Local Industrial Strategy.

The table on page 22/23 sets out a list of places of strategic importance. We strongly suggest that Government approved new garden towns and garden villages are recognised separately within this table. There is considerable scope to embed new travel behaviours and technologies as part of these settlements as they are not faced with the same constraints as established centres.

Therefore, there are unique opportunities for healthy place shaping as well as new technologies and living laboratories to be at the centre of the planning process and there should be a greater focus on these opportunities so they can be planned at an early stage.

Healthy place-shaping and active travel

We support the objective of improving quality of life and well-being but we consider that there should be a stronger focus on the importance of healthy place-shaping in improving residents' quality of life and wellbeing (including mental health) by supporting healthy travel choices. Healthy place shaping initiatives can also play an important role in increasing the percentage of first and last mile trips by foot and cycle rather than car.

Creating new and improved off-road connections to serve pedestrians and cyclists is critical to the Strategy to increase active travel opportunities and change travel behaviour. These need to be safe and convenient with appropriate lighting and street furniture/ signage to guide the user. Fragmented routes need to be completed/ improved so that the user can easily and safely reach their destination, including those with disabilities

We support Policy 4 which sets out a hierarchy of transport modes and which prioritises the needs of active travel modes beyond others. However, there may be cases where it is more appropriate to prioritise public transport (on a key bus routes for example) and therefore there needs to be an element of flexibility.

Cycling in Oxford is particularly high as a modal share but this quickly diminishes beyond the city. Where there are cycling 'hot-spots', the Strategy should support opportunities to extend this out through strong cycle connections to surrounding areas, particularly key housing and employment centres.

The role of town centres as 'mobility hubs'

We generally support Policies 25 to 27 and we believe that the development of 'mobility hubs' is an important element of the Strategy. These opportunities include the strengthening of interchanges in town centres and high frequency bus routes or rural stations.

The use of town centres, particularly serving rural areas, is radically changing away from retail being the dominant use. Considering the future use of these centres is vital to support our economy. As working practices becomes more flexible in terms of the spaces used, these centres could have a crucial role in providing flexible spaces for people to work and for small businesses to grow where they can form a cluster and be supported by other services and leisure activities such as gyms, cafes and shops, benefitting the wider economy.

This Strategy should consider how it can play a part in supporting these town centres to become 'mobility hubs', reducing the reliance on the private car and allowing sustainable first and last mile travel choices to be accessed. Initiatives such as creating pedestrian zones and improving the attentiveness of external spaces will help to draw more people and business into these areas.

Serving rural communities

West Oxfordshire has an aging population and this trend is likely to continue. The challenges of providing environmentally friendly transport to serve the elderly population in rural communities has long been a challenge.

There has been a decline in traditional public transport modes, particularly in rural areas and we agree that technology needs to be harnessed to help create new models of connectivity, perhaps through solutions such as driverless shuttles and other smart travel solutions. Investment in training initiatives should also play a key role to allow all age groups to access services.

Whilst the car is likely to remain more dominant in rural areas, there may be opportunities to reduce the number of miles travelled using private transport by providing accessible and high quality parking facilities at 'mobility hubs' such as railway stations to encourage the use of sustainable travel for the bulk of the journey, accepting that part will be travelled by car. This should be alongside other initiatives such as active travel connections to 'mobility hubs' and town centres.

Electrification of the transport network

We fully support the electrification of trains, buses and vehicles across the EEH area as proposed in Policies 1 and 2. As recognised in the wider Strategy, this is just one of many initiatives and this should be supported alongside the reduction on overall journey numbers and increasing active travel.

Although the electrification of the transport system is a major first step in de-carbonising the transport network, there could be a reference made to future options such as the potential for hydrogen in the longer term.

Importance of key corridors

Whilst we recognise that this strategy is strategic in nature and is framed around policy rather than being geographically focused, we continue to highlight the importance of key connections within Oxfordshire including the A40 corridor between Oxford/ Witney (and beyond) and the rail upgrades on the Cotswold line running between Oxford and Evesham.

It is important that there is a focus on how upgrades can de-carbonise the network and promote active travel and public transport, such as the creation of bus lanes and cycle ways. For example the A40 corridor is planned to provide an integrated route with convenient public transport choices and a Park & Ride.

Within the investment pipeline table on pages 57-59, the A40/ A34 should be included within the area/ corridor studies.

Freight

We agree that the freight sector is often overlooked and this will be a critical consideration going forward. Freight movements are likely to increase and therefore it's vital to consider how this demand can be accommodated in an environmentally sensitive way through the use of rail and transport tubs as well as considering how developing technologies play a part in this.

EEH is well placed to play a key role in assisting in the co-ordination of methods to reduce emissions resulting from freight movements through the work undertaken in the EEH Freight Study, including understanding the opportunities and potential benefits of transferring a greater proportion of freight to the existing and future planned rail network.

Conclusion

To conclude, overall WODC is supportive of the Draft EEH Transport Strategy but the Council considers that there should be a stronger focus on the themes identified above and in particular on the role of smaller market towns, the opportunities of Garden Towns and Villages, the importance of healthy place shaping and the post Covid-19 recovery.

We trust you find this response helpful. If you wish to discuss any of the points raised, please feel free to get in touch.