

**EEH draft Transport Strategy consultation - OCC proposed response:**

*Introduction*

Oxfordshire County Council broadly supports the draft Transport Strategy and its focus on developing a net-zero transport network across the EEH region by 2050. We recognise that there are many practical, political, wider policy and funding challenges in line with achieving this goal, but believe that these will need to be overcome to ensure that climate change targets in particular are achieved. However, we also recognise that the strategy and its delivery needs to be developed in parallel with the emerging spatial framework for the OxCam Arc, and that the strategy should reflect this. By working in partnership with others across the England's Economic Heartland and the OxCam Arc on transport and connectivity matters, we believe we can make a real difference to achieving a higher quality of life for all residents in our area.

*Comments on the **Draft Transport Strategy** document*

*General:*

OCC believe that the strategy should be strengthened by having greater regard to the on-going work at the OxCam Arc level, in particular the emerging spatial framework led by Government. The regional transport strategy and its proposals should be developed in an iterative way with this framework, and better take account of developing spatial planning at the more local level, including the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

We also believe that there should be greater recognition in the strategy of the need for cross boundary working with surrounding sub-national transport bodies on connectivity and scheme proposals that have impacts across both areas. For example, Berkshire authorities within the Transport for South East (TfSE) area have been progressing plans for a new Thames Crossing to the east of Reading that would have impacts on Oxfordshire that would need considering in detail. Oxfordshire and EEH will need to be sighted and involved in development of such proposals, and to understand the wider implications and impacts for both policy and delivery.

The Strategy should also have greater reference to the role that buses and coaches can have in improving strategic regional connectivity alongside rail. This is reflected in the more detailed comments given below.

*Page 14:*

Overall we support the vision and key principles outlined, particularly those on achieving a net-zero carbon emission transport network and improving quality of life and wellbeing. However, it would be useful in the clarifying text to be clear that healthy place-shaping will also have a key role in improving residents' quality of life and wellbeing.

*Page 22:*

This section rightly identifies the settlements along the central spine of Oxfordshire connecting Bicester, Oxford and Science Vale/Didcot as the locations where current housing and jobs growth is focused and where improvements to connectivity, particularly for public transport and active travel, should also be focused.

*Page 27:*

We do not consider the words 'and to rail stations' is needed in bullet point 4 of this page - the reference to 'high quality bus and active travel provision' is sufficient.

*Page 31:*

We support the EEH work on pathways to de-carbonisation and would like to work with EEH to understand what behavioural and technological measures can be deployed to ensure we achieve a net-zero carbon transport system. The DfT document, 'Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge' document, published in March 2020 clearly indicates that emissions from road transport, including HGVs and Vans delivering goods and services will remain high over the coming years. We believe that EEH has an important role in helping to co-ordinate approaches to reduce emissions, for example strategic level multi-modal solutions to better manage and reduce the impacts of freight movements.

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Policy 1: We support plans for the electrification of rail lines within the EEH area, subject to ensuring that any impacts on sensitive landscapes are mitigated.

Policy 2: We support plans for enabling electrification of the vehicle fleet across EEH, but recognise that this is only part of the overall strategic approach. This should not distract from the overall aim of reducing levels of vehicle use and prioritising active travel. We believe that the potential role of Hydrogen propulsion should be recognised in this policy as well.

Policy 3: We support moves to prioritising investment that reduces single-occupancy car use, but would want to ensure that this is measured in appraisal alongside other scheme benefits including overall carbon emissions, and place-based benefits. We also believe that for this to happen, demand management measures such as re-allocation of road space and/or parking and road pricing measures will be needed and that this should be made clear in the supporting text. There will also need to be further clarification on how this target will be measured going forward.

*Page 33:*

Policy 4: We support the inclusion of a hierarchy of transport modes in this policy and believe this will be important in ensuring the right decisions are made on transport investment priorities. Our recent work on Active Travel bids has shown that schemes promoting active travel are often very good value for money, especially if part of comprehensive network planning (such as Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plans) where they can offer real incentives for people to walk and cycle more.

However, our work in places like Oxford has shown that availability of road space is often finite, and that difficult decisions will need to be made about how space is allocated. It is considered that the policy and/or supporting text should therefore be

clear that the aim for development of proposals is that they are inclusive in terms of providing for users that may have difficulty using certain modes of transport (in line with relevant legislation such as on disability), but that they may not be able to provide for all modes of transport- effectively priority for investment in the transport system is based on the hierarchy given.

It would also be useful for the policy to highlight the need for proposals to be developed in the context of relevant national and local design standards for active travel. We therefore propose additional text to be added to the end of the policy as follows:

**..and take account of relevant national and local design standards- e.g. on walking and cycling.**

Policy 5: We agree that the framework for investment decisions should be based on value for money and environmental outcomes, but further believe that health outcomes should also be measured as part of quality of life considerations. We therefore propose that the words '**including health**' are added to the end of this policy.

*Page 38:*

Policy 7: OCC fully support the delivery of East West Rail as providing significant public transport connectivity benefits between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge, reducing the need to travel by car between these locations.

Policy 8: OCC support the principle of the EWR corridor being digitally connected, but would want to ensure that a business case exists for use of digital infrastructure on this route before this investment is undertaken.

Policy 9 (also relevant to policy 14): The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS) has identified the opportunity to operate EWR western section services through Oxford to Didcot Parkway from 2024, and services from Cambridge through to Bristol/ Southampton (via Didcot) from 2028. OCC would want to ensure that these opportunities are realised and reflected in further, more detailed EEH rail study work.

Policy 10: We believe that enhancements at EWR stations along the route, at existing EWR stations and potential new locations like Culham, should focus on improving sustainable travel, including bus connections and active travel linkages. This should be referenced in the supporting text.

Policy 11: For Oxfordshire, it will be important that a longer-term solution is found to enable continued accessibility and connectivity in the vicinity of the London Road crossing, Bicester as more EWR trains start to operate. OCC will continue to work with EEH and the EWR consortium to develop and deliver this solution.

*Page 40-41:*

Policies 12 to 14: OCC will continue to work with EEH and central government on the connectivity challenges and opportunities on the strategic corridors identified. It will be important that this work is framed in the context of the need to decarbonise the transport network and other strategic priorities on promotion of healthy place shaping. It should also take into account plans for growth as set out in local plans and for Oxfordshire the emerging Oxfordshire Plan 2050.

In addition, OCC believes that the role of bus and/or coach services in providing public transport linkages on these corridors should be recognised in these policies. For example, bus services between Swindon and Oxford have improved greatly over the last few years and will continue to have a key role in providing connectivity along this route. We believe that additional reference should be made to working with '**public transport operators**' in policies 13 and 14 to reflect their role (as they are in Policy 22).

*Page 42:*

Policy 19: OCC support this policy, recognising that the focus should be on providing for intra-regional transport demand through improved bus and rail connectivity, complemented by linkages to high-quality active travel networks and connections.

Policy 21: OCC believes investment in the Strategic Road network should also provide complementary improvements to sustainable travel, particularly for bus services and active travel. Any proposals should also be considered in terms of the impact on carbon and sustainability as per policy 5. This linkage should be made clear in the strategy document. We also propose that an additional criteria is added to the policy to recognise that the strategic road network also has a role in delivering sustainable transport improvements:

***'d) enables delivery of sustainable transport linkages such as public transport and active travel improvements'***

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Policy 23/24: OCC believe there are strong linkages between delivery of sustainable transport networks and new development. For example, in Oxford, a bus-based mass transit network is being developed on transport corridors coming into the city from surrounding areas in line with our Connecting Oxford Strategy in our adopted Local Transport Plan. This links with new housing and employment development in surrounding districts, including Eynsham and Witney along the A40, in Cherwell along in the A44, and in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse to the South and West of Oxford. These planned improvements are partially fully segregated, such as along the A40, but also have mixed elements of bus priority and operation on existing roads. We propose that the wording of policy 24 is amended to reflect this as follows:

***'We will support the development and delivery of high-quality **public transport networks that give priority to bus services**, including development of segregated mass transit systems where there is the potential market for its long-term sustainability.***

We propose that an additional example is added to this policy to reflect these wider bus-based opportunities: '**Central Oxfordshire - Bus based Rapid Transit**'

*Page 46:*

Policies 25 to 27: OCC believe that there is good potential for development of 'mobility hubs' within the Heartland area. This will include opportunities to improve interchange in urban areas, for example at bus and rail hubs linked to regeneration of town centres, and rural areas, for example along high frequency bus routes or at rural stations. The

linkages between improved delivery of digital connectivity and the set-up of these 'mobility hubs' should be noted in the supporting text

*Pages 49-53:*

Policies 30 to 36: OCC believe that EEH are in good position to take forward more detailed work to understand the investment and approaches needed to better strategically manage freight across the Heartland, including understanding how to reduce the environmental impacts of the sector. This should build on 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 (including EWR). These considerations should also feature in the planned connectivity studies.

Page 54:

OCC note that this section includes reference to the Covid-19 situation, and the resulting short-term changes in travel behaviour. We believe that it will be important in the more detailed work, including the connectivity studies, to understand the likely longer-term implications on travel behaviour and demand and how this should influence priorities on strategic infrastructure investment.

Page 57:

Investment Pipeline:

'Digital infrastructure provision'

OCC strongly support further investment in digital connectivity across the EEH area, and its role in helping manage travel demand, including in rural areas.

It would be useful to develop the investment pipeline list further to be more programme based, understanding barriers, opportunities and timelines to delivery, and priorities for investment in more detail.

*Page 58:*

'Step Change in Connectivity'

Significant investment is already planned along the central Oxfordshire spine, including development of a Bus Rapid Transit Network in and around Oxford, and strategic cycle network investment in Bicester, Oxford and the Science Vale area. Further investment, for example in rail with the development of more local services, is likely to see a significant uptake in sustainable travel. It is therefore seen as a good additional example to reference under this section.

'Area/Corridor Studies'

OCC believe that these studies should review the role of bus and coach services (alongside rail) in improving public transport connectivity on these corridors.

*Comments on the **Proposal to Establish a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body** document*

OCC is broadly supportive of the principle of EEH obtaining statutory status, but has some concerns regarding the overall benefits of having some of the proposed powers at the EEH level, particularly regarding public transport operation.

Firstly, it is recognised that EEH having the 'general functions' set out under the 2008 Transport Act would give more weight to the final Transport Strategy and its delivery proposals in central government decision-making.

OCC is also broadly supportive of the additional powers sought related to strategic decision making, as we believe that this builds on the collaborative EEH partnership work undertaken to date on evidence base and policy development. In particular, we support the right to be consulted about new rail franchises, and the right to have a role in setting the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) for rail and the Road Investment Strategy (RIS) for the Strategic Road Network (SRN).

OCC is not currently convinced that the additional powers sought regarding operation of bus services, including the ability to secure the provision of bus services, enter into Quality Bus Partnerships and introduce integrated ticketing systems are required or would have any significant benefit for Oxfordshire. We believe that these powers are best kept at the authority level, where the majority of bus networks and services are focused. Where cross-boundary services do exist, they tend to be more strategic and inter-urban services which are more commercially viable. If required, joint working on improving bus services with surrounding authorities could take place using existing powers and functions at a local authority level, although this is currently limited due to bus service funding constraints.