

CABINET- 15 OCTOBER 2019

ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND OUTLINE TRANSPORT STRATEGY: FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT

Report by Director for Planning and Place

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to;
 - (a) endorse the County Council response to England's Economic Heartland Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement document as included in Appendix 1, and;
 - (b) ask officers to continue to engage positively in development of the Transport Strategy, reporting back on progress to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Cabinet where relevant.

Executive Summary

2. An *Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement* document has been produced by England's Economic Heartland (EEH). Publication of the document marks the start of engagement on EEH transport strategy development, with further public consultation planned on a more developed strategy in 2020. So, there will be future opportunities for this Council to consider the next stages of the strategy and provide views.
3. The strategy document includes a strategic vision, as well as a number of chapters on the themes of connecting people, places, opportunities and services, and a section on investment and delivery. It also includes a number of examples of projects across the EEH area that link to the strategy priorities, and a number of illustrative future visions of different types of locations.
4. As a main strategic player in the Heartland Area, it is planned that Oxfordshire County Council respond to the current engagement exercise (ending on 30th October), with the proposed consultation response included in **Annex 1** to this report. This proposed response includes answers to the questions asked in the engagement report, and in particular highlights areas that are considered need further review and consideration in the next stage of the strategy development.
5. Relevant financial and staff, equality, sustainability and risk management matters are noted in the main report, with implications for the County Council seen as generally neutral or positive at this time.

Introduction

6. England's Economic Heartland (EEH), the (currently) non-statutory sub-regional transport body for the area between Swindon and Cambridge (**Annex 2**), is progressing development of a Transport Strategy. The strategy covers strategic transport matters across the Heartland area for the period to 2050, and it is intended that it is agreed as the transport 'vision' by the EEH partners. Essentially, this strategy would be a main component of the 'Connectivity' element of the wider Oxford to Cambridge Arc work programme and is intended to inform strategic connectivity investment priorities across the area over the next 30 years.
7. *An Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement* document has been produced, and this was launched at the annual EEH conference on 16th July 2019. The publication of the *Outline Transport Strategy* marked the start of the engagement process for the Strategy, with key dates from now identified as:
 - **Until end of October 2019-** Engagement on the *Outline Transport Strategy* with a wide range of groups, decision makers and other interested parties
 - **Autumn 2019- Spring 2020-** Strategy developed, taking into account feedback from the engagement exercise
 - **Mid 2020-** Further, more 'formal' consultation on an updated Transport Strategy document
 - **Later in 2020-** Final strategy planned to be signed off by EEH partners
8. It is important to note that the major regional transport schemes, East West Rail and Expressway are being progressed separately (the latter two as specific schemes by Network Rail and Highways England respectively). Whilst the strategy will give the opportunity to outline how other transport networks and connections can respond and relate to these schemes, this is only part of the *Outline Transport Strategy*, which aims to set out a vision and framework for transport and connectivity in the EEH area as a whole.
9. The completion and approval of the strategy would be aligned with the evolution of EEH into a Statutory Sub National Transport Body, with decision making powers that would be agreed as part of this process. This underlines the importance of this Council in having a strong role in shaping its development.

Outline Transport Strategy document and proposed Oxfordshire response

Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement

10. The *Outline Transport Strategy* document is divided into chapters, based mainly around the themes of connecting people, places, opportunities, and services, as well as an overview vision. Each chapter also has a number of questions (21 in total), proposed to help prompt discussion with stakeholders on the themes reviewed. The text highlights key issues and themes, how connectivity could evolve over the heartland area to 2050, including a number of 'future visions,' and the types of measures that EEH could develop in response. It does not specifically recommend a package of future transport/ connectivity measures, although this could be developed further in the next version of the strategy. A number of examples are also given of the type of transport schemes that have or are being developed across the area, including some in Oxfordshire.
11. In summary, the structure includes the following chapters:
 - **Strategic Vision** - focuses on delivery of a zero-carbon transport network by 2050, whilst also achieving the principles of *enabling economic growth*, improving *accessibility and inclusion*, and ensuring a high *quality of life and environment*.
 - **Connecting people** – this section focuses around enabling 'frictionless travel' for all users of the transport system, including development of improved travel hubs.
 - **Connecting places** - this section focuses on investing in key strategic transport corridors, including the Major Road Network, Strategic Road Network, and Rail, as well as digital infrastructure.
 - **Connecting opportunities** - this section focuses on supporting economic and jobs growth in the EEH area, including reference to addressing the Government Industrial Strategy four 'Grand Challenges'.
 - **Connecting services** - this section focuses on improving the freight and logistics network, building on the work and recommendations in the EEH freight study.
 - **Investment and Delivery** - these sections focus on the role of partnerships in enabling strategy delivery, developing a 'pipeline' programme of investment, and the potential for strategy performance indicators.

Proposed Oxfordshire County Council response

12. As a core EEH partner, it is proposed that Oxfordshire County Council reply directly to the *Outline Transport Strategy* engagement exercise (finishing at the end of October). The proposed response is given in **Annex 1**. The response has had input from a wide range of officers, and also follows briefing

on the strategy to the Oxfordshire Strategic Transport Forum and Transport Cabinet Advisory Group.

13. In summary, the draft response welcomes development of the Transport Strategy, whilst highlighting areas of focus that are considered should be reviewed and developed further to inform production of the full Transport Strategy. This includes highlighting the need for the strategy to:
- Better understand the role of travel and traffic demand management measures in helping to make the future transport network more efficient and carbon neutral;
 - Further develop the evidence base and scenario testing tools to better understand priorities for transport investment across the EEH area;
 - Consider the role that healthy place shaping principles and promotion of better health outcomes for all should have in planning the future transport network;
 - Identify priorities for reducing carbon emissions from existing and new transport networks;
 - Better understanding and establish priorities for investment in the digital infrastructure that could enable the transport network to work better and more effectively;
 - Set out and agree a set of principles considered important to help shape transformational transport schemes;
 - Consider and agree between partners the approach to developing a pipeline of investment in the EEH area that best fits with the transport strategy vision and principles; and,
 - Better define the partnership arrangements that are needed at a regional level to help deliver wider transport network priorities.
14. There is also the potential for submitting a joint Oxfordshire Authority response to the consultation, and the principle of this was endorsed at the Oxfordshire Growth Board on 24th September. County Council officers are helping to co-ordinate development of a proposed response, which would need the appropriate sign-off by each authority.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

15. The County Council's corporate plan, 2019-22 includes a vision based on the 3 elements of 'Thriving People,' 'Thriving Communities,' and 'Thriving Economy.' This workstream fits well with the 'Thriving Economy' part of the vision, "We support a thriving local economy by improving transport links to create jobs and homes for the future.' In particular, development of the strategy will help to set out priorities for securing investment in strategic transport infrastructure, and inputting to the development of key cross

boundary schemes such as East West Rail. It also fits with elements of the 'Thriving Communities' vision, given the relationship between transport investment, quality of life, health and the environment. Overall, being a EEH core partner and helping to shape the transport strategy will ensure that Oxfordshire has influence over future priorities and investment in wider and cross boundary strategic transport networks, thereby helping to deliver the corporate vision.

Financial and Staff Implications

16. The immediate financial/ staff implications are focused around officer time for finalising the OCC response and assisting co-ordination of a potential joint response to the Outline Transport Strategy. The resource for this is covered in this year's staff budgets. The staff resource for input to further development of the EEH Transport Strategy has also been included in currently mapped budgets.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

17. There are no immediate specific equality implications identified for Oxfordshire that need full consideration. This is particularly as the engagement exercise is an evolving strategy that is likely to be further developed significantly in response to the current engagement exercise. Any equality assessments would be considered and where relevant undertaken to inform any County response to planned consultation on a more developed Transport Strategy next year.
18. However, it is important to note that the *Outline Transport Strategy* document specifically includes 'accessibility and inclusion' as one of the 3 key principles included in its outline vision, noting the need to reduce financial, cultural, digital or physical barriers to travel. The 'connecting people' section of the strategy further outlines measures that could improve the transport network for all users, such as improvements to public transport networks.

Sustainability Implications

19. The *Outline Transport Strategy* specifically includes a vision around developing zero-carbon transport system by 2050, supported by the principle of 'quality and life and environment,' focused on supporting environment net gain. This vision fits well with the existing and emerging County priorities, for example on carbon reduction, although the exact linkages and quantification will need further consideration in development of the more detailed Transport Strategy.

Risk Management

20. The main risks and mitigation identified for OCC in terms of development of the EEH strategy are as follows:

- The need to manage staff resources for on-going input to development of the main EEH Strategy document, balanced against other work priorities;
 - The need to identify and manage linkages with other workstreams - e.g. Oxfordshire's new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, Oxford to Cambridge Arc workstreams; and
 - The need to ensure an appropriate level of communication regarding development of the strategy.
21. These risks need balancing against the opportunities for better partnership working on development of the strategy and resulting associated project work, and for securing of additional funding for transport improvements. This could lead to benefits for residents of Oxfordshire, as well as for the County Council, for example through cost and efficiency savings. The link to corporate policies and priorities are as described in paragraph 16.

Next Steps

22. Once endorsed, the proposed County Council response to the *Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement* will be submitted to the EEH business unit by the end of October for consideration. It is intended that alongside other responses, it will help develop a more detailed EEH Transport Strategy. It is intended that the County Council will continue to input to development of this strategy as a core EEH partner.
23. Once a fuller strategy is developed, it is expected that there will be a more formal public consultation exercise. At present, this is planned to take place in mid-2020.

SUE HALLIWELL
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Annex 1: Proposed Oxfordshire County Council consultation response to the *Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement*

Annex 2: England's Economic Heartland Area

Background papers:

Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement at:

<http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/Pages/outline-transport-strategy.aspx>

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