

Divisions Affected - ALL

CABINET - 16 MARCH 2021

England's Economic Heartland Final Transport Strategy

Report by Corporate Director Communities

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - (a) Approve England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Final Transport Strategy;**
 - (b) Continue our representation on the EEH Board and Strategic Transport Forum (STF) to ensure alignment with our emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).**

Executive Summary

2. The Final EEH Transport Strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport on the 24th February and published on the 25th February. It was endorsed by the EEH Strategic Transport Forum on 5th February 2021. Electronic links to the pages are set out below alternatively the final document and summary document are appended at Annex 1 and 2 respectively.
3. In summary, the EEH Transport Strategy sets out how the region will:
 - i. Focus on decarbonising our transport system by harnessing innovation and supporting solutions which in themselves create green economic opportunities
 - ii. Promote investment in digital infrastructure as a means of improving connectivity
 - iii. 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
 - iv. Champion increased investment in active travel and shared transport to improve local connectivity to ensure that everyone can realise their potential
 - v. Continue to ensure the needs of the freight and logistics sector are met whilst lowering its environmental impact.
4. The County Council has been actively involved in the shaping of the draft Transport Strategy, published in July 2020, through our membership on the EEH Board and STF. Cabinet comments on the draft strategy, submitted in October 2020, are attached for information (Annex 3) and were subsequently incorporated into the final EEH Strategy at the STF meeting on 5th February.

The EEH Transport Strategy was formally launched on 26th February 2021. Officers will continue to work with EEH Board and STF that effective governance is in place as this progresses.

5. The County Council has had significant input into the Strategy at both officer level (via the EEH Transport Group) and Member level (via the STF) and given the recent launch and importance of the Transport Strategy to the emerging County Council LTCP, Cabinet are asked to formally approve the final EEH Transport Strategy.
6. It is important to note that while the EEH Transport Strategy is non statutory and does not override or supersede any local Transport Strategy approved by its individual constituent Highway Authorities it does provide an important sub-national framework for strategic transport planning in Oxfordshire.

Previous Council Consideration

7. Oxfordshire County Council has maintained a strong role in development of the strategy both through representation of the Leader on the Leaders Board from the outset and through the representation of the Cabinet Member for the Environment on the Strategic Transport Forum (STF) which has led development of the Transport Strategy since December 2018. Cabinet agreed a response to the initial public consultation on the outline strategy in October 2019 and responded again in October 2020 following the publication of the draft Strategy for public consultation in July.
8. A joint County Council and Cherwell District Council Members briefing was held in September 2020 to feed into the response the second public consultation on the Draft Strategy. A summary version of the Strategy was produced and widely circulated amongst elected members and the Draft Strategy was also considered by the County Council's Transport Cabinet Advisory Group. This all helped to inform the Cabinet response to the draft Strategy.
9. The County Council's comments to the Draft Transport Strategy referenced the need for:
 - the strategy to be strengthened by having greater regard to the on-going work at the OxCam Arc level, in particular the emerging spatial framework
 - greater recognition in the strategy of the need for cross boundary working with surrounding sub-national transport bodies (STBs)
 - greater reference to the role that buses and coaches can have in improving strategic regional connectivity alongside rail
 - support for the vision and key principles outlined, particularly those on achieving a net-zero carbon emission transport network and improving quality of life and wellbeing (with the comment that it needs to be recognised that healthy place-shaping will also have a key role in this).

10. These and other comments were reported back to the STF in November 2020. In the report to that meeting, specific references were made to the responses from Oxfordshire (and other authorities) on strengthening alignment with the Arc, and also linkages with neighbouring STBs, as well as other detailed comments made by Oxfordshire, including the need to work with public transport operators and the need to consider active travel in strategic transport scheme investment. These led to subsequent changes in the final strategy document.
11. On Zero Carbon, the biggest single response to the consultation was the view that there was a need to deliver a net zero carbon transport system before the legal requirement of 2050. This was a view Oxfordshire fully supported in STF discussions, and the final version of the Strategy now references achieving net-zero no later than 2050 with an ambition to reach this by 2040.
12. A further notable change, partly in recognition of the increasing importance of digital connectivity, is the addition at the top of the transport hierarchy of enabling access to services and opportunities without the need to travel.

Strategy Approval and Next Steps

13. The Final Transport Strategy, 'Connecting People, Transforming Journeys' was published on 25th February. The full strategy document can be accessed via: http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/documents/405/EEH_Transport_Strategy_Connecting_People_Transforming_Journeys_AV.pdf
14. A summary version of the strategy can be accessed via: http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/documents/404/EEH_Summary_Transport_Strategy_Connecting_People_Transforming_Journeys_AV.pdf
This illustrates the EEH area, Investment Pipeline and Connectivity Studies.
15. Whilst marking a significant milestone, publication of the strategy is as much a starting point for future working at a sub-national and County scale. In particular, there is a clear opportunity for the transport strategy and its proposals to continue to be developed in an iterative way, to take into account developing spatial and infrastructure planning at a County level, including the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, supporting the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy update and the Council's emerging Local Transport & Connectivity Plan.
16. In addition, the EEH forward work schedule includes a programme of 'Connectivity Studies' taking a holistic and multi-modal approach the strategic transport corridors. These are now specifically referenced in the strategy; for 2021/22 these include the Swindon-Didcot-Oxford area study, with an Oxford to Milton Keynes study also planned to commence shortly.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

17. The EEH Transport Strategy directly supports a number of the Council's strategic priorities in the Corporate Plan, in particular reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality, reducing the need to travel, promoting public

transport and active travel over private use of the car where appropriate and strengthening investment in strategic transport and digital connectivity, notably rail investment such as East-West Rail.

Financial Implications

18. There are no additional resources required as a consequence of this report

Comments checked by: Ian Dyson, Assistant Director of Finance

Legal Implications

19. There are no legal implications arising from this report. The EEH Transport Strategy is not a Statutory document or Plan.

Comments checked by: Jonathan Pool, Solicitor (Contracts), Law & Governance

Staff Implications

20. There are no additional staffing implications arising from this report.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

21. The strategy explicitly supports equality and inclusion. For example, its principles refer to improving the quality of life and wellbeing through a safe and inclusive transport system accessible to all.

Sustainability Implications

22. The Strategy includes an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal. The Strategy's more ambitious 2040 target for achieving net zero emissions from transport directly supports Climate Action. This is reinforced by specific references in the Strategy to planning for the decarbonisation of the rail network and road fleet.

Risk Management

23. There are no specific risks to the Council resulting from this report. Opportunities for the Council have been discussed in paragraph 15 above

Consultations

24. Two previous consultations have been undertaken, on the outline Transport Strategy in 2019 and draft Transport Strategy in 2020. The County Council responded to both consultations following Cabinet approval.

JASON RUSSELL
Corporate Director Communities

Annexes: Annex 1: EEH Transport Strategy

 Annex 2: EEH Summary Transport Strategy

 Annex 3: Oxfordshire County Council consultation
 response to draft EEH Transport Strategy October 2020

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: EEH Transport Strategy Integrated Sustainability Appraisal

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