

## **England's Economic Heartland Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement**

Oxfordshire County Council response, 21 October 2019

### **Introduction**

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) welcome the opportunity to reply to the Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement document. As a strategic partner in England's Economic Heartland, we very much support development of the Outline Transport Strategy, and the partnership approach to transport and connectivity matters that it outlines. We also believe it important to set out a longer-term vision for connectivity across the EEH area that will help development and delivery of both transport schemes and policy.

However, we recognise that the strategy needs to be developed in the context of wider considerations, including local and national policy development, delivery matters and development of the Ox Cam Arc ambition. We therefore consider that it should focus on what can be achieved and is best considered at the regional/ sub-national level, and therefore our comments should be considered in this context.

We look forward to working within England's Economic Heartland to help develop and refine the next version of the Transport Strategy over the next year.

### **Overall Comments**

OCC believe the Outline Transport Strategy document is well set out and structured, and highlights many of the key issues and priorities. In particular we welcome:

- The setting out of a strategic vision, and supporting principles to guide strategy development;
- Structuring the document around connectivity themes;
- A focus on use of the regional evidence base, including use of appropriate visuals to present information and data;
- The use of 'Future Visions' to help define how the transport network could develop over the next 30 years; and,
- The appropriate use of examples to help illustrate key themes and points.

Whilst we believe the outline strategy is a good basis for developing the fuller transport strategy, there are however a number of matters we consider should be reviewed and developed further to inform production of the full Transport Strategy, including:

- Better understanding the role of travel and traffic demand management measures in helping to make the future transport network more efficient and carbon neutral;
- Further developing the evidence base and scenario testing tools to better understand priorities for transport investment across the EEH area;
- Considering the role that healthy place shaping principles and promotion of better health outcomes for all should have in planning the future transport network;
- Identifying priorities for reducing carbon emissions from existing and new transport networks;
- Better understanding and establishing priorities for investment in the digital infrastructure that could enable the transport network to work better and more effectively;
- Setting out and agreeing a set of principles considered important to help shape transformational transport schemes;
- Considering and agreeing 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 defining the partnership arrangements that are needed at a regional level to help deliver wider transport network priorities.

It is important that the Transport Strategy also identifies relevant cross boundary connectivity and scheme proposals with surrounding sub-national transport body areas, including strategic rail and road links to the Transport for South East, Midlands Connect and Western Gateway. For rail, there will need to be recognition of links to plans for improvements to the South in the Berkshire area (and onwards to Heathrow), to the south-west linking towards Bristol, and to the north linking with the West Midlands. For road, there will need to be recognition of cross boundary proposals that could impact on the EEH area. For example, Berkshire authorities have been progressing plans for a new Thames Crossing to the east of Reading that would have impacts on Oxfordshire that need considering in detail. Oxfordshire County Council has recently passed a motion (annex 1) which clearly states that should a new bridge be built it should be restricted to public transport, cyclists and pedestrians. However, should a car bridge be promoted, any proposal needs to be considered alongside mitigation in the Oxfordshire (and therefore EEH) area.

Through addressing these further points, we believe that the transport strategy will better be able to set a balance between enabling improved connectivity for all across the EEH area, whilst also ensuring that the impacts of any improvements on communities and the environment are minimised.

## **More detailed comments**

Outlined below, we have set out answers to questions included in each section of the strategy, including noting in more detail key matters that we believe need further review in development of the full transport strategy.

### **Strategic Vision**

#### 1. Does the draft vision provide sufficient focus for the Transport Strategy?

Overall, OCC support the ambition for a zero carbon transport network by 2050, as well as the 3 core principles. However, it is considered that the vision and principles could be developed further, taking on board other key matters.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, OCC believe the strategy vision should be reviewed including:

- Considering if a hierarchy of travel mode choices can be defined, based around likely carbon emissions and how they meet the core principles;
- Understanding the role of managing travel and traffic demand in reducing carbon emissions, and promoting efficient use of the transport network;
- Understanding how a healthy place shaping approach and promotion of better health outcomes for all can help shape future development of the transport network; and,
- Better understanding how innovation can contribute towards achieving the strategy vision.

#### 2. Is the ambition to have a zero-carbon transport system by 2050 sufficiently challenging?

Having an overall ambition for a zero carbon transport system by 2050 seems right, and is consistent with central government policy. At present, both surface transport and aviation are significant contributors to carbon emissions, and therefore tackling this will be key if overall carbon reduction targets are to be achieved.

However, it is recognised that achieving carbon reductions will be easier in some areas than others, and therefore the strategy can help by identifying priority areas of the transport system and associated transport demand that will need to be tackled to achieve this. EEH core and wider partners will have a key role in helping to deliver this vision, including setting out best practice practical examples of how lower carbon transport networks and systems can be achieved. For example, OCC are currently developing plans and programmes to make our organisation carbon neutral by 2030.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, OCC believe there will be a need to:

- Better define the target for zero carbon, including understanding if this is a net-zero target as per the overall central government target;
- Considering if there will be a need to have an element of carbon-offsetting in certain transport areas;
- Identifying how larger transport schemes can best be delivered to minimise their carbon impact, both in construction and once they are delivered, and
- Identifying best practice examples of how lower carbon transport networks can be achieved.

3. Do the three key principles provide an appropriate framework within which to develop the Transport Strategy?

In broad terms, the principles provide an appropriate framework to further develop the strategy. However, OCC believe there is need to:

- Further reference the role that technology can have in enabling people **not** to have to travel when not needed, hence saving energy and carbon;
- Further reference the role of transport connections and services in supporting healthy place shaping and improving health outcomes; and,
- Identify relevant key linkages between the principles, for example the role of improved walk, cycle and public transport options in addressing inequality by providing better access to employment and services.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, it will be useful to:

- Develop the principles further to take account of the points above; and

- Work with partners to understand how any performance indicators can be set that both fit with the vision (and hence are outcome focused) and are realistic in terms of being able to be monitored.

## **Connecting People**

4. What are the key factors influencing people's choice of travel mode?

A wide range of factors influence people's choice of travel mode, which vary across different areas and groups of people. These range from cost, variations in journey times, availability of travel choices across modes, perceptions of use of different modes of travel, healthy travel considerations and lifestyle considerations. All of these factors in turn relate to locations of travel origin, destinations and purpose of any particular journeys.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, OCC believe there is need to consider whether further research/ focus group meetings should be held to explore these matters for feed into the more detailed strategy. The regional scenario-based model should assist with understanding how travel mode choice impacts on the transport network.

5. What are the key barriers that need to be addressed if we are to achieve frictionless travel?

Population travel habits and considerations are complex, with many different factors needing consideration. However, if we are to make it easier for people to be able to travel and in particular chose sustainable travel then breaking down barriers will be important. For public transport these include tackling the ease and cost of ticketing between modes and different services within transport modes. For walking and cycling these include addressing physical environment barriers through provision of high quality facilities and tackling perceived and real concerns regarding safety and security. It also requires provision of high quality interchange at locations at which transport modes interact, including for those who may have mobility impairments.

6. What performance measures should be used to identify the levels of service users require of the transport system?

OCC believe that that it would be useful to review a number of user-centred performance measures, but these will need to be appropriately researched, evidence based and easily measurable. It will also be important that any

measures of performance are balanced against wider outcomes against the strategy vision and principles.

7. Should the strategy include and define appropriate 'nudge principles' (small changes which can influence user-behaviour) to encourage more people to use public transport in the Heartland area?

Yes, it would be useful for the full strategy to develop and define these further, not only for public transport, but for all sustainable transport modes. This should be backed by appropriate and relevant research and evidence.

### **Connecting Places**

8. What weight should be given to the changes in travel demand arising from the delivery of transformational infrastructure?

It is recognised that delivery of large-scale transformational infrastructure such as East West Rail (EWR) or the OxCam Expressway will change travel demand across the EEH area and enable quicker and more reliable journeys between locations not currently well connected, such as between Oxford and Milton Keynes. However, the scale of this change is currently less well known, and could change in time as, for example, new employment and housing growth opportunities are realised.

When planning and delivering these schemes it will be important to understand as best as possible how travel demand and routes in local areas could be impacted and how any complementary measures or mitigation should be planned. For example, what interchange improvements are needed, or how alternative routes could be prioritised for sustainable transport improvements. In this context, it is considered that the design for any transformational infrastructure needs to carefully take into account any benefits it could bring to local areas, including carefully considering the balance between providing for local and longer-distance travel. Development of the design should also consider, and where relevant mitigate, environment and health impacts.

Partners can have a role in helping to shape these schemes through identifying priorities for consideration as part of their development. For example, in September 2018, OCC as part of the Oxfordshire Growth Board agreed a set of principles considered important in informing decisions on the proposed OxCam Expressway related to promoting a local sustainable transport network, minimising environmental impacts, and supporting future growth and innovation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/more-clarity-on-oxford-to-cambridge-expressway-required/>

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, OCC believe it will be useful to develop and agree a set of principles that can be included to guide development and delivery of any transformational transport infrastructure schemes.

9. What weight should be given to the potential of the rail network to accommodate a higher proportion of future travel demand

Significant rail projects in the heartland, particularly EWR, will help to transform journey options between certain towns and cities, such as Oxford and Milton Keynes. The project will also give opportunities for wider service enhancements between the area and those surrounding it, particularly the Midlands/ North of England. Such investment is likely to attract significant new demand, as evidenced following delivery of the first phase of EWR between Oxford and Bicester.

It will be important that plans for transport investment recognise these changes in travel demand, for example through improving interchange at stations with new rail services. However, there will still be significant travel demand at a local level and therefore the need to invest in the rail network should also consider and plan for this.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, OCC believe it important to consider what further evidence can be used and/or developed to assist understanding of changes in travel demand across the existing and proposed rail network. From an Oxfordshire perspective, this will include the outcomes of the Oxfordshire Rail Study.

10. Have we identified the key strategic transport corridors?

Broadly, OCC are in agreement that many of the key transport corridors in EEH area have been identified in the Outline Transport Strategy. However, the following key links are **not** identified on the schematic on pages 42/ 43 which are considered important in linking the EEH area and its surrounds:

*Road:*

A40 corridor between M40- Oxford and Witney/ the Cotswolds

A420 corridor between Oxford and Swindon/ the South West

*Rail:*

Proposed western rail link to Heathrow growth area

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, OCC believe it will be important to identify any additional transport corridors that are considered important in providing transport accessibility within and to the EEH area, including those identified above.

11. Are there specific issues that should be taken into consideration as part of the connectivity studies?

OCC believe that the connectivity studies should include consideration of the following issues:

- Access to existing settlements and proposed development along these corridors;
- Ensuring the design of any major infrastructure improvements takes into account and benefits local transport access, including public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure;
- Environmental impacts and opportunities in a wider sense, including carbon impacts, air quality matters, and impacts on environmental capital;
- Understanding how innovations in mobility such as electrification of the vehicle fleet and changes in digital infrastructure should be integrated and developed alongside connectivity improvements; and,
- Health matters and impacts, including how improvements can contribute towards healthy place shaping, and reducing inequalities.

12. To what extent should we look to the growth in digital services to change the nature and scale of future travel demand?

OCC considers that the benefits of developments in digital services such as 5G should be maximised to help delivery of the Strategy vision. In particular, digital improvements have the potential to reduce the need to travel directly, such as through enabling flexible work practices, and make the transport network more efficient through improving availability and analysis of data thereby improving network management measures. In turn, this is likely to have benefits in reducing carbon outputs produced by the transport network. Improvements in the digital network could also enable new means of travel, such as connected and autonomous vehicles.



*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, OCC believe it will be useful to identify priority areas where digital services and networks will assist with delivery of the overall transport vision.

### **Connecting Opportunities**

13. What are the connectivity requirements for businesses operating from the region?

It will be important that the transport strategy takes account of the developing business priorities, including those identified in Local Industrial Strategies. Emerging connectivity requirements will need to be balanced against the other priorities identified in the strategic vision when considering any investment priorities, such as carbon reduction, with business needing to respond to these challenges through the way they work and operate.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of the transport strategy development, OCC believe it will be useful to understand better how business can practically contribute towards delivery of the wider transport strategy. For example, understanding their travel impacts as well as connectivity requirements will be important in helping identify and prioritise any measures and interventions across the EEH area.

14. What are the key performance measures for the Transport System from a business perspective?

Please see answer to question 6.

15. What measures should the overarching Transport Strategy include in order to enable the potential that exists within the four Grand Challenges of the Industrial Strategy to be realised?

Please see key points noted in answer to other questions.

16. To what extent is investment in digital infrastructure more significant and/or urgent than physical infrastructure?

The right investment in the digital network will be key to enabling better connectivity across the EEH area. Please refer to answer to question 12 above for more detail.

## Connecting services

17. How will the way we access goods and services continue to change, and what are the key issues that need to be addressed in the Transport Strategy?

The EEH Freight and Logistics Study gives a good evidence base to understand current freight and logistics issues across the EEH area. The challenge will be to understand how the freight and logistics network can be developed to be more efficient and effective, whilst reducing external impacts. Autonomisation and electrification of the transport network should be able to assist with this, but will come with implications associated with the required physical infrastructure, and location of freight and logistic activities that will need careful planning. It will also to an extent be location specific across the EEH area. For example, autonomous vehicle deliveries may be more appropriate for areas with generous streetspace such as Milton Keynes, whilst cycle delivery methods may be more appropriate where better cycle facilities or higher levels of cycling exist such as Oxford or Cambridge.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

OCC believe that it will be useful if the strategy can identify more specific measures for both the shorter- and longer term that will help develop a more efficient, effective, lower carbon and lower impact freight and logistics system for the EEH area. One key area to review is how the freight and logistics sector can move towards decarbonising, including understanding how the development of hydrogen and electric vehicle fleets and associated infrastructure can contribute.

18. What freight and logistics services are important for people and businesses? For example, accessing goods (via delivery or in person); a thriving high street; access to health, education and leisure facilities?

Freight and logistics services will continue to be important to both individuals and businesses. As noted under question 17, the challenge will be how these can be developed to continue to provide an effective service, whilst also reducing their environmental impacts. Also, as noted under question 17, certain initiatives and services may be more suited to particular geographic areas across the EEH area.

19. Just in time and last minute operations are affecting the way people and businesses access goods and services. How should this growing trend affect the way we plan transport now, and in the future?

Please see answers to question 17 and 18.

## **Investment**

20. Is the approach to investment the right one? If not, why not?

OCC agree that it is important to develop a programme of targeted investment for transport across the EEH area, and that the funding for this will need to come from a variety of public and private sector sources. The proposed 'single pot' approach needs further careful consideration, including understanding what investment this will help deliver. Given less funding certainty in the longer-term, it is expected that any investment programme will be more detailed for the shorter-term and at a higher-level in the longer-term.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

OCC believe that the level and detail of any investment programme across the EEH area will need careful consideration by partners, in particular to understand what best 'fits' at the EEH level, rather than at a more local or national level. This discussion will also need to consider the role of EEH in helping to deliver this programme, including any relevant statutory powers that may be needed, funding considerations, and any prioritisation frameworks.

Existing evidence base work on infrastructure requirements held by partners will also be important to consider as part of this process. For example, Oxfordshire authorities have developed an Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, which has helped define strategic infrastructure requirements to support growth across our area.

## **Delivery**

21. Is the approach to delivery the right one? If not, why not?

OCC agree that delivery of the strategic vision across the EEH area will require development and agreement to both formal and informal partnerships. Examples of successful partnership work undertaken to date at the EEH area level include the East West Rail Consortium. Judgements will need to be made by EEH partners on an on-going basis as to the level and scope of partnerships needed to enable the strategic vision to be realised, and how best to share knowledge and expertise in different areas. EEH will have a role to enable appropriate partnership work to happen, based on priority areas identified in the Transport Strategy. Examples could include partnership arrangements such as Forums to plan for better integrating the public transport network, or looking at the approach to regulation and management of new and emerging forms of transport such as e-scooters or dockless bikes.

*Matters to consider in development of the full transport strategy:*

For the next stage of transport strategy development, it will be useful to:

- Better define the types of further partnerships that will be needed to help deliver the strategy, and the appropriate level at which these partnerships should be formed;
- Consider the linkage of such partnerships to wider OxCam workstreams, including those on place-making and the environment; and,
- Consider any changes in powers or responsibilities, including at the EEH level, that will be needed to enable delivery to happen.

## **Annex 1: Oxfordshire County Council Motion, as agreed on 10 September 2019**

### **Motion by Councillor David Bartholomew**

“Reading Borough Council is proposing to build a vast new bridge to alleviate Reading’s traffic problems. It is included in their Draft Local Plan as a top priority. The bridge would take off at the Thames Valley business park near Reading and land near Playhatch in Oxfordshire. The only onwards option for traffic would be through the congested streets of Henley or along the narrow B481 country road through Oxfordshire villages.

Reading and the other Berkshire councils supporting the scheme are focusing almost entirely on the costs of building the bridge and the benefits it will bring to Reading. They recognise that the bridge would have a substantial impact on the Oxfordshire road network, but blithely state this will be dealt with by unspecified and uncoded ‘mitigation measures’.

This council calls on the Leader to write to council leaders at Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell, plus MPs John Howell, John Redwood, Matt Rodda and Theresa May, stating that:

- a) In the context of the Climate Emergency a car-based solution to a car-based problem that would pour thousands of cars and HGVs into Oxfordshire is totally inappropriate and should a new bridge be built it should be restricted to public transport, cyclists and pedestrians;
- b) Notwithstanding the above, if a car-based solution is pursued, the bridge and necessary mitigation measures (i.e. improvements to the Oxfordshire road network) must not be considered as two separate projects, but as one project so that the benefits, disadvantages and costs of the scheme can be holistically assessed.”

### **Decision:**

Motion Agreed by 54 votes to 0, with 1 abstention.