

# Strategic Transport Leadership Board

March 2025

## Agenda Item 8 Consultation responses

### *Recommendation:*

#### **It is recommended that the Board:**

- **Agrees the response to Transport for South East's strategy consultation**
- **Notes the responses to the following consultations which have been submitted:**
  - Transport Select Committee Call for Evidence on Rural Transport
  - Government Spending Review
  - Western Gateway - Strategic Investment Plan
  - DfT-Phasing out of Electric Vehicles
  - Transport Select Committee Rail investment pipelines: Ending boom and bust
  - Office for Road Rail - Evaluation of National Highways Stakeholder Engagement Survey on-line response
  - National Integrated Transport Strategy – See item 4 for detail
  - GBR Rail Reform Consultation and our approach – See item 5 for Detail

### **1. TfSE Draft Transport Strategy**

- 1.1. Transport for the SouthEast (TfSE), our neighbouring Sub-national Transport Body is undertaking consultation on their draft transport strategy.
- 1.2. EEH shares borders with TfSE at the boundaries of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Swindon with Berkshire and Slough.
- 1.3. TfSE's draft transport strategy is primarily a strategy led document, with many key themes which align with EEHs own transport strategy.
- 1.4. In the draft EEH response we have welcomed the inclusion of a number of cross boundary interventions of importance including Solent to the Midlands movements, improving surface access to Heathrow and decarbonisation of the Thames Valley branch lines. We have also highlighted that we would like to see the inclusion of A404 corridor improvements.
- 1.5. EEH's draft response to the consultation is included as Annex 1 to this paper.
- 1.6. The consultation response is due 7 March. We have been given an extension to the deadline to allow the Strategic Transport Leadership Board to consider any amends to the draft response ahead of submitting the EEH response.

## **2. Transport Select Committee Call for Evidence on Bus Services in Rural Areas.**

- 2.1. The Transport Select Committee undertook a call for evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of recent Government policy in tackling the decline in bus services and to explore the social and economic consequences of poor connectivity in rural areas and consider whether innovations in alternative service models could provide solutions.
- 2.2. The key points from EEH response included the fact that franchising models need flexibility to appeal to rural areas and we advocated for multi-year investment strategies to enable better planning and value for money.

Other comments included:

- 2.3. Bus Service Improvement Plans funding was to be welcomed, but disparities in allocations have created unequal service levels. We highlighted the potential for integrating bus and rail services, particularly through mobility hubs and digital ticketing systems and we emphasized the importance of funding and collaboration between transport providers.
- 2.4. Long-term funding was crucial for sustaining rural bus services. Enhanced Partnerships are seen as viable, but franchising may offer more transformational change in some areas.
- 2.5. Demand Responsive Transport and community transport were suggested as alternatives, with a focus on local knowledge, partnership, and additional funding, asset-free DRT using ride-hailing platforms were also identified as a further opportunity to be explored.
- 2.6. Coordination and funding for cross-boundary services should be seen as essential. EEH is developing a regional bus network concept (The Heartbeat Network) to address these challenges.
- 2.7. We concluded by setting out that long-term, stable funding and better coordination between local authorities and transport providers was essential if we are to improve bus services in rural and polycentric regions, such as EEH.
- 2.8. EEH's full response to the Transport Select Committee is set out in annex 2. Our Managing Director has been asked to provide oral evidence on bus reform (with a focus on Enhanced Partnerships) to the Committee on 24 March 2025.

## **3. Spending Review Submission**

- 3.1. The principles for EEH's Spending Review submission were agreed at December's Strategic Transport Leadership Board meeting.
- 3.2. The full response is in annex 3.
- 3.3. It focused on
  - Maximising East West Rail, through dedicated local authority door-to-door funding, Varsity Way, Bletchley chord, Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link, Oxford-Bristol link and the Eastern Section.
  - Ely Junction
  - Bus and mass rapid transit
  - EEH road priorities, including those identified in the Oxford to Cambridge Roads Study
  - Appropriate transport funding for local and combined authorities, and England's Economic Heartland

## **4. Western Gateway –Draft Strategic Investment Plan**

- 4.1. The Western Gateway sub-national transport body recently consulted on their Draft Strategic Investment Plan; EEH submitted a response to this in early February 2025.



- 4.2. The investment plan focused on a priority list of 38 strategic level schemes for the Western Gateway area, with those related to delivery of a direct Oxford to Bristol service and completion of electrification on the line to Bristol (where the Oxford to Bristol service would operate) seen as most relevant to EEH. The plan also presented an assessment of the schemes against several criteria, including a set of strategic aims.
- 4.3. The EEH response firstly highlighted relevant parts of our transport strategy, in particular policies related to improving western linkages from East West Rail towards Swindon and Bristol. It also referenced relevant elements of our evidence base, including the Main Line Priorities Study, the Oxford to Swindon Connectivity Study and the Connecting Economies: Swindon-Didcot-Oxford document, all of which highlight the opportunity to improve direct rail links between Oxford- Swindon and Bristol.
- 4.4. In this context, the response welcomed the inclusion of a direct Oxford-Swindon to Bristol in the list of Western Gateway investment priorities, highlighting the extensive partnership work being undertaken to plan for delivery of this service. The response further gave detailed comments on the assessment of the scheme undertaken in the draft plan, wishing to ensure that this was updated to ensure it reflected the latest joint work undertaken.
- 4.5. The full response is in annex 4.

## **5. DfT – Phasing out of Petrol and Diesel Vehicles**

- 5.1. The Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) launched a consultation on phasing out sales of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 and supporting the zero-emission vehicle transition. The consultation closed on 18 February 2025.
- 5.2. EEH supports the transition to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs). It is a key policy in our transport strategy and, we will continue to support local authority partners to accelerate EV infrastructure delivery.
- 5.3. We agree with the government’s view on phasing out full hybrid and plug-in hybrid technologies, though in the interim recognise the need for longer-range plug-in hybrids to support the transition to electric vehicles, especially in o largely car-dependent and rural regions – such as EEH.
- 5.4. EEH advocates for a short-term moderate CO2 cap and accelerated uptake of pure electric vehicles, alongside investments in public transport and better land use planning.
- 5.5. We have highlighted possible additional measures to accelerate uptake such as improving engagement with power distribution companies, providing grants for used low-emission vehicles, implementing a scrappage scheme for the most polluting vehicles, and enhancing support for on-street charging infrastructure.
- 5.6. EEH recommends setting a minimum range for new PHEVs to ensure significant emission reductions and establishing a CO2 requirement for vans from 2030 to further support transport decarbonisation.
- 5.7. See annex 5.

## **6. Transport Select Committee Rail investment pipelines: ending boom and bust**

- 6.1. The Transport Select committee have launched an inquiry into Rail Investment Pipelines: ending boom and bust. This is expected to review how government can ensure a stable pipeline of projects, enhancements and procurements to improve the rail network, including understanding why this hasn’t happened consistency in the past, and the benefits of having a stable investment pipeline going forward.
- 6.2. A call for evidence process was launched on this just before Christmas, and EEH submitted a response at the beginning of February (annex 6).



- 6.3. The EEH response reflects on key rail projects within our region, namely East West Rail, Ely and HS2, highlighting that the stop- start nature of their development has not been conducive to the planning of transport connectivity, business investment and new development across our region. Such uncertainty means that it is very difficult to maximise the value of government investment in rail infrastructure, for example through aligning locally led transport and development plans, or attracting private sector investment.
- 6.4. The response further highlights that having longer-term and up to date pipelines of enhancements would give greater certainty to all public and private sector partners to invest and maximise the benefits of rail investment. Further, the development of such pipelines should be undertaken in collaboration with both local and regional public and private sector partners.
- 6.5. For example, the Wider South East Rail Partnership can have a useful role to bring together regional partners with the rail industry to agree priorities and thereby help facilitate the preparation of project pipelines for the shorter and longer-term planning horizon. Finally, the response highlights that therefore an opportunity for a reset of policy and plan making for longer-term rail investment as rail reform comes forward.

## **7. ORR - Evaluation of National Highways Stakeholder Engagement**

- 7.1. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) are undertaking research on how National Highways undertake their stakeholder engagement. EEH have been selected along with all our Local Authority Partners to take part. The engagement is via an on-line survey which is designed to provide feedback on how National Highways has engaged with their key stakeholders.
- 7.2. All those who have been selected to take part have been requested to answer the survey on their experience as an organisation with working with National Highways. Therefore, EEH are not inviting our wider LTA community to input into EEH's response to the survey as each LTA have also been asked to respond individually.
- 7.3. The survey is online and includes questions on how frequently we engage with National Highways how we would rate our interactions with National Highways and how they accommodate local requirements into the work that they undertake.
- 7.4. Most of the survey is made up of dropdown boxes so our responses are limited. However, we have suggested that some areas that we think work well included a reference to some of the teams we work with in National Highways including: the strategic planning team; the network operations team locally to the EEH region; RIS Strategy Team; Our local EEH representative; the Major Project Team; and the planning team.
- 7.5. In addition we have highlighted the need for early involvement in the RIS schemes and that the regular meetings we have with National Highways and the relationship that we have with them as being invaluable in supporting our Local Authority Partners.

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**March 2025**