

# Strategic Transport Leadership Board

## Minutes

27<sup>th</sup> September 2024

11:00 – 13:00

*Virtual*

Present:

CLlr Liz Leffman (Chair)  
CLlr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew  
CLlr Graham Lawman  
CLlr Javed Hussain  
CLlr Lucy Nethsingha  
CLlr Phil Larratt  
CLlr Anna Smith  
CLlr Chris Watts  
CLlr Steven Broadbent  
CLlr Adam Zerny  
CLlr Jim Weir  
Phil Southall

Leader, Oxfordshire County Council  
Cabinet Member, Milton Keynes Council  
Executive Member, North Northants Council  
Executive Member, Luton Council  
Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council  
Cabinet Member, West Northants Council  
Deputy Mayor, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough  
Cabinet Member, Swindon Borough Council  
Cabinet Member, Buckinghamshire Council  
Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council  
Deputy Mayor, Bedford Borough Council  
Managing Director, Strategy and Performance at Go Ahead Group

Apologies:

CLlr Martin Tett  
CLlr Phil Bibby  
Mayor Nik Johnson

Leader, Buckinghamshire Council  
Executive Member, Highways & Transport  
Mayor, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

EEH Team Members Present:

Naomi Green  
Suzanne Winkels  
James Golding-Graham  
Adam King  
Fiona Foulkes  
Abi Nichols  
Trevor Brennan  
James Gagg  
Nathalie Mazhunga  
Hanane Elmaarouf  
Erin Pitcher

Managing Director  
Technical Programme Manager  
Decarbonisation and Innovation Manager  
External Affairs and Policy Manager  
Capability, Excellence & Governance Manager  
Project Lead  
Project Lead  
Project Lead  
Project Officer  
Business Operations Assistant  
Business Operations Assistant

1	<p><b>Introductions</b></p> <p><b>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL)</b> opened the meeting and asked attendees if they were content with accuracy of previous meeting minutes.</p> <p><b>Naomi Green (NG)</b> said that all actions are either addressed in the agenda items or are currently in progress. Here are the ongoing actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Business Planning Update</b> - <i>Following a discussion amongst Board members, a long term plan will be presented to Board members in due course.</i></li> <li>2. <b>Productivity considerations</b> - <i>The proposed Heartbeat network includes provision for increased services between Hitchin and Luton. Further work is ongoing.</i></li> <li>3. <b>Public Questions</b> - <i>EEH is liaising with Alan Francis.</i></li> <li>4. <b>Connectivity Studies</b> - <i>EEH is working with CPCA to consider additional work, particularly following completion of the Local Growth Plan.</i></li> </ol> <p><b>Action - EEH to add Phil Southall to the attendee list in the minutes from the last meeting.</b></p>
2	<p><b>Public Questions</b></p> <p><b>Alan Francis, MK Green Party (AF)</b> expressed his support for the main line rail study proposals, including the electrification of East West Rail. He also highlighted the need for improved direct connectivity between Milton Keynes Central, Bedford, and Cambridge via East West Rail. He said that he had raised this issue with EEH and EWR Company but was still awaiting responses. <b>AF</b> said that Network Rail's strategic advice last year recommended such a service, emphasising Milton Keynes' significance as the largest settlement in the East West Rail corridor. He said it was important to have direct rail services to both Oxford and Cambridge from Milton Keynes Central, noting that treating Milton Keynes Central and Bletchley as if "one station" in studies leads to poor connectivity. He referred to the recent flooding and traffic issues as evidence of the demand for travel in the Milton Keynes-Bedford corridor. <b>AF</b> said that forced train changes at Bletchley deter passengers, leading to increased car usage and CO2 emissions. He also mentioned the Universal Studios theme park proposal, which further strengthens the case for a direct rail service. He urged that a direct Milton Keynes Central-Bedford-Cambridge service be included in the study's recommendations.</p> <p><b>Cllr Javed Hussain (JH)</b> highlighted the issue of heavily used and inadequate train stations in the area, emphasising the need for upgrades. He stressed the importance of cross-connectivity, mentioning the potential benefits of extending the busway from Dunstable to Leighton Buzzard, which would enhance connectivity to Milton Keynes. This extension would provide residents with more travel options. He urged for lobbying efforts to improve the transport infrastructure to meet these needs.</p>

### Rail investment priorities

**James Gagg (JG)** opened the item and updated the Board on the rail investment priorities. He also highlighted the ongoing plans for rail reform and collaboration with sub-national transport bodies in the wider southeast to advocate for rail investment. The updated ["Keeping Trade on Track"](#) document supports the case for strategic rail interventions, including the Ely scheme and future improvements in the Northampton-Milton Keynes-Buckinghamshire corridor.

**John Collins & Daniel Philips, Arup (JC) (DP)** presented slides on the conclusions of the rail main line study.

**Cllr Lucy Nethsingha (LN)** raised a concern about Ely station not being listed as a potential hub in the current package. She said she understood the current reasoning, she suggested that Ely could be considered a hub in the future if certain developments proceed. She emphasised the importance of eastward connections and questioned whether Ely might be included as a hub in future plans.

**Naomi Green (NG)** said that EEH has recently published an updated brochure for Ely Junction and has written a letter to the Rail Minister reiterating the priority of Ely. She said that EEH is collaborating with Transport East and Transport for the South East through the Wider South East Rail Partnership and confirmed that Ely is a key focus.

**Phil Southall, EEH Bus Operators Association (PS)** raised a point about integration. He noted that while integration is not a strategic objective, it appears in Package 8 concerning hubs and accessibility. He highlighted the rail industry's general shortcomings in integration and mentioned Project Coral, which aims to improve seamless ticketing in the bus industry and eventually include rail. He suggested that Project Coral could be flagged as a strategic objective or included within Package 8 to facilitate better integration.

**Cllr Anna Smith (AS)** highlighted a key point from the recent Combined Authority Transport and Infrastructure Committee meeting, emphasising the importance of connectivity for transport hubs. She said that it is not sufficient to simply establish a station and assume that other modes of transport, such as buses, will automatically connect. She argued for a holistic and integrated transport network, ensuring that all key players are aware of and committed to making these connections happen.

**NG** reiterated the importance of focusing on integration. She said that further details would be discussed in the next agenda item.

**Cllr Graham Lawman (GL)** highlighted the lack of East-West connectivity as shown in the diagram on **page 23** of the report. He noted the mention of connectivity between Wellingborough and Northampton, suggesting that the current bus service enhancement is insufficient for the congested A45 corridor. **GL** emphasised the need for more ambitious solutions, as the existing bus service is slow and does not adequately serve key areas. He also stressed the importance of making all stations, not just hub stations, step-free to ensure full accessibility for disabled passengers. **GL** urged for greater focus on improving accessibility at intermediate stations to ensure passengers can get on and off at their local stations.

**Board Agreed the publication of the final EEH Rail Main Line Priorities Study (Appendix 1) and the outline of priority workstream areas arising from the study.**



	<p><b>Board Agreed the updated Wider South East Rail Partnership strategic priorities document as the basis for driving further partnership work.</b></p> <p><b>Board noted the update on rail reform and noted the publication of the updated 'Keeping Trade on Track' document, setting out the case for investing in the critical Ely scheme (Appendix 2) and intention to publish a brochure on the case for the Northampton-Old Oak Common rail corridor.</b></p>
4	<p><b>New Government update, including fiscal events, and EEH financial update</b></p> <p><b>Naomi Green (NG)</b> opened the item with an update on EEH's proposed responses to the live fiscal events, both in terms of the short-term Spending Review underway in advance of the Chancellor's autumn budget (30 October 2024) and the longer-term Spending Review (expected to take place through the autumn and early in 2025).</p> <p><b>Dan Taylor, DfT (DT)</b> reiterated the spending parameters set by the Treasury, emphasising the focus on identifying in-year savings for the 2024-25 budget, with the first milestone being the end of October. The work for 2025-26 will continue existing work streams without new bids, operating within constrained parameters. He also said the integrated national transport strategy, led by Danny Williams, is keen to engage with STBs and build on their work regarding integrated transport across regions. The Secretary of State's focus is on the role of transport for people and how integrated transport works in various areas, a concept that has been long considered by local areas. He encouraged contributions to this ongoing effort.</p> <p><b>Cllr Lucy Nethsingha (LN)</b> noted the consensus across local and national government on the need to address the infrastructure deficit to enable future growth. She also emphasised the difficulty in securing upfront funding for public transport and new rail investments. <b>LN</b> proposed considering a piece of work focused on changes in government financial management to help local authorities and partners secure funding more effectively. She acknowledged the staffing limitations but suggested leveraging staff from partner organisations. She said that other parts of the government are also looking into this issue and recommended incorporating this into their programme due to its relevance to ongoing transport discussions.</p> <p><b>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL)</b> said there is a need for early investment in transport networks, such as new stations, and questioned how to secure funding without relying solely on developers. <b>LL</b> said that while developer contributions might help, they often fall short of the required infrastructure, particularly for mobility hubs and rail services. She stressed the importance of finding alternative funding methods and mentioned that Oxfordshire is exploring these options. She requested support and collaboration from others, including EEH, to address this funding challenge effectively.</p>

	<p><b>NG</b> welcomed the suggestion, confirming that EEH can look into it if the board requests. <b>NG</b> mentioned that EEH has already done some preliminary work, including exploring land value capture models and establishing relationships with the UK Infrastructure Bank. She suggested pooling expertise from across the region and the private sector due to the complexity of the issue. She recommended conducting early research and presenting preliminary findings to the board in December to keep the conversation ongoing.</p> <p><b>DT</b> suggested that collaborating with other STBs could be beneficial, as they are likely facing similar questions. He emphasised the potential for synergy in addressing these common issues collectively, rather than each STB working in isolation.</p> <p><b>Action – EEH to produce a paper on Public Sector finance.</b></p> <p><b>The Board noted the update on the new Government approach, including the two stage Spending Review, currently underway and noted the 2024-25 mid-year financial update. Board also noted initial proposals submitted by DfT to Government, to inform the first stage Spending Review (2025/26) and autumn budget.</b></p> <p><b>The Board agreed to invite the newly appointed Director for Integrated Transport Strategy for England to EEH’s December Board meeting.</b></p> <p><b>The Board agreed the proposal for EEH’s 2025/26 work programme.</b></p>
5	<p><b>Consideration of Statutory Functions and Powers</b></p> <p><b>Fiona Foulkes (FF)</b> introduced the paper and provided an update on the proposed approach to exploring which statutory functions local partners might want EEH to pursue in the future, ensuring it is in the right place to support national decision making. The paper also included suggested principles as a framework for this exploration.</p> <p><b>Dan Taylor, DfT (DT)</b> emphasised the importance of considering the current situation and the uncertainty regarding ministers’ positions on additional STBs gaining statutory status. He cautioned against assuming that the powers granted to Transport for the North (TFN) when it was established would be appropriate for other STBs today. <b>DT</b> highlighted the significant changes in the rail sector, including the advent of Great British Railways (GBR) and local devolution, and stressed the need to be clear about what statutory status would provide and how it would improve transport for people. He suggested articulating the benefits clearly and considering the costs to the organisation. <b>DT</b> agreed to the flexible approach to remain agile and adapt to the evolving situation.</p> <p><b>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL)</b> emphasised the need for a flexible approach as outlined in the paper, agreeing that any potential changes from the government, such as those related to GBR or other factors, should be considered. She also mentioned the possibility of devolution and other unclear elements. <b>LL</b> said that the discussion represents a direction of travel or the beginning of a journey, rather than a definitive pursuit.</p> <p><b>Naomi Green (NG)</b> highlighted two key areas of interest for the board members. Firstly, the challenge of not being able to hold capital funds and the need for creative funding solutions. She mentioned the example of digital connectivity on East West Rail, where they effectively enabled funding but couldn’t hold the money.</p>

	<p>Secondly, <b>FF</b> is exploring different structural options so that EEH remains agile and light touch. She said the goal is to find corporate models that are cost-effective and enhance the ability to leverage funding from various sources, rather than relying solely on government grants.</p> <p><b>The Board supported the exploration of possible routes for EEH to seek statutory functions.</b></p> <p><b>The Board agreed the proposed principles to provide a framework for the EEH Business Unit to work within when identifying best options for statutory status.</b></p>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Connecting Economies brochures</b></p> <p><b>Adam King (AK)</b> introduced the paper and gave an update on EEH's Connecting Economies brochures.</p> <p><b>Cllr Graham Lawman (GL)</b> asked whether the brochures are individual documents, expressing particular interest in the one that is not yet ready, Luton-Bedford-Corby. <b>GL</b> wanted to ensure that the brochures are not combined into a single document, which could result in the unfinished brochure being overlooked.</p> <p><b>AK</b> confirmed that all brochures are individual documents. He assured that the seventh brochure will be printed separately. He also mentioned that North Northamptonshire is prominently featured in both the Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford brochure and the Luton-Bedford-Corby brochure.</p> <p><b>The Board agreed to the publication of the Connecting Economies brochures</b></p>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Business Unit Update</b></p> <p><b>Suzanne Winkels (SW)</b> introduced the item and updated the board on the following consultations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MHCLG's proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework</li> <li>• DfT's proposed changes to government guidance on setting up a bus franchising scheme.</li> <li>• OFGEM's Regional Energy Strategic Plan Policy Framework</li> <li>• ORR's Holding National Highways to Account</li> </ul> <p><b>Cllr Lucy Nethsingha (LN)</b> raised two issues related to recent experiences in Cambridgeshire. Firstly, she highlighted the difficulty of building new busways due to current legislation requiring two separate votes by the Cambridgeshire County Council, which complicates the process. She suggested asking the government to review these legislative elements that hinder transport infrastructure projects. Secondly, she mentioned the challenges of addressing concerns about national strategic infrastructure projects, such as a large incinerator, which impact the transport network beyond peak times. She proposed that the government consider these broader issues in their consultation.</p>

**Cllr Steve Broadbent (SB)** agreed with **SW's** points about the need for infrastructure but emphasised the importance of timing, funding, and provision. He said that the transport infrastructure should be developed alongside or before housing, rather than following it. **SB** suggested that the letter should clearly state the necessity of integrating transport with housing development to avoid delays in infrastructure implementation. He stressed the need for a vision-based approach focused on transport elements rather than overall housing numbers. **SB** also highlighted the potential impact of the New Towns Commission's future reports on current transport solutions, suggesting that it is challenging to finalise a vision before the Commission's findings are available. He urged for a stronger emphasis on transport in the response to ensure it aligns with planning and development needs.

On franchising **SB** noted that there are significant costs and impacts for authorities determining if franchising is viable and the EEH response should highlight the varying starting points and previous funding of different authorities. This variability could make franchising prohibitively difficult for some areas. **SB** said that there is a need for funding to account for these differences to ensure all authorities can consider franchising from a similar starting point.

**Naomi Green (NG)** said that the NPPF response, which was due on the 24<sup>th</sup> September has a holding response submitted, pending a full considered response from the board. **NG** suggested two options: recirculating a revised version for board review within a couple of days or sending the response as a board submission rather than from her, which could be cleared through layers. She deferred the decision to the chair, and the board members on how they preferred to proceed.

**Cllr Liz Leffman (LL)** suggested that board members send their comments directly to **SW** and **NG** to be included in the collective response, rather than submitting separate responses.

**Cllr Graham Lawman (GL)** echoed **SB's** point about the importance of phasing infrastructure, noting that relying on house sales and delaying infrastructure implementation can significantly increase costs. He said that this issue also applies to the projects managed by National Highways. **GL** stressed the need to keep options open, regarding bus franchising, particularly for semi-rural authorities like theirs, where subsidizing routes could exceed their budget. He highlighted the potential issue of low uptake of chargeable services in rural areas and suggested that maintaining flexibility, possibly through a halfway approach, would be beneficial.

**Cllr Anna Smith, (AS)** expressed willingness to share experiences from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. She emphasised the need for a less bureaucratic approach to franchising consultations and that their officers would regularly communicate with **NG** to incorporate their experiences into any responses. **AS** also supported the "infrastructure first" approach, highlighting its effectiveness in continental planning. She said that delays in infrastructure led to missed opportunities for community building and increased pressure on transport networks. **AS** mentioned the importance of having infrastructure in place at the start of large-scale developments to avoid relying on delayed developer funds.

**LL** suggested that the letter should clearly state the collective view that prioritising infrastructure first is crucial. She emphasised the importance of including this point upfront in the letter and requested its addition to strengthen the response.

**Phil Southall (PS)** raised concerns about the adoption of roads by local transport and highways authorities, particularly in relation to bus services. He said the issue of bureaucracy delaying the handover of roads, which can lead to deterioration and, in some cases, force buses to stop operating. **PS** said that there are legal issues surrounding buses on unadopted roads, he also gave an example which included a significant case in the





Northeast of England where a bus service had to be withdrawn due to a dispute between the highway's authority and the developer. He suggested that any discussion about infrastructure should address these issues to ensure smoother bus service provision.

**SB** expressed concerns about the upcoming land use plan, which could significantly impact the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) discussions. He highlighted the potential for new mandates, such as the placement of solar farms, which might require local areas to generate their own energy to support transport networks. **SB** said that there is a need to review the response before offering his support, given the uncertainty about the plan's implications. He requested that the response be circulated by the 8th to allow for thorough review and feedback. **SB** also raised concerns about the generation side of the land use plan, noting that there is little information available.

**LL** noted that local authorities would likely submit their own responses to the consultation. She expressed the difficulty of making a response from a regional perspective and suggested that this issue should be included in their individual responses.

**James Golding-Graham, (JGG)** acknowledged **SB's** concerns about the current trajectories and pathways, noting that they are likely to follow a hub and spoke model set by the centre of the NISO. He emphasised the need for a power veto to address these concerns explicitly. **JGG** assured that their response reflects these issues prominently and invited further comments.

**Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew (JWM)** said that she works for NISO and said that the methodologies for the project are still being developed and have not yet been finalized. She mentioned that feedback from local authorities and regional bodies will be incorporated into these methodologies. **JWM** said that the strategic objectives will be consulted on, and the process will involve gathering information and expertise to inform proposals for the government. She highlighted that NISO will not mandate construction projects; instead, it will provide a framework for planning and informing government decisions on future developments.

**NG** suggested working with individual authorities to coordinate and share themes from their responses. She emphasised the importance of considering the democratic accountability of local planning authorities, highlighting that elected members make decisions through the planning process. **NG** proposed tying this into their current efforts to remind stakeholders about local decision-making. She requested the names of officers working on this within each authority to facilitate coordination. If the names are not known, she suggested reaching out via transport offices to identify them and ensure a comprehensive approach.

**SB** expressed full support for the discussion on the impact of RIS (Road Investment Strategy) delays. He asked about the number of schemes that have been postponed and the extent of what is still pending. **SB** suggested including an annex table to outline the scale of these delays, noting that it affects every area. He emphasized the importance of having evidence to support their concerns.

**SW** said that EEH has a plan showing the RIS programme and noted that EEH is one of the least affected areas, with many projects progressing well. **SW** offered to provide a plan that outlines the RIS programme and its status in the region.

**GL** highlighted the issues related to the A45 duelling project, noting that delays are often caused by planning or financial constraints. He mentioned a specific situation where a new junction on a strategic road is needed, but prolonged delays have significantly increased costs. **GL** highlighted the importance of timely and adequate provision by highways



	<p>authorities, as the junction services up to 5,000 houses and a nearby industrial estate. He stressed the need for proper engagement in both planning and financing to address these issues effectively.</p> <p><b>Action - Board members to send their comments on the consultation responses to EEH via email.</b></p>
<b>8</b>	<p><b>Future Meeting Dates</b></p> <p>The Board agreed the following 2024 dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 December (in person)</li> <li>- 7 March 2025</li> <li>- 23 May 2025</li> <li>- 11 July 2025 (in person)</li> <li>- 26 September 2025</li> <li>- 5 December 2025 (in person)</li> </ul>