

Strategic Transport Leadership Board

Minutes

7th March 2025

11:00 – 13:00

Virtual

Present:

Cllr Liz Leffman (Chair)

Cllr Graham Lawman

Cllr Javed Hussain

Cllr Phil Larratt

Cllr Anna Smith

Cllr Chris Watts

Cllr Adam Zerny

Cllr Nicola Gribble

Cllr Phil Bibby

Cllr David Rouane

Leader, Oxfordshire County Council

Executive Member, North Northants Council

Executive Member, Luton Council

Cabinet Member, West Northants Council

Deputy Mayor, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Cabinet Member, Swindon Borough Council

Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council

Deputy Mayor, Bedford Borough Council

Executive Member, Hertfordshire County Council

Leader, South Oxfordshire District Council

Apologies:

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha

Cllr Steven Broadbent

Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew

Cllr Martin Tett

Mayor Nik Johnson

Phil Southall

Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council

Cabinet Member, Buckinghamshire Council

Cabinet Member, Milton Keynes Council

Leader, Buckinghamshire Council

Mayor, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Managing Director, Strategy and Performance at Go Ahead Group

1	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) opened the meeting and asked attendees if they were content with accuracy of previous meeting minutes.</p> <p>Hanane Elmaarouf (HE) said that there are three ongoing actions and also said that there is an update on statutory functions exploration, which is currently on hold. If board members have any questions, please feel free to contact Naomi Green or Fiona Foulkes. The ongoing actions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New Government update, including fiscal events, and EEH financial update - <i>The 'Securing Investment in the Region' paper includes information on public sector finance, with suggested actions for progressing understanding.</i> 2. Buses - <i>Further work to explore the Luton to Dunstable extension options is being commissioned, including an extension to the ECML at either Hitchin or Stevenage. Demand levels at either end and along its existing route are being captured as part of the study.</i> 3. Connectivity Study Six - <i>EEH has reviewed the feedback received and have made the necessary modifications to the report to ensure it addresses all concerns and suggestions. The revised report will then be circulated to board members in due course.</i>
2	<p>Public Questions</p> <p>Alan Francis, MK Green Party (AF) referred to the Maximising East West Rail prospectus (item 3 annex 1), and specifically the information on page 9 regarding the Bletchley North East chord.</p> <p>AF welcomed inclusion of the chord within the document no objection but said it will be expensive and take time to deliver. Lower cost and quicker options should be implemented first.</p> <p>This includes reversing at Bletchley station which he said would be much cheaper and quicker than to build than the N-E chord. It adds about 4 mins to journey time, compared to using a chord, but improves connectivity at Bletchley.</p> <p>He suggested that prospectus draft is amended to include reversing at Bletchley station as a short term, low cost, quick to build option with N-E chord as a longer term option.</p>

East West Rail

Naomi Green (NG) opened the item and gave an overview on the work being done to maximise the benefits of the East West Rail for local places, the region, and the wider UK.

Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) thanked NG and highlighted a discussion at the PRP board with Lord Vallance, saying that East West Rail alone was insufficient and that door-to-door transport was crucial. She said that Lord Vallance agreed with this sentiment.

Cllr Phil Bibby (PB) agreed with **LL** and said East West Rail is crucial for integrated transport. He noted that Hertfordshire County Council would like EEH to promote more physical rail links between East West Rail and the East Coast Mainline to provide more flexibility.

James Gagg (JG) said officers were flagging similar things through work with ARUP to maximise opportunities related to East West Rail and HS2. He said this included looking at options beyond East West Rail's core scope to enhance wider rail connectivity, whether through additional physical links or improved interchange. He said the study's progress would be reported back to the Board in the future.

3	<p>Cllr Anna Smith (AS) said she welcomed the work around the legacy and door-to-door connectivity. She said she had concerns about the timescales for East West Rail, particularly the schemes being designed to be locked down by the third week of July 2025, making it difficult for authorities with upcoming elections to provide feedback. She said she was keen to see the critical path on this.</p> <p>Verity Quinn (VQ) said following the local authority forum meeting last week, local authorities were presented with a lot of detail and a forward plan of activity and engagement around East West Rail, particularly focusing on the DCO process. She said she had been liaising with senior officers within East West Rail to raise concerns. VQ said she was working with them to clarify for local authorities and all parties the requirements that form part of the DCO process, which have a specific time frame, and those that don't.</p> <p>AS said the concern would still remain about the timescale of the DCO process because it is a key part of the process. She said a little more time now to ensure that it's done effectively with the buy-in of local authorities and members could be extremely helpful six to eight months down the line.</p> <p>VQ said she completely agreed and hoped to have a further update at the end of next week. She said it was made quite clear by EWR on that call that the DCO process timeline is unlikely to be able to be changed.</p> <p>Cllr Graham Lawman (GL) said that it should be taken as read that new stations will have a bus terminus, turnaround, or a bus stop right outside.</p> <p>VQ said the first session yesterday on door-to-door connectivity, which was Oxford to Winslow, resulted in agreeing that a major engagement forward plan is required. EEH will start drafting this with East West Rail and local authority colleagues. She said part of that would include working groups around all the new stations, ensuring that best rail integration is included and that what GL is requesting would be pivotal.</p> <p>Dan Taylor (DT) said the work being done by regional partners on East West Rail and the way it's being pitched, with the idea of a "corridor of corridors," is great. He said it's well aligned with the government's ambition in this space, referencing Lord Vallance's work and broader government ambitions for the Oxford to Cambridge corridor. He said the key is to ensure it doesn't become a narrowly defined piece of work that only covers a few places or is too focused on one aspect of transport as that is not the government's ambition. DT said there's a significant role for EEH to play in this space and he's encouraging his government colleagues to work with EEH to consider the broader geography and range of opportunities.</p> <p>The Board noted the work being done by EEH and its local and regional partners to maximise the benefits of East West Rail</p> <p>The Board agreed to publication of the Maximising East West Rail document (annex 1)</p>
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Integrated Transport

Abi Nichols (AN) introduced the item, which outlines EEH's approach to integration across our technical programme and engagement in the development of the Integrated National Transport Strategy (INTS).

Trevor Brennan (TB) said EEH is accelerating the deployment of mobility hubs in the region, exploring them as private sector investments. A draft prospectus with nine locations is included in Annex 2, building on initial sites from last December. They aim to finalise it for future Board approval. EEH also facilitated a triage investment workshop with KPMG, and Chris and Ben from their future mobility team will present the outcomes to the Board.

Chris Hillcoat (CH) and Ben Foulser (BF), KPMG, presented the workshop outcomes, discussing how to stimulate and incentivise private sector interest in developed mobility hubs. They highlighted the perspectives of public authorities and the private sector, challenges faced, and success factors for making mobility hubs investable. They recommended enhancing the investment prospectus and focusing on business case development.

Cllr Graham Lawman (GL) said he didn't recognise the mobility hub locations mentioned, particularly Kettering in Northamptonshire. He wondered why Wellingborough was left out, despite a new station being built by a developer next to a 5,000-house extension at Stanton Cross. He said it's an ideal opportunity for a station without a bus terminus that needs one.

TB said all the sites are led by officer contributions. He agreed to clarify that particular site. He said the brochure is its first iteration, and they hope to add additional sites as it's developed.

Holly Greig (HG), Deputy Director for the Integrated National Transport Strategy, DfT, provided an overview of the Integrated National Transport Strategy. She said she highlighted the people-focused approach, the devolution agenda, the importance of public transport, the role of cars and motorists, and the significance of freight and logistics. She said she emphasised the alignment of the strategy with other government strategies and the ongoing engagement work to gather views on the strategy.

Cllr Anna Smith (AS) said if we're looking at strategic infrastructure across the region, Ely area has to be at the centre of that. She said it unlocks so much. She said that if we're looking at the blockers to growth at the moment, the blocks around Ely are really significant.

GL said that integration includes accessibility of stations and facilities for people with various disabilities, whether visually impaired or physical. He said he didn't know if that forms part of the remit, but it needs to be considered and potentially funded.

Naomi Green (NG) said that recognising it's a large commitment for board members, she suggested that if **HG** is comfortable sharing the slides, one of the EEH team will have a bilateral with **GL** about what he wants to see in the roadshow and strategy.

Action – TB to clarify with North Northamptonshire officers about Wellingborough as a mobility hub site and report back to EEH Board.

Action: EEH to share slides from the Integrated National Transport Strategy presentation with board members.

	<p>The Board noted the update on EEH Mobility Hub work programme, including an initial EEH 'Mobility Hubs Investment Prospectus' and to receive a presentation on the outcomes of EEH/KPMG Mobility Hub investment workshop.</p> <p>The Board noted the findings of the interim Smart Junction report.</p>
5	<p>Supporting rail prioritisation and planning</p> <p>James Gagg (JG) updated Board on wider rail matters, including work of the Wider South East Rail Partnership, rail reform, and priority rail investment priorities, including the Oxford-Swindon-Bristol service, and the Ely Junction improvement scheme.</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) asked about the response to the APPG letter regarding Ely Junction.</p> <p>Adam King (AK) said Government generally says in correspondence on Ely to wait until the Spending Review. AK said the Ely Task Force, which includes private operators and companies, is maintaining advocacy efforts and collaborates with the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority to keep the momentum for the Ely scheme.</p> <p>Cllr Graham Lawman (GL) said he wondered if they were missing a small trick on quick wins because there's very little mention of reopening old lines. He said he could think of three in their area, like Bedford to Northampton, Northampton to Leicester, and the Welland Line. He said they all have barriers due to time and development, but they're opportunities for quick wins. He said there's no mention of it at all and thinks it's something they ought to consider.</p> <p>JG said the mainline priorities work identified key hubs and connections, which was presented and endorsed by the board last autumn. He said one of the packages considered missing links where there wasn't a key rail link between hubs. JG said it started to identify opportunities for multimodal connectivity, which might not necessarily be rail but could include high-quality bus services, mass transit, and similar opportunities.</p> <p>Cllr Phil Bibby (PB) said he wanted to press for the Crossrail 2 scheme, as it's felt this will provide capacity improvements to the West Anglia mainline and serve passengers to HS2 services at Euston.</p> <p>Cllr Anna Smith (AS) praised EEH's rail work as exciting. She said there's so much potential, especially for joined-up rail and local authority input into rail.</p> <p>Cllr David Rouane (DR) said that on the Oxford to Bristol proposal, the section between Oxford and Didcot is highly congested at the moment. He said it's only two lines and there's no more capacity. He wondered if the introduction of this proposal would displace other services on that section, particularly relating to Culham, a small station between Oxford and Didcot, which is a major science park and housing development. He said part of the selling point of that is the train service. He said this perennial problem about capacity on that line needs to be addressed.</p>

5	<p>JG said the Oxford to Bristol services are a short-term opportunity to connect key locations along that line, specifically Oxford to Swindon to Bristol using the core north of Didcot. This doesn't mean they shouldn't also look at developing local services between Oxford and Didcot. He said there's a medium-term aspiration to connect those services with East West Rail. JG said colleagues in Oxfordshire are keen to develop this opportunity, including increasing service frequency to Culham due to significant housing and employment growth.</p> <p>Naomi Green (NG) said they will follow up and consider this across all activities, keeping it in mind as they continue the project. She said there's a lot of work on rail capacity in Oxfordshire, including the Southampton to Midlands freight route, which needs to be factored in.</p> <p>Action: EEH to follow up on the potential impact of the Oxford to Bristol service on local services between Oxford and Didcot.</p> <p>Action: EEH to ensure that officers are consulted on the rail reform consultation before it is submitted.</p> <p>The Board agreed the position paper for the Wider South East Rail Partnership as given at Annex 1 as the basis to drive further partnership working on planning for rail across the wider south east</p> <p>The Board noted the update on rail reform proposals and agrees the key areas for EEH's consultation response (section 4.9)</p> <p>The Board notes the update on planning for rail investment priorities, including the proposed Oxford to Bristol service opportunity, now summarised in a narrative/ advocacy document as given in Annex 2, and the Ely junction project.</p>
6	<p>Freight Action Plan</p> <p>Suzanne Winkels (SW) presented on EEH's Freight Action Plan and discussed the next steps for its implementation, which include developing a Freight Action Plan Matrix.</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) said the work is important. She said that improving freight connections across the region, particularly taking freight traffic off the A34, would make everyone happier.</p> <p>Cllr Phil Bibby (PB) mentioned that officers are collaborating closely with the EEH team because of the upcoming rail freight terminal in Park Street, Hertfordshire. This terminal is expected to enhance the network and reduce lorry traffic on the roads.</p> <p>The Board endorsed the EEH Freight Action Plan in included as Annex A; and</p> <p>The Board agreed to the development of the Freight Action Plan Matrix to take forward actions for freight in the region.</p>

7	<p>2025/26 Business Plan</p> <p>Naomi Green (NG) introduced the item and updated board members on EEH's programme of activities for 2025/26. She sought agreement to continue local contributions towards EEH, maintaining them at the same flat rate as in 2023/24.</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) said it would be a shame to see the work done by the PRP, especially the data observatory and environmental work led by Bridget Smith, disappear. She said this work fits well with the East West Rail legacy and proposed that EEH host it until the new organisation is established. LL asked board members if they felt it was appropriate for EEH to take on this work and mentioned a pro forma that needs to be filled out.</p> <p>James Golding Graham (JGG) said that having access to the platform would be highly beneficial, at least in the short term, to advance their work on the legacy of East West Rail. He noted the platform's flexibility, which would allow for quick integration of data to support their efforts and provide a strong starting point for their projects.</p> <p>Action: EEH to work with the chair to develop a proposal for retaining and supporting the coordination of the assets of the Pan Regional partnership.</p> <p>Board noted the letter from the Secretary of State for Transport, confirming EEH's settlement for 2025/26: an increase on previous years to reflect the growing level of support and engagement required from EEH.</p> <p>Board noted the work programme for 2025/26, subject to final agreement with DfT over additional activity.</p> <p>Board agreed to continue its support to EEH through annual partner contributions, held at 2023/24 levels to reflect current financial pressures.</p>
8	<p>Consultation responses</p> <p>Suzanne Winkels (SW) presented the consultation responses, including the smart junction technology work and the response to the Transport for the South East updated transport strategy.</p> <p>Cllr Graham Lawman (GL) said that the Transport Select Committee's rail investment should consider reopening old lines. He said that investment in this area would be beneficial. He also said that demand responsive transport legislation needs to be reviewed, as bus passes are only valid after 9:30am, limiting their use for commuting and school transport. GL said that improving legislation could enhance efficiency and vehicle utilisation. He said that PHEVs have limitations, noting that people often don't use the electric mode due to practical constraints like charging infrastructure. He said that there needs to be a rethink on this issue, as encouraging people to charge their vehicles is challenging, especially in areas with terrace houses.</p>

8	<p>Trevor Brennan (TB) said that on Thursday, 17th of July, Landor Links, is co-hosting a Quality Rural Bus conference at the Fielder Centre. He asked if any board members would like to attend the session and said that they should email directly to express interest.</p> <p>Action: EEH to remind board members of the bus conference after local elections.</p> <p>The Board agreed the response to Transport for South East’s strategy consultation</p> <p>The Board noted the responses to the following consultations which have been submitted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
9	<p>Future Meeting Dates</p> <p>The Board agreed the following 2024 dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20 June 2025 (in person) - 11 July 2025 - 26 September 2025 - 5 December 2025 (in person)