

Transport East
c/o Suffolk County Council
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2BX

EEH Business Unit
c/o Buckinghamshire Council
Walton Street Offices
Walton Street
Aylesbury
HP20 1UA

Email: info@transporteast.gov.uk

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Dear Will,

Transport East Enabling Powers Consultation

England's Economic Heartland welcomes the opportunity to respond to Transport East's consultation on possible enabling powers.

As neighbouring sub-national transport bodies, there are significant economic and demographic linkages between our two areas, making the performance of our transport networks of mutual interest and importance. We have many shared characteristics, including large rural populations, a polycentric geography, high dependence on the private car, high volumes of freight and above average emissions.

We already have a strong record of working together on cross boundary issues and items of common interest. I have no doubt our strong working relationship will continue as we implement the actions within our transport strategies, share learning and adopt common approaches.

Benefits of Enabling Powers

EEH is supportive of the potential benefits identified within the consultation document. In particular, we see value in integrated regional transport strategies formed collaboratively in partnership with national agencies and local transport authorities. EEH is currently exploring whether enabling powers, functions or statutory status would allow us to better deliver our regional transport strategy.

Proposed Enabling Powers

The General Functions underpin the work of Transport East and other sub-national transport bodies. The Secretary of State for Transport taking regard of the regional transport strategy provides a 'golden-thread' between local democratic decision making, the performance and prioritisation of investment on our country's national networks (road, rail and public transport) and Government policy making.

EEH is supportive of Transport East's proposals to have a defined coordination role in supporting rail specification and investment decision making, primarily as part of our existing arrangement through the Wider South East Rail Partnership. This will enable better integration of new/amended services and new infrastructure and will also recognise the connectivity demands to/from London in our respective regions.

EEH is supportive of Transport East's proposal to have a defined role in strategic road decision making and investment processes impacting the Strategic Road Network and the Major Road Network. We agree that there could be a potential role for ORR to ensure National Highways have taken appropriate consideration of regional transport priorities. However, the rights for construction and acquisition of land may need to be caveated if it is decided to pursue these – for example, making the power joint with the Secretary of State or concurrent with the local authority. EEH's view is that any powers must retain the sovereignty of combined or local transport authorities and this is not explicit in the current wording.

EEH would be very supportive of sub-national transport bodies having the ability to hold, make and receive capital grant funding. We would not want to see this limited to public transport facilities only and would like to see this extended to include the ability to receive capital grant money to develop business cases for major infrastructure schemes, where we have the support of our combined and local authorities to do so. This would be transformational for the role of the sub-national transport body in supporting the delivery and acceleration of schemes in our respective region.

EEH is supportive of Transport East's proposals to deliver specific strategic or cross-boundary bus or passenger transport services within an integrated network, as agreed by their Board. We recognise that there is an opportunity with the Better Buses Bill for alternative thinking around bus service delivery, and there could be, where determined by the Board, a role for sub-national transport bodies in this, particularly in large regional areas with low demand.

Other functions of an STB

EEH would like to see a recognised role for sub-national transport bodies in the early planning and development of significant infrastructure with strategic transport implications including Nationally Strategic Infrastructure Projects and strategic transport infrastructure. This would enable integrated transport solutions to be designed in to new infrastructure projects from the outset, rather than retrofitting. This could be further extended to give a supporting or advisory role in planning for other infrastructure and utilities, such as energy.

In line with our desire for the Secretary of State to "have regard" to the regional transport strategy, this should be extended to all relevant executive agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies, such as Active Travel England. A core part of this would be the provision of a rationale by the relevant body where policy, investment decisions or capacity allocations run counter to the regional transport strategy.

Best wishes,

ClIrr Liz Leffman

Chair, England's Economic Heartland

