

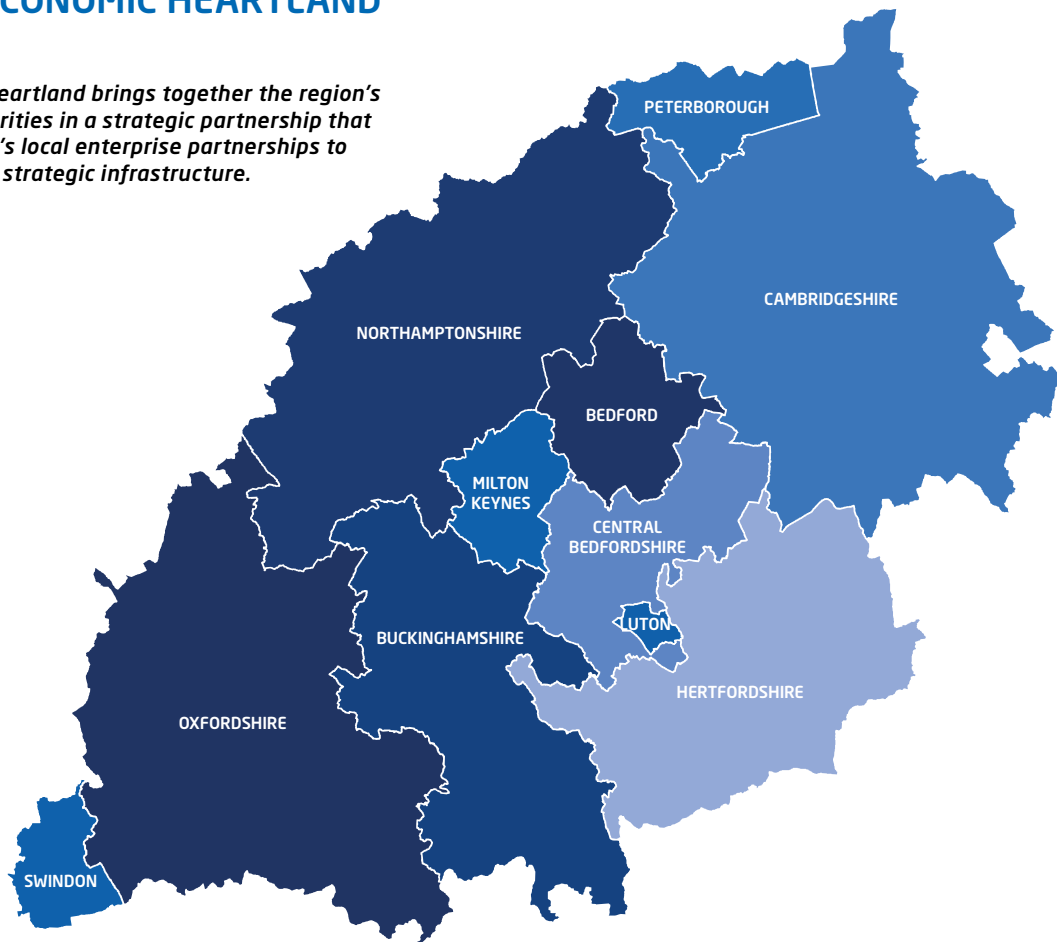
## Annual Report 2019-20





## ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND

*England's Economic Heartland brings together the region's Local Transport Authorities in a strategic partnership that works with the region's local enterprise partnerships to provide leadership on strategic infrastructure.*



England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is a strategic collaborative partnership, one in which the partners choose to come together in a shared endeavour: to realise the economic potential of the region and to do so in a way that delivers net environmental gain.

Our membership stretches from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire, and from Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire. Founded in autumn 2014, our initiative was in response to our understanding that:

- Strategic infrastructure issues (and solutions) extend beyond any one single area
- Issues that are common to one or more areas can benefit from a co-ordinated response
- Need for stronger integration of investment by Government, its agencies, local authorities, as well as infrastructure and service providers.

These guiding principles continue to underpin our work as EEH and reflect our commitment to harness the benefit of collaborative working to unlock added value that benefits our communities, residents and businesses.

Central to the work of EEH is our understanding that a modern economy requires consideration of strategic infrastructure in the round; that any consideration of strategic transport infrastructure also requires consideration of digital infrastructure, and indeed of power supplies.

Through EEH we are able to convene discussions on issues of regional significance and to do so in a way that addresses the need to look beyond traditional silos. It allows us to focus on the need to improve connectivity – both physical and digital – as a means of delivering long-term sustainable growth.

## COVID-19 - Responding to the Pandemic

We moved the work of EEH to a virtual operation on 17th March in response to the advice issued by the Government in respect of social distancing.

Our executive support has been working from home and has been able to maintain the momentum associated with our programme of work. All of our meetings are being held virtually and we are looking at incorporating our experience during this time to effect permanent changes to the way in which we operate moving forward.

Right from the start of our work on the regional Transport Strategy we set out that the future of our transport system could not be 'business as usual'; that the rise in e-commerce and changes to the way in which businesses deliver services is changing both the need to travel, and the nature of travel demand.

The pandemic has highlighted the potential to effect significant and potentially profound changes to the way in which we connect people and places with opportunities and services. As a centre for science and technology-based innovation, our region is at the forefront of harnessing the opportunities that arise from those changes to the benefit of our residents and businesses.

## OXFORD - CAMBRIDGE ARC

The Arc has been identified by the Government as being a national economic priority. Just as with the work of EEH, the initiative recognises the added value of bringing together the strengths of individual areas in order to achieve an ambitious agenda.

As EEH we provide leadership on strategic infrastructure in support of the Arc initiative through the connectivity work stream, working closely with the other Arc related work streams to ensure that our activity is aligned to our shared ambition.

The critical importance of strategic infrastructure linkages beyond the immediate Arc area was set out in the report of the National Infrastructure Commission. The wider geography of EEH, incorporating Hertfordshire and Swindon, ensures that those wider linkages are properly considered to the benefit of the Arc initiative.

## OUR GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

### Political and Business Leadership

Our political and business leaders meet on a quarterly basis as the EEH Leaders group. Partners are represented by either their elected political leader or LEP chairman, supported by a senior official from within their executive.

As of March 2020, the Chair of the Leaders' Group is Cllr Martin Tett (Buckinghamshire Council), Deputy Chair is Cllr James Jamieson (Central Bedfordshire Council).

As the group with overall accountability for the work of EEH, the Leaders meeting is responsible for:

- Agreeing the annual budget, including local contributions
- Agreeing the Business Plan for the year ahead, set within a 3-year medium term financial plan
- Determining the focus of, and overall work programme for, the EEH partnership
- Being accountable for expenditure undertaken by the EEH partnership
- Maintaining and monitoring the strategic risk register.

Senior representatives from Government attend our meetings as observers.

### Strategic Transport Forum

The Strategic Transport Forum was established by the Leaders Group in February 2016. Chaired by Mayor Dave Hodgson (Bedford Borough Council), the Forum is the focus for our work on the Transport Strategy, including:

- Preparing, publishing and maintaining the Regional Evidence Base upon which the Transport Strategy is prepared
- Preparing, publishing and implementing the Transport Strategy for the region
- Publishing the investment pipeline that flows from the Transport Strategy
- Taking forward, in collaboration with partners, the programme of connectivity studies through which future investment requirements will be identified
- Prioritising regional investment requirements with a view to securing funding for delivery of detailed proposals

- Ensuring the investment programmes of national agencies and infrastructure owners reflect agreed regional priorities
- Monitoring implementation of the Transport Strategy, and undertaking reviews as appropriate.

Our Forum meets on an at least quarterly basis with partners represented by either their portfolio holder (in the case of local authorities) or board member (in the case of local enterprise partnerships), supported by senior officials from within their executives.

### Executive and Officer Support

Led by the Programme Director (Martin Tugwell), the EEH Business Unit exists to provide the capacity and capability we require to take forward our ambitious programme of work. A dedicated team, hosted by Buckinghamshire Council (as our Accountable Body), the Unit works closely with all of our partners to deliver that programme and support activity at the local level where that brings added value.

As of March 2020 the Business Unit had a complement of eight staff, with one vacancy. Two-thirds of staff are on secondment from our partners. This reflects our commitment to both provide opportunities for professional development, and retain as much of the knowledge and experience accumulated through our work for the longer term benefit of the region and its partners. We supplement the capability of the Unit through the use of commissions with specialist consultants where this is required to deliver our programme.

Working closely with the EEH Business Unit, the Transport Officers Group brings together representatives from all of our partners to provide technical support and advice on work of the Strategic Transport Forum. Chaired by Laura Church (Luton Borough Council), the Officer Group has played a key role throughout the development of the Transport Strategy, including forming steering groups to oversee commissioned pieces of work.

## EXTENDED COLLABORATIVE WORKING

EEH was established to realise the added value accrued through collaborative working on issues of regional significance: a philosophy that is embedded throughout our work and reflected in our on-going partnerships with a number of other groupings.

### East West Rail Consortium

Established in 1995 by local authorities right across southern central England, the Consortium continues to be the champion for East West Rail: a project that will deliver a step-change in east-west connectivity by linking Ipswich and Norwich, with Cambridge, Bedford, Milton Keynes, Oxford, and beyond that towards Swindon and onwards to Bristol and South Wales.

Given the significance of East West Rail to the Heartland the EEH Business Unit continues to provide the secretariat function supporting the Consortium, working with local authority and local enterprise partnerships across both the Heartland and Transport East regions.

### Delivery Partners

Right from the start the EEH Leaders recognised that the partnership represented the opportunity to harness the knowledge and experience that resides within the private sector companies providing consultancy and professional services to each of us. The resulting 'Delivery Partners' group has been part of our extended network of collaborative working arrangements.

Working closely with the EEH Business Unit, the group enables our work to be shaped by their understanding of how strategy shapes the development of detailed proposals and influences their delivery on the ground. It also provides a means by which the Unit can gain access to additional technical skills when these are required to support our programme of work.

## EEH Bus Operators Association

Established in 2018, the Association brings our bus operators together into a Forum that enables the EEH Business Unit to engage the sector on issues of strategic importance. With the sector a key part of our transport system, albeit one that continues to face significant challenges, the Association brings added value in ensuring that our work is shaped to help the sector realise its full potential. The significance of this relationship is reflected by the Association having a seat on the Strategic Transport Forum.

## National Agencies

The rail sector is at the heart of our transport system, and the delivery of East West Rail and the release of capacity on the classic rail network arising from HS2 are significant opportunities to harness the power of rail investment to act as a catalyst for transformative change. Our close working relationship with Network Rail (System Operator) enables us to align their long term strategic planning work with our role as the Sub-national Transport Body for the region. In a similar vein, our relationship with Highways England's Strategic Planning Team enables us to align our activity on the Major Road Network with their activity on the Strategic Road Network

## England's Sub-national Transport Bodies

As one of the seven English Sub-national Transport Bodies, we work closely with colleagues across the country, sharing knowledge and experience, and working together on issues that are of common interest to all of us.

## OUR FUNDING

Local contributions in support of the work of EEH are set by our Leaders' group as part of the Business Planning process: for 2019/20 these were:

County Council	£50,000 per authority
Unitary Council	£30,000 per authority
Other Partners	£30,000 per partner

In recognition of our role as a Sub-national Transport Body, our local contributions are supplemented by funding from the Department for Transport. Funding from the DfT has enabled us to make steady progress with the development of our Transport Strategy.

In July 2019 the Department confirmed funding of £500,000 for 2019/20 to enable us to:

- Prioritise transport projects in the region by developing (our) core Transport Strategy
- Maintain and further develop (our) regional evidence base
- Develop a proposal to create a central pool of expertise for scheme development
- Carry out a technical assessment of how to maximise leverage from East West Rail by creating a series of 'public transport hubs'.

In discussion with the Department we agreed that the funding would be used to enable a number of specific pieces of work set out in our Business Plan for the year:

- In support of the development of our Transport Strategy we would use the funding to commission work to develop our approach to improving First Mile/Last Mile connectivity, and in developing our proposals for measures/indicators of success for the Strategy
- In support of our Regional Evidence Base we would ensure that the database continued to be updated on an annual basis for the next 3 years to the benefit of our partners both locally and nationally, as well as supporting work on our regional policy scenario model
- In support of identifying and prioritising transport projects we would use the funding to prepare the region's submission for our first 5-year programme of investment in the Major Road Network, and commission specialist supports to develop our proposal for an investment strategy that support delivery of the Transport Strategy
- In support of the concept of developing a central pool of expertise, working with our partners we would commission specialist support to identify the key issues and develop a proposal that addresses them.

Throughout the year we have used our collaboration with the East West Rail Consortium, and with the EWR Company to take forward work in support of helping ensure we maximise the benefit of the investment in East West Rail.



## OUR WORK PROGRAMME

### Transport Strategy

Our key focus throughout the year was the need to maintain momentum with the development of the Draft Transport Strategy, and this we have done, although our ability to commission work was at times dependent upon the timing of funds being made available from the Department.

Right from the start it was clear to us that if we were to achieve our strategic ambition of realising the economic potential of the region and to do so in a way that delivered net environmental gain, we would need a new approach to the way we plan for and implement our transport needs: it could not be 'business as usual'. Not underestimating the nature or scale of the challenge facing us we determined that an early engagement with our communities, our residents and businesses was essential.

So it was that on 16th July 2019 we published our Outline Transport Strategy, through which we began that engagement. A genuinely open-ended conversation, the Outline Transport Strategy presented the nature of the challenge facing our region's transport system and sought views from our communities, residents and businesses as to what they considered the key issues for our Transport Strategy to be.

Over the ensuing 15 week period we undertook over 35 engagement events across the region working with our partners to gain insight and perspective that has been used to shape the detail of our Draft Transport Strategy. It was clear from the 100+ detailed responses that we received that there was an appetite for change and an understanding that the inherent strengths of the Heartland created opportunities to effect change at pace.

We used the output from the engagement on the Outline Transport Strategy to refine the vision and key principles for our Draft Transport Strategy. Over the second half of the year the EEH Business Unit has brought the output from our technical studies and that from the engagement together to develop the detailed narrative of the Strategy.

Pulling this all together into the Draft Transport Strategy in the final quarter of 2019/20 enabled us to begin the process of securing the support of firstly the Transport Officer Group and subsequently our Strategic Transport Forum. We remain on track to publish our Draft Transport Strategy for formal consultation in July 2020, and to finalise the Strategy by the end of 2020.

### Regional Evidence Base

Maintaining and developing the Regional Evidence Base that supports our work has been a key activity throughout the year. Our approach continues to be one where the Regional Evidence Base is always available to our partners (both within the region and nationally) at no additional cost. A key requirement when building the database and the policy scenario model was to ensure that they can both be used without the need for specialist knowledge or skills.

As of March 2020 the Regional Evidence Base comprises:

- **GIS-based databank** – containing up to date information on known plans for growth (economic and housing); the databank is update annually using information supplied by local planning authorities and local enterprise partnerships; the most recent update was completed in December 2019



- **Policy Scenario Model** – an agent-based regional model that is used to assess the relative implications of alternative scenarios. The model has the ability to consider both alternative development scenarios (scale and distribution of future growth) and alternative policy scenarios. Its back casting ability enables the interventions required to achieve a particular outcome to be explored. The most recent version of the model was delivered in February 2020 and is now available to our partners
- **Population Segmentation** – part of the output from our work linked with the First Mile/Last Mile project, this provides insight into the behaviours of the region's residents in a way that complements the Strategy's user-centred focus. A recent addition has been to use the information to power a cloud-based tool that our partners can use to explore the implications of different scenarios at the local level
- **Pathway to Decarbonisation** – we have made use of the National Infrastructure Systems Model (NISMOD) to identify the implications of alternative pathways and used that to inform our approach to decarbonising our transport system.

We have used the Regional Evidence Base to identify opportunities arising from planned growth across the Heartland, and used that to inform the development of the Draft Transport Strategy and its associated investment pipeline.

As a key partner in our work, we continue to provide Government and its agencies with access to the Regional Evidence Base: having a single, consistent version of what is planned by local authorities for their area is an important building block for any subsequent conversation. We have showcased the capacity and capability of our Regional Evidence Base to MHCLG (January) and DfT (February): feedback in both instances was very positive and officials supportive of our approach.

## Integrated Sustainability Appraisal

Running in parallel with the work to develop our Draft Transport Strategy, the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA) is ensuring that our Strategy delivers on our ambition to push forward the sustainability agenda. In so doing it ensures that our Strategy meets the legislative requirements associated with our long-standing ambition to seek statutory status for our STB.

Our ISA encompasses a Strategic Environmental Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment, Community Safety Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment. Having secured consultancy support, the scoping report for the ISA was prepared and published for consultation in March 2020. Work on the ISA itself continues alongside that on the Draft Transport Strategy

Our approach ensures that the ISA is truly integrated with the development of our Draft Transport Strategy. The draft ISA will be published alongside the draft strategy in July for consultation, and finalised alongside the Transport Strategy in December 2020.

## Technical Studies Supporting the Draft Transport Strategy

Our approach to developing the Draft Transport Strategy has been to use the capacity and capability that sits within the EEH Business Unit to take the lead. Consultancy support has only been sought where specialist advice has been required: this has required a discrete number of commissions to be placed over the year under review in its preparation.

- **Freight and Logistics** – commissioned in the latter half of 2018/19, the output from this study was published in July 2019 alongside the Outline Transport Strategy. Our collaborative approach to this work enabled it to be aligned with the work of the National Infrastructure Commission with both pieces of work benefiting as a consequence. This work was co-commissioned with the East West Rail Consortium who part funded the work
- **First Mile/Last Mile** – a two part piece of work: the first part comprising a ground-breaking analysis of Experian's MOSAIC dataset which allowed us to segment the region's population according to existing behaviours and spending patterns. This analysis in turn led to the development of a cloud-based tool that enables the user to explore the implications of alternative travel choices at the local level: the tool was trialled by two of our partners in support of proposals being considered for funding. The second part comprised a review of world best-practice and experience that forms the basis of a tool-kit that enables individual partners to develop detailed proposals



- **Outcome Measures/Indicators** – recognising the importance of having outcome measures against which implementation of our Transport Strategy can be monitored, this commission developed an initial set of proposals upon which we have subsequently built and which will be set out as part of the draft Transport Strategy
- **Rail Passenger Study** – commissioned from Network Rail (System Operator) and delivered by them as part of the core strategic planning function, the first phase of this work delivered us a baseline of existing rail services. The output – which will be published alongside the Draft Transport Strategy – will provide us with a detailed understanding of the potential for rail to offer an attractive alternative to the private car. We are already working with some of our partners to advise on how investment in rail infrastructure might shape their thinking on future land use planning through their Local Plan. Phase two to the study will be taken forward in collaboration with Network Rail and our partners as part of our 2020/21 work programme.

## Prioritisation of Investment

In July 2019 we responded to the request from the DfT for Sub-national Transport Bodies to take the lead in preparing the initial 5-year programme of investment in our Major Road Network, including Large Local Majors.

Our approach was to work with our partners to identify a long-list of potential schemes: given the requirement to only consider those schemes capable of being delivered before 2025 this list was comparatively short. With the support of specialist advice from our delivery partners we developed a multi-criteria assessment framework that enabled each of the schemes to be considered for inclusion in our programme of investment.



We continued to draw on the support available from our delivery partners to ensure that each scheme was subject to an independent review that was grounded in the framework of our Outline Transport Strategy.

Our initial 5-year programme was submitted to the Department in July. We continue to support each of our partners as they develop the detail of their proposals, and continue to work with the Department to ensure our 5-year programme moves forward into implementation.

## Connectivity Studies

Moving forward, we will use our programme of connectivity studies as the means by which we will work with our partners to identify the infrastructure required to support the delivery of planned growth. The output from these studies will feed into our investment pipeline.

In the second half of the year we used the output from the opportunities mapping together with the responses to our Outline Transport Strategy to develop the programme of connectivity studies. Building on our experience with the Major Road Network submission, the detail of the study programme was developed using a multi-criteria assessment framework and will be published alongside our draft Transport Strategy in July.

## East West Main Line

Our role as EEH in supporting the work of the East West Rail Consortium (and more recently the EWR Co) has continued to be a key area of activity throughout the year.

In addition to co-funding the work on freight and logistics, this partnership has also seen both groups part fund the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study, the first phase of which reported in January 2020 and the outputs of which have been used to shape our investment pipeline.

Throughout the year we have worked with the EWR Co as they consider and then determined the preferred route for the Central Section, and we have continued to work with the EWR Alliance as they take forward the delivery of the Western Section. In the latter role we have continued to collate information relating to 'work-in-kind': a mechanism for capturing the value of work undertaken by the partners to enable delivery of the Western Section.

As the EWR Co has developed its customer-led vision for East West Rail, we have used this as the opportunity to align our work on First Mile/Last Mile with theirs thereby enabling us to lay the foundations for East West Rail stations to act as public transport hubs.

In the final quarter of the year we have worked closely with DfT, Network Rail and EWR Co to make the case for delivering the Western Section with fibre connectivity to the benefit not only of the railway but the surrounding communities. In the absence of funding being available from Government, we have used our role to facilitate a discussion that would potentially see this funded by the partners along the Western Section through the 'work-in-kind' mechanism.

### Centre of Excellence: Technical and Professional Capacity and Capability

Addressing the barriers to implementation of a regional strategy, and in particular those that impact on our ability to develop and then deliver schemes of strategic significance, has always been of keen interest to EEH.

We secured specialist support that enabled us to review the sector's current processes, and building on the practical experience of our partners, enabled us to identify the key risks to the efficient and cost-effective scheme development. Having identified and defined the nature of the problem, the second stage of this work focused on identifying solutions and business models that will enable those solutions to be implemented.

The outcome of this work has reinforced our experience with the development of the first 5-year investment programme for the Major Road Network, in particular:

- The lack of technical and professional capacity within the 'client side' to oversee the work required to develop scheme proposals
- The lack of access to specialist experience that would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of that work.

Building on the outcome of this work, we are finalising the business case for establishing a 'centre of excellence' – initially as a pilot – in 2020/21. The key features of this team will be:

- A (small) dedicated team comprising specialist technical and professional skills upon which all partners are able to draw to support the development of detailed scheme proposals
- Enabling partners will have access to specialist skills without the need to carry them as overheads within their own structures, nor without having to secure access to those skills at commercial rates from external sources
- As a regional centre of excellence the team will accumulate knowledge and experience that is then retained within the region and to the collective benefit of partners.

The initial focus for the 'centre of excellence' will be to support those partners taking forward proposals included in our Major Road Network/Large Local Major programme, together with proposals included in the investment pipeline.

### Our Other Activity

As a Sub-national Transport Body we have continued to engage throughout the year on issues that are of strategic importance to the Heartland, including:

- **East Midlands train franchise** – having previously identified the region's ambition for the new franchise, we continued to work with the prospective bidders, and subsequently the new operator to make the case in support of that ambition
- **West Coast Main Line** – we have continued to work with Network Rail and other partners to ensure our expectations for the reallocation of capacity on the West Coast Main Line following the opening of HS2 are realised
- **Rail Connectivity with West/East Midlands** – we continue to work with Midlands Connect and Network Rail (meeting on a quarterly basis) to progress proposals that will improve rail connectivity between the two regions
- **Network Rail Shared Value Policy** – responding to a concern raised by a number of partners regarding the application of Network Rail's Shared Value Policy was acting as a barrier to planned development being delivered. We used our ability to convene a meeting involving all the relevant parties we worked with DfT and NR to establish that the policy was being applied incorrectly. This led to the preparation of revised guidance to be issued concerning the policy

- **A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet** – a regional priority and a scheme included in the Road Investment Strategy, we have been an active member of the Senior Stakeholder Board convened by Highways England. We have worked with HE to shape the brief for a bespoke piece of work that will consider whether there is scope for HE to secure local contributions towards the cost of the scheme. Our input helped ensure that any work commissioned properly considers the wider issues relating to the funding of public services in the local area
- **The Expressway** – we engaged with DfT throughout the year on their proposal for an ‘expressway’ between Oxford and Milton Keynes. We set out the case for reconsidering the proposal within the context of our work on the draft Transport Strategy, noting that as conceived it would be inconsistent with the long term strategic direction for our transport system. Subsequent to the Government’s decision to ‘pause’ the scheme we have sought to set out to the DfT an alternative approach to ensuring the infrastructure requirements of this part of our region are identified and taken forward into delivery
- **Transport for Counties** – together with the DfT and Hertfordshire County Council we have supported this programme of seminars organised by the University of Hertfordshire. With its focus on the importance (and challenges) of improving connectivity in rural/semi-urban areas the focus of the seminars is directly relevant to the Heartland.

## COMMUNICATIONS/ENGAGEMENT

Our approach as EEH is to be open and transparent in our work. All papers relating to the Strategic Transport Forum are public documents, and meetings of the Forum are open to members of the public to attend. This year we introduced a slot on the agenda of each meeting whereby members of the public are able to address the Forum on matters of concern relating to its programme of work.

We have continued to develop the functionality of our website to improve the user experience, and regular email newsletters have helped raise awareness and increase engagement by our partners and stakeholders.


Our 3rd Annual Conference was held on 16th July at the University of Hertfordshire and we used this as the opportunity to publish our Outline Transport Strategy. Feedback from the conference was extremely positive and highly complimentary about the work of EEH and the way we were approaching the development of our Transport Strategy.

In anticipation of an autumn Spending Review we organised bespoke roundtables at each of the three main party conferences in the autumn. Although beneficial in raising the profile of EEH, moving forward we are going to seek alternative ways of engaging with our Westminster politicians.

The switch to virtual operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled us to maintain momentum with our programme of work. Engagement by our partners in virtual meetings has been extremely positive and we are looking to see how we might embed the use of virtual meetings as part of our ways of working moving forward.




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