

# England's Economic Heartland Bus Symposium 2024

Delivering Better Buses



# Introduction

Buses form the backbone of public transport in our region. They are a vital part of the transport system for many people, and they have potential to grow their role to support wider economic and social ambitions.

Over the last 18 months, EEH has developed a range of tools, guidance, route concepts and models to support transport authorities. This includes our 'bus funding bid booster' and the establishment of the 'bus forum' which encourages collaboration and the sharing of good practice between authorities and operators in the region.

EEH's work has earned it recognition within the Department for Transport as being a leading voice on developing bus solutions, particularly in non-metropolitan areas.

In September 2023 we held our first Bus Symposium in Luton, which successfully brought together Board members, operators, senior officers and national experts. From this event, a 'statement of intent' highlighting action areas for EEH's work during 2023/24 was agreed:

- **'Total Transport':** Exploring ways of commissioning public sector funded transport so that passengers get a better service with less duplication of resources.
- **Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) support:** Supporting our local and combined authorities with their BSIP refresh, including strengthening the evidence for investment.
- **Delivery and network models:** Providing expert advice on both bus delivery (for example, enhanced partnerships and franchising) and bus network models, including the production of a conceptual regional bus network.
- **Improving journey planning and integration:** This includes ticketing, roll out of mobility hubs, and using East West Rail as a catalyst for improving 'door-to-door' local transport connectivity.

This brochure highlights the results of this work and suggests potential next steps which will be considered by this Symposium and Board members.



Through the work of the past year, it has become even clearer that, due to our large number of relatively small urban areas (when compared to metropolitan areas found elsewhere in the country), a highly significant opportunity for market growth lies in improving connectivity between our towns and cities.

This makes EEH's regional role, working across traditional boundaries, particularly important moving forwards.

## Our bus strategy sets the regional ambition for buses:

- More frequent and reliable services.
- Better journey planning and integration with other modes.
- Improvements to fares and ticketing.
- Higher specification buses.
- Improvements to passenger engagement.
- Ensuring bus supports wider decarbonisation of the transport network.

## Contents

Introduction	2
A busy year for buses...	3
What the data says...	4
The economic impact of local bus services	6
Steps towards 'Total Transport'	8
Delivering BSIP Improvements	10
Models and networks	12
The Heartbeat Network	15
Integration	18





**The new government's franchising plans were announced in Peterborough, where the Secretary State shared a bus journey with Mayor Dr Nik Johnson, Deputy Mayor Anna Smith and Peterborough MP Andrew Pakes**

## A busy year for buses...

In the 13 or so months since the 2023 symposium, there have been several developments related to buses. This included, under the previous government, the extension of the £2 fare cap and the bus service improvement plan refresh.

Following the General Election, the new Secretary of State, Louise Haigh set out her five strategic priorities for transport, which includes 'improving bus services and growing usage across the country'.

The new Government's five-point plan for buses is:

- Allowing every community to take back control of their buses by removing barriers that currently limit bus franchising powers only to metro mayors.
- Accelerating the bus franchising process by supporting local leaders to deliver better buses, faster.
- Supporting public ownership by removing the ban on publicly owned bus companies and building on the success of award-winning public bus services still in operation.
- Stepping in to safeguard local bus networks by providing more accountability over bus operators and ensuring standards are raised wherever you live across the country.
- Empowering local transport authorities and reforming funding by giving local leaders more control and flexibility over bus funding and allowing them to plan ahead to deliver their local transport priorities.

The Government says these measures 'will give local leaders the tools they need to deliver better bus networks, at pace, reflecting the needs of the local communities that rely on them'.

In September the Buses Bill, which would expand franchising powers and lift the ban on public ownership, was laid in Parliament.

EEH's response to the corresponding consultation on updating franchising policy:

- Welcomed the ability for all authorities to be able to franchise, should they wish.
- Called for authorities to be given appropriate levels of funding to make franchising work in their areas.
- Stated that some local authorities, particularly in a region such as EEH with relatively small cities, market towns and large rural populations, may find it challenging to make the case for franchising.
- Urged Government to strengthen their support for enhanced partnerships for those authorities which do not wish to pursue franchising.
- Championed the concept of 'shadow franchising', a 'light touch' model which would enable authorities to trial the viability of franchising without full long-term commitment.

## What the data says...

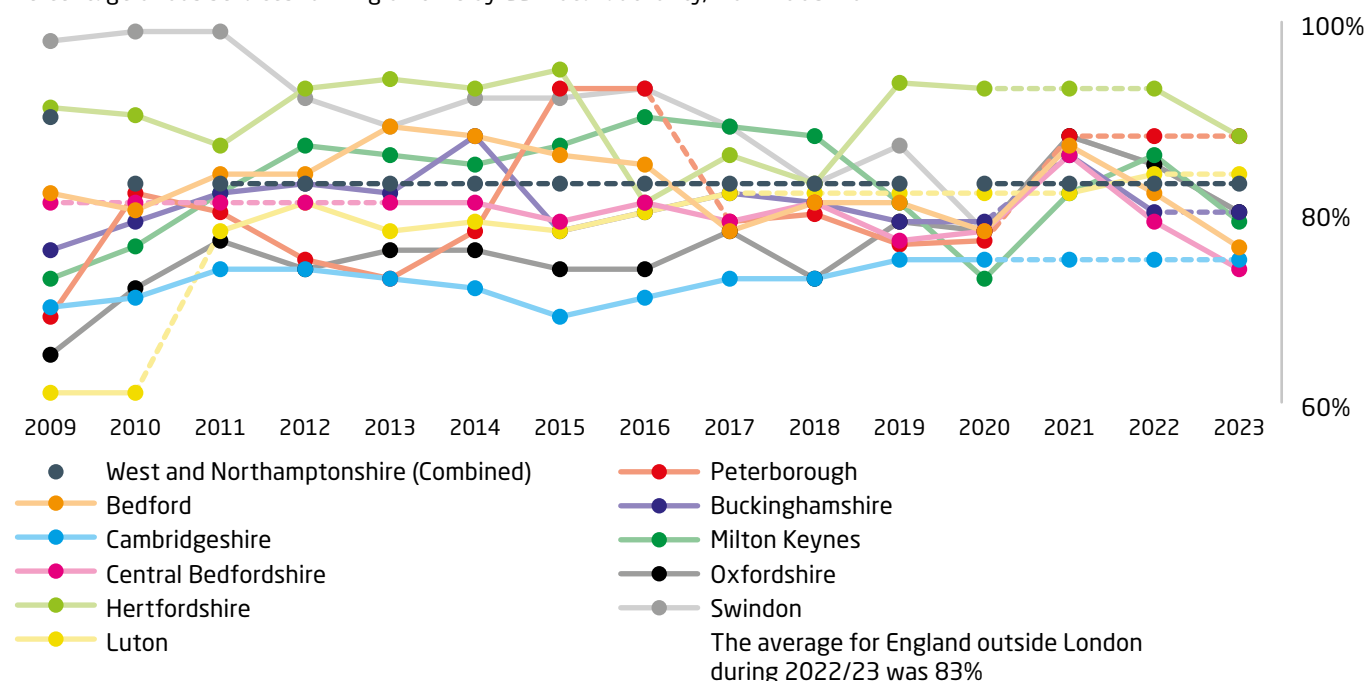
In 2023, there were over 130 million miles of passenger journeys being made by local buses in the EEH region, this patronage figure is up by almost 25 million miles from the previous year, with the largest increases being seen in Oxfordshire (8.1 million miles), Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (5.8 million miles), Hertfordshire (3.3 million miles), 'North and West Northamptonshire' (combined 1.6 million miles) and Luton (1.4 million miles) areas. It is of note that the successes generally correlate with BSIP funding allocations: Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire and Luton received original BSIP funding of between £12 and £29 million each (CPCA received £2.3m in the BSIP-plus round).

Although bus passenger journeys declined steeply during the pandemic, the EEH region has experienced growth in patronage numbers in 2023 to about 80% of pre-COVID levels.

In terms of bus services running on time, there has been a very small average decline from the previous year of about 3%, to around 81% across the EEH region (the average for England outside London during the same timeframe was about 83%). No authorities within EEH saw improved reliability, though in five authorities' reliability remained the same.

### Reliability

Percentage of bus services running on time by EEH local authority, from 2009/10



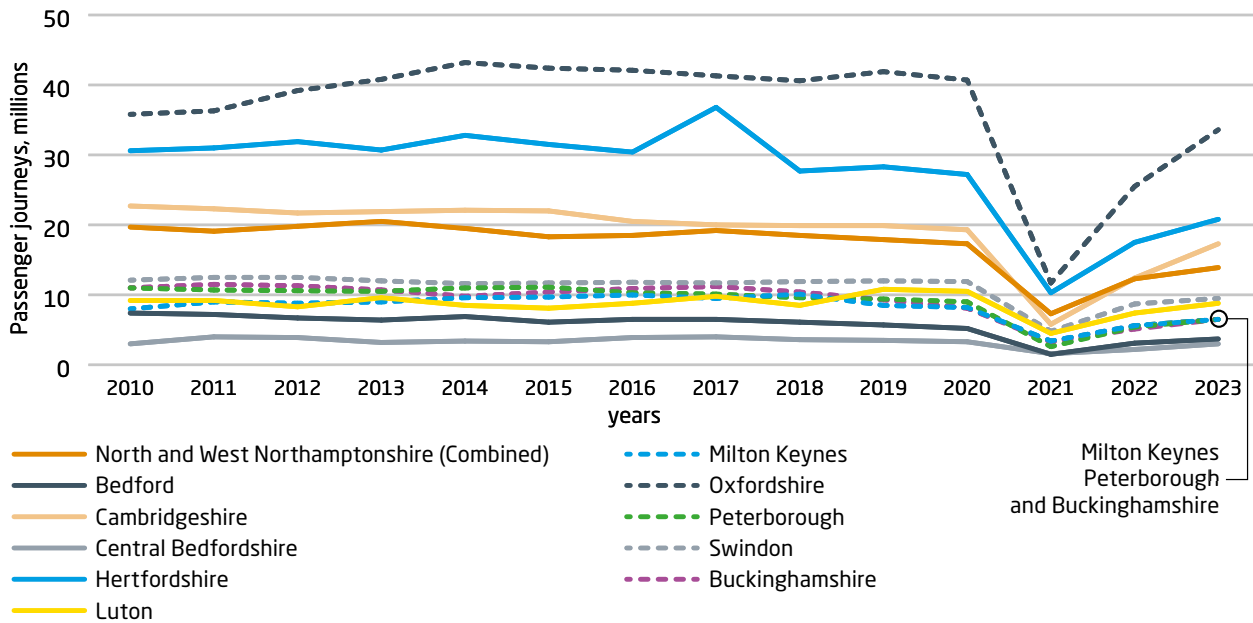
The average reliability for buses across the EEH region during 2022/23 was 81%, as compared to England outside London of 83%.

The percentage of 'non frequent' bus services running on time (as defined by DfT as no more than six minutes late, where services are less than six buses per hour) by local authority within the EEH region.

Please note: Data for some authorities may be unavailable or not yet published, where it is missing for individual or consecutive years, this is indicated by a dotted line.

## Patronage

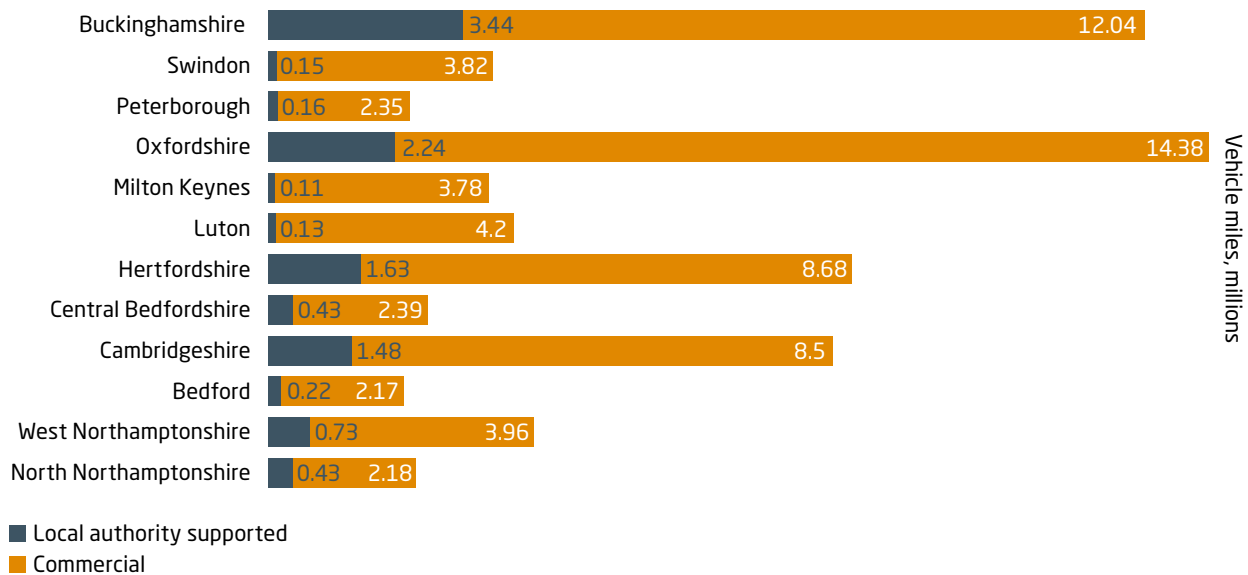
Passenger journeys (millions) by EEH local authority areas, since 2009/10



Patronage declined steeply during the pandemic – with some areas losing over 70 % of passenger's journeys – more recently, journeys on average have seen an upward trend to about 80 % (with some areas seeing over 90 %) return to pre – pandemic levels of patronage.

## Funding

Vehicle miles on local bus services by local authority, and service type (millions) – 2022/23



A breakdown of local bus services by EEH local authority and service type (local authority supported and commercial funded) for 2022/23

There were 84 million miles of bus journeys in EEH region during 2022/23, on average 88 % were funded commercially and 12% supported by the local authority. With Luton having the lowest proportion of supported services at 3 % and Buckinghamshire having the highest at 22 %. In England as a whole (outside of London) 87% of services are funded commercially and 13 % are supported by local authority.

# The economic impact of local bus services

---

**In September 2024, the Confederation of Passenger Transport published new independent research that sought to quantify the huge scale and breadth of economic benefits delivered by local bus services to the British economy.**

This research highlights how local bus services support every aspect of our lives – boosting local economies, connecting communities, improving health, protecting our environment and providing exception value for money from public investment.

The Economic Impact of Local Bus Services shows:

- Bus operators directly employ 105,000 people and support employment of a further 53,000 in the sector's supply chain – which provides an £11 billion annual boost to the British economy.
- Bus services deliver far more economic benefits than this, with the millions of people who use buses every day spending £1 in every £10 spent on the High Street – contributing a total of almost £40 billion every year to local economies.
- Bus commuters (that number over 2 million every day) earn £72 billion a year and pay taxes of £15 billion.
- In the East of England and South East regions passenger benefits generate £1.66 and £2.76 billion per year respectively at their destinations (from wages, taxes, and spending on services or shopping).
- Using the bus also generates a wide range of health and wellbeing improvements for both passengers and local communities with a combined economic impact of £15.6 billion. This includes access to jobs, education and training worth £8.7 billion, health benefits worth £2.8 billion, support for volunteer work valued at over £1 billion, and a reduction in congestion worth £600 million per year.

Over and above all of those findings, the research also confirms the value of public spending to improve bus services:

- Taking a selection of typical investments including alterations that give buses priority over other traffic on the roads, higher service frequencies, and lower fares, researchers calculate that every £1 of public funding spent on a typical package of measures can generate at least £4.55 in economic benefits. Moreover, that figure rises to over £5 for more targeted interventions such as bus priority measures.
- In addition, the research places a figure of £3.5 billion per year on the economic value of the bus network for people who don't actually use the bus, but want or need the option to be available.

The research is intended to inform debate and decisions made at a national and regional level about investment in better services and infrastructure. It sets the case for why improving bus services is a 'no regrets' investment.

A parallel piece of research completed in a similar way and over the same period has evaluated the economic impact of coach services. The results of this research will be published on October 17.

## About the research

CPT commissioned KPMG UK to produce this research between May and August 2024. In addition to an economic analysis built from multiple sources of publicly available data, an engagement phase of research was undertaken with a range of key stakeholders across England, Wales, and Scotland.

## Next steps:

EEH will review comparable data for the region, helping to set a compelling case for investing in buses as a core part of this Government's spending review to 2028.



**£1 IN EVERY £10 SPENT  
ON THE GB HIGH STREET,  
NEARLY £40bn PER  
YEAR, IS SPENT BY  
BUS PASSENGERS**

 **£17.3bn**  
SHOPPING

 **£9bn**  
COMMUTERS

Plan for buses –  
a strong bus  
network drives  
economic growth

 **£12.9bn**  
LEISURE



## **3 WAYS** THAT BUSES DRIVE THE ECONOMY



**The bus industry  
itself**  
pays wages and  
taxes and invests  
in supply chains



**Ten million bus  
journeys a day**  
keep passengers  
connected to jobs and  
services and benefit  
the wider community



**When passengers reach  
their destination**  
they earn wages, pay  
taxes and spend on local  
services and shopping



**OVER 2.2m BUS  
COMMUTERS**

**EARN AROUND £72bn  
per year and PAY  
£15bn tax each year**



# Steps towards 'Total Transport'

---

At last year's symposium, Board members expressed a desire to explore the potential financial savings that could be found from the delivery of passenger transport services from across the health, school, and local authority transport sectors.

'Total Transport' is about finding ways of commissioning public sector funded transport so that passengers get a better service with less duplication of resources. This can include services like non-emergency patient transport, adult social care transport and home to school transport. These are all similar, provided in the same geographical area and often carrying the same passengers at different times.

Hundreds of millions of pounds are being spent annually across the EEH region every year to provide transport services. Nationally, local authority spending on special educational needs and disabilities transport (SEND) for example has reached nearly £1.4bn in England for 2023-24, a 95% rise from £728m in 2018-19, with the average annual cost of SEND school transport per child in England increasing by a third, from £6,280 to £8,299<sup>1</sup>.

EEH worked with the Better Futures Consultancy (a digital transport solutions provider) to investigate whether a 'Total Transport' approach was feasible and could offer service and cost benefits in the region while still fulfilling transport authorities' statutory requirements.

## Key Findings

The needs of over 30 different stakeholders were collated, including four local and combined authorities from within the EEH region, NHS England and operators, including bus, home-to-school, community transport and non-emergency patient transport providers. This helped us to understand and examine the root challenges of a more holistic approach to passenger transport services within the region that any potential solution would need to address.

- **Data consolidation** - the collection, and analysis of transport related data varied in maturity and quality from service to service and organisation to organisation. Access to reliable data is seen as a critical need as it informs the decisions made and higher quality data, or access to data, could enable a variety of cost saving measures to be found.
- **Process automation** - most services still carry a high degree of manual input to both plan and operate services. For example, dealing with passenger, parent/guardian or patient queries for non-emergency patient transport or adult social care transport. One stakeholder forecasted that by being able to digitise elements of their service and automate tasks such as validating and actioning payments to suppliers, providing service communications and reporting, would produce savings in the region of £850,000 over a five-year period.
- **Managing Demand** - optimising service utilisation, for some services such as SEND alternatives, could be considered to reduce overall demand such as personal travel budgets or shared travel. In one example given, simply switching one child to a personal travel budget created savings of over £28,000 per annum. For other services the opposite is true, for example local transport authorities and operators need to work together to stimulate demand or shift demand onto existing public bus services (home-to-school for example).
- **Scenario testing** - introducing new concepts or service configurations carries a high degree of risk (both for the users and organisations) and can take time to implement, due to, for example, procurement processes.

---

1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68665303>





## Challenges

Implementing a Total Transport model within the region faces several challenges and would require a combination of digital tools and organisational change. Additionally, clear leadership, cross-departmental collaboration, and revised procurement processes are essential for success.

Overcoming challenges such as siloed services, data limitations, procurement cycles, licensing complexities (such as the need for training, the need for operator licensing, or limits on driver hours) will be crucial.

Also, the legal frameworks around passenger transport do not readily lend themselves to a new 'hybrid' service such as Total Transport, which would include providing for multiple clients and multiple purposes (including local bus) in one. For example, there are restrictions around journey lengths, separate fares, Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) and concessionary fares eligibility, these would have to be addressed to the central government or by LTAs' local traffic commissioner.

However, potential benefits include cost savings, improved service efficiency, and enhanced passenger experience.

## How do we meet needs and overcome challenges to unlock opportunities?

- Develop a regional dedicated digital platform to support data collection, analysis, and modelling.
- Help to establish clear leadership, governance structures and collaboration to drive the Total Transport initiative, within different transport service providers.
- Review and revise procurement processes to align with Total Transport principles.
- Work with DfT and local Traffic Commissioner to update the existing legal framework around passenger transport services (covering bus services, taxis and private hire vehicles) to allow easier integration of services across differing clients and for multiple purposes.

## Next steps:

Through the work undertaken, the benefits of Total Transport are clear, but they are not yet being realised as several challenges remain such as organisational and legislative barriers. To help further the case for Total Transport, EEH will be working with its local transport partners to conduct pilot projects to test the approach in differing service settings. We will work with government and partners to review how the regulatory framework can best support Total Transport.

# Delivering BSIP Improvements

Our local transport authorities and partners undertook a 'refresh' of their original BSIP documents this year. This involved engaging further with bus operators and other stakeholders to update their initial plans which were submitted back in from 2021. This included reflecting on developments and changes in their local bus market and setting out what improvements have been achieved.

It should be noted that only four out of 12 authorities within the region were awarded settlements within the initial round of BSIP funding. Some of our partners have used BSIP (and the more limited BSIP-plus) funding to:

- Increase the frequency and expand bus services across the individual local authority bus networks and improve cross-border services, and evening and weekend services where possible.
- Enhance real-time passenger information (at stops and online) to provide up to date bus journey information, with actual arrival and departure times, giving the traveling public more confidence in using the bus.
- Improve ticketing offers, to include lower single fares (£1 and £2 offers) and introduce multi-operator tickets, to provide a more comprehensive and cheaper alternative to single occupancy car use.
- Deliver bus priority schemes, including traffic signals upgrades and bus stop improvements.

The refreshed BSIPs also included authorities' ambitions for 2025 and beyond. Our partners' ambitions include:

- Investment and funding certainty (both capital and revenue) with guaranteed multi-year settlement. This will ensure bus networks can be improved and become more inclusive as well as supporting bus infrastructure and better bus stop delivery, to improve the passenger experience.
- Funding to accelerate the transition to a fully decarbonised bus fleet.
- Role of buses to be embedded within planning reform, so that they can provide a seamless, integrated and sustainable transport option to support economic growth.

As part of the BSIP refresh process, EEH was able to provide support to its partners, by developing a narrative on a regional bus network concept 'The Heartbeat' (covered later in this document), in order to strengthen the case for better regional bus connectivity.

## Next steps:

The economic value of buses and the link between investment and delivery of improvements (with almost immediate returns) is clear. EEH's Spending Review submission and that of local partners should make the strongest case for significant investment in buses across the life of this Parliament.





## Case Study: How Hertfordshire used its BSIP funding

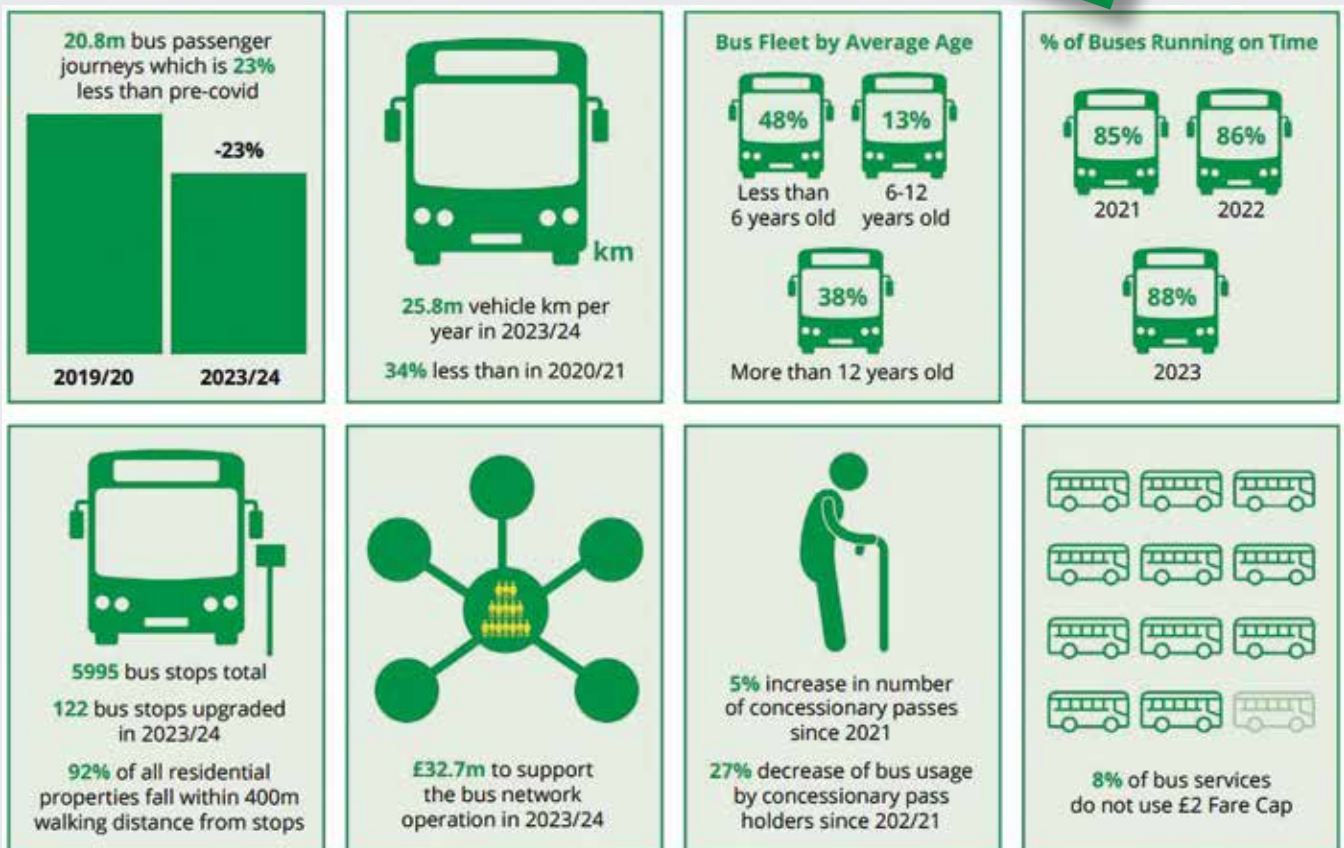
Hertfordshire County Council says its Bus Service Improvement Plan has resulted in an 18% increase year on year of residents travelling by bus since 2022.

The £29.7million funding has led to significant improvements across Hertfordshire's local bus network including new services, more frequent buses as well as the launch of new schemes such as its uber-style on demand bus service HertsLynx, which currently operates in north and east Hertfordshire and Dacorum.

The latest offer in this package of measures, is the launch of a new bus ticket type, 'Intalink Connect'. This scheme can reduce the cost of travelling by bus around the county compared to buying individual tickets for each part of a passenger's journey.

Intalink Connect tickets can be bought from £2.50 a day and £9.50 a week if bought in conjunction with a Hertfordshire SaverCard, or from £5 a day and £19 a week without. In addition, the Adult SaverCard has now had a discount offer increase

from 15% to 50% and this is available to anyone between the ages of 26 and 59. This now matches the discount available with a Young Person's SaverCard (ages 11 to 25) and Senior SaverCard (age 60+).





## Models and networks

Following the 2023 symposium, England's Economic Heartland commissioned Systra to provide expert advice on the next steps for improving bus connectivity in the region.

Systra considered a range of factors including historic and current bus usage levels, the constrained fiscal environment, and the region's geography and demographics.

They are clear that, in a region containing relatively smaller cities, market towns and a large rural population, the greatest opportunity for market growth lies in improving connectivity between towns and cities.

However, there is potential for an innovative composite solution to enhance the productivity and value of bus services in the region. Given the volume and variety of transport authorities in EEH (and given the deliberate flexibility of current legislation to allow for partial, whole, or multi-LTA application of different models), one size does not need to fit all.

A 'patchwork' approach would not necessarily be 'piecemeal'; different models could be intelligently deployed across the region to suit local circumstances and operating conditions (such as splits between urban, peri-urban and rural areas).

Their two reports (one focused on delivery models, the other on network models), includes the following recommendations. Subject to EEH Board Member comments, as next steps EEH will look to explore the below in further detail.



### Increase cross-boundary collaboration

This includes defining the extent of cross-boundary collaboration on regional/multi-LTA enhanced partnerships or franchising, both as a means of ensuring some consistency across the region and to improve the planning and operation of routes which connect destinations in two or more LTAs.

Following last year's symposium, Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and Luton local authorities increased their collaboration on bus. EEH has also set up a Regional Bus Forum to strengthen pan-regional engagement.

### Develop a regional network model

Systra considered several 'network models' and their appropriateness to our region. They concluded that a hybrid combination of two models were most appropriate: 'urban hub and spoke' to connect people into larger population centres; and inter-urban 'bus lines'.

A 'bus line' is a strategic bus or coach service that connect towns and cities at a strong frequency. These may have limited stops, perhaps acting closer to a train or tram line than a traditional local bus, and connect cities, towns, key interchanges and mobility hubs, from which easy onward connectivity into local area by local buses, demand response transport (DRT), community transport, walking, cycling and 'kiss and ride' is provided.

As part of the 'bus lines' approach, EEH has developed a conceptual 'Heartbeat' network map, which was presented to the EEH Board in July. This is explored in more detail on the next page.



## Strengthen enhanced partnerships through requesting delegation of registration powers

Under an EP, the Traffic Commissioner (TC) may delegate powers concerning service registrations to the LTA itself. The LTA would manage the process for registering, varying, or cancelling services. Compliance with the terms of an EP becomes a condition of registration, with the LTA empowered to refuse new applications or cancel existing registrations. The TC would retain the powers of regulation, enforcement, and appeal. So far, only three LTAs have been delegated by a TC to carry out the registration functions in their area – including Hertfordshire.

## Investigate concept of ‘shadow franchising’

A ‘shadow’ franchise would (in the first instance) significantly reduce transitional costs by skipping a competitive tendering process as it would automatically ‘convert’ existing commercial operators into franchise contractors. The network would continue to operate ‘as normal’ (albeit with the LTA assuming a regulatory enforcement role).

It would give the LTA time to assess its own commitments, ensuring that it has sufficient resources (and familiarity) to manage a full process in future.

Commercial operators would also no longer face the risk of losing their business to a rival bidder and would have a few years to become accustomed to working under a franchise framework and to demonstrate their suitability as a contractor going forward.

Once the initial term of the ‘shadow’ franchise is completed, all contracts would be subject to a normal competitive tendering process, wherein new entrants would have the opportunity to bid.

The approach would require a legal change by Government. Following further investigation into the potential attractiveness of shadow franchising to local transport authorities in the region, members may wish to agree to EEH advocating for this legal change on their behalf, with the concept potentially being trialled in this region.

## Consider strategic value of minibuses

Incorporating minibus routes into the network, whether using tendered or local-authority owned fleets, could help restore the viability of lesser-used routes, while allowing established, low frequency routes to operate at a higher frequency. It will also complement DRT fleets, ensuring that minibuses are not a ‘one-off’ high-risk acquisition for DRT. Minibuses incorporated into the wider commercial and supported services fleet operating in an area can reduce the price of tenders and make higher frequencies more viable, as part of a longer-term strategy to encourage bus use and grow the network.

## Asset-free DRT could reduce long-term financial burden

Asset-free DRT (using apps such as Uber and Lyft) could be used utilised as a DRT solution. These software platforms permit for example shared minicab rides to be discounted, using virtual vouchers, and can include subsidies to reduce costs to users who would receive a discounted or free bus ride. Some apps on the market can offer the ride more widely, across local minicab operators, Community Transport providers, NHS non-emergency transport or even bus operators. These solutions could be used in areas where community bus services are not feasible, expanding service coverage and reducing long-term financial burden.



## Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's assessment of franchising

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is currently consulting on proposals to introduce franchising.

Its consultation document includes an assessment of the proposed franchising scheme compared to an enhanced partnership. Information from the consultation document includes:

**Franchising model:** // The model of franchising envisaged is different from that found in London or the one recently introduced in Greater Manchester. Rather than controlling and managing all aspects and assuming all risks, the CA will look to share responsibilities and risks with operators, working collaboratively to define and design provision and incentivising operators to increase usage and benefit from increasing revenue. This approach is like models of franchising found elsewhere, such as in the Netherlands or Jersey, and is more appropriate to the needs of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. //

**Costs:** // A move to Franchising would require an initial, one-off investment by the Combined Authority estimated at £1.42 million over 3-4 years (transition cost). This would cover things like consultancy, legal and procurement fees. There would also be additional staff costs of £1 million per annum and IT costs of £0.5 million per annum.

Transition and management costs would not qualify for public sector borrowing and it is assumed that these are funded from the Combined Authority's reserves or other revenue funding sources. Beyond the initial costs to introduce franchising, funding sources for the ongoing delivery of the Proposed Franchising Scheme include:

- Farebox revenue.
- The Transport Levy.
- Mayoral Precept.
- Government funding.
- Bus Services Operator Grant. //

**Assessment conclusion:** // Franchising offers clear advantages for the Combined Authority in achieving its strategic objectives. It would have full influence over outcomes and the efficient delivery of bus service improvements to passengers, and bus network changes which support the delivery of wider policy ambitions.

Whilst an Enhanced Partnership is less risky for the Combined Authority, Franchising has clear advantages over an Enhanced Partnership in terms of the Commercial Case. It offers more certain delivery, with greater confidence in achieving desired outputs and outcomes.

With respect to the Financial Case, both options require substantial financial support in the long term to realise the Combined Authority's Bus Strategy ambitions and objectives. The case for franchising has been demonstrated to be affordable and sustainable in the long term. For an Enhanced Partnership the Combined Authority would need to raise further funding to manage the decline of the bus network in the long term.

The Management Case demonstrates that either option is deliverable, and that both would require an expansion of the Combined Authority's resources and capabilities.

Having undertaken this Assessment in accordance with the relevant requirements of the Transport Act and the Franchising Guidance, the Combined Authority considers that, on balance, the strategic advantages of Franchising and the increased certainty which it brings in terms of outcomes, outweigh the disadvantage of taking on significant financial risk. //



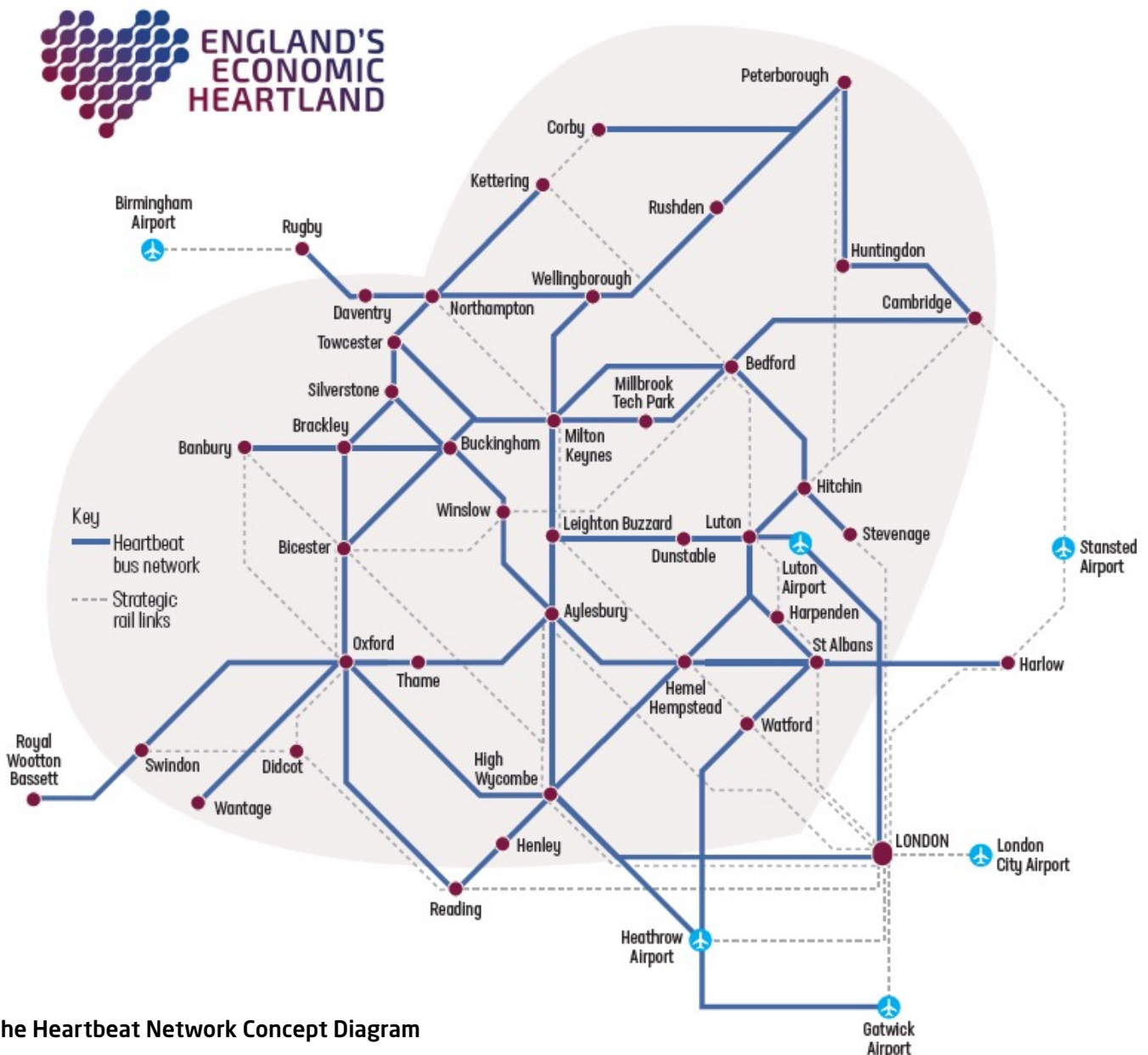
## The Heartbeat Network

EEH is a polycentric region, made up of relatively small cities, market towns, villages, and rural economic hubs. More than 35% of its population live in small market towns and their rural hinterlands. There are large parts of the region not served by rail, making journeys by bus the only viable public transport mode.

Following Systra's advice on the suitability of the 'bus line' network model for the region (combined with urban hub and spoke), the Heartbeat network concept was developed. This is based upon connecting

transport hubs and key destinations within the region, providing for better cross-local transport authority journeys and integrating with the existing local bus services.

The Heartbeat network is not a direct replacement for successful bus routes but rather brings together 37 routes including 15 existing routes (at 30mins or less frequency), 11 other existing routes (which require improved frequency to 30 mins or less) and 11 new connections, which would also require minimum frequencies.



The Heartbeat Network Concept Diagram

The routes identified fall into three categories, whilst also complementing rail services within the region:

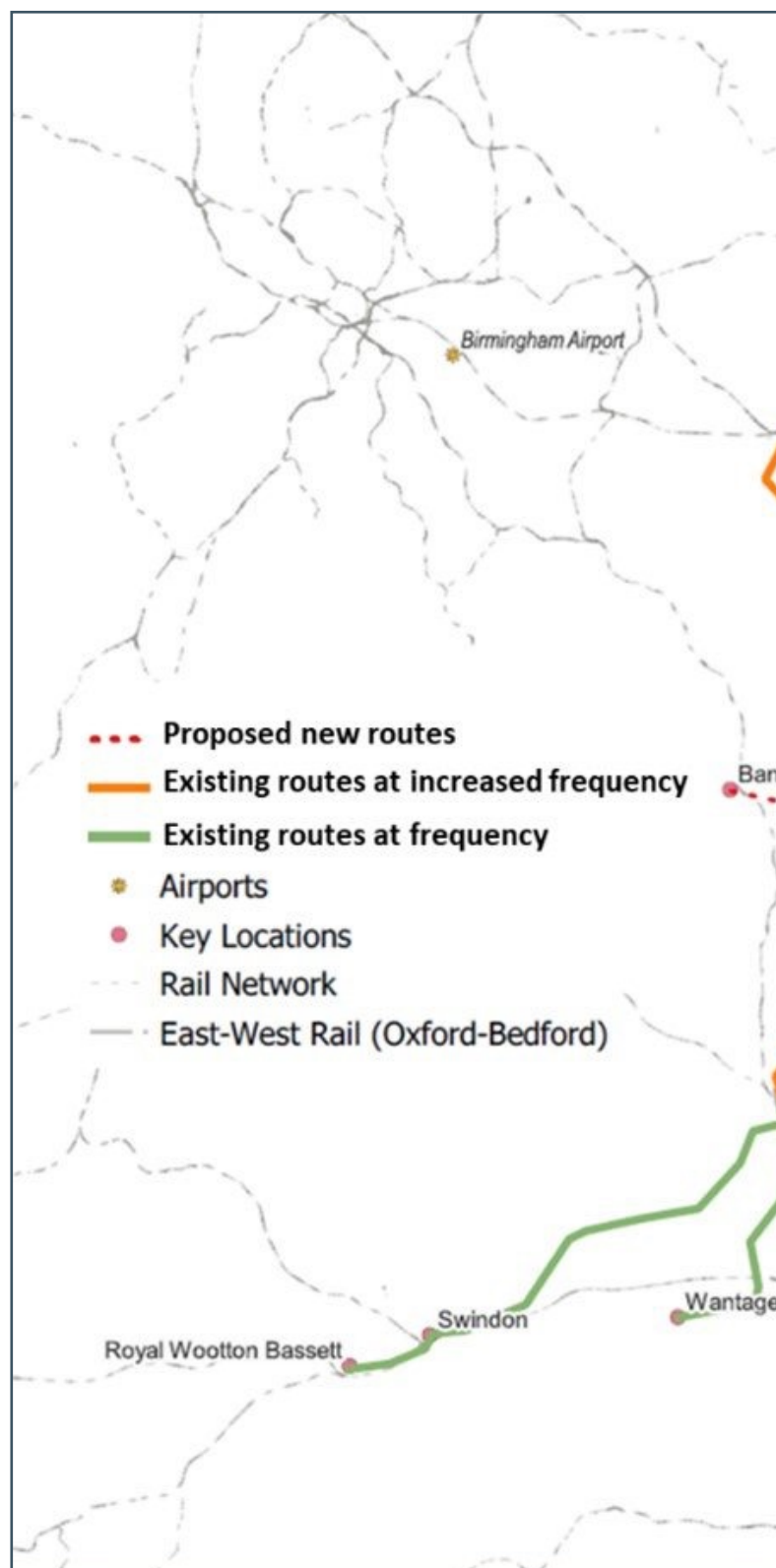
- Higher-frequency short bus routes linking residents to major centres and major business destinations.
- Lower frequency bus services at around every 30 minutes, operating reliably all day and linking transport hubs (rail/bus) in the region, scheduled with other routes for a coordinated arrival and departure ('pulse') timetable for bus and rail services to optimise interchange at hubs throughout the region.
- Coach services, providing longer-distance services linking major centres and airports within and around the region, again with interchange optimised at regional hubs.

## The Heartbeat Network Route Map

The Heartbeat Network route map includes existing routes (which currently operate to frequency of 30 mins or less) shown in green, other existing routes that would require an increased frequency shown in orange and proposed new routes shown as a red dashed line.

### Next steps:

EEH Board Members have agreed to develop the Heartbeat network further, including how it can be operated and funded. This work is key in establishing the case for better regional connectivity that the Heartbeat network can deliver.







# Integration

## Mobility Hubs

EEH is building on the success of our work on mobility hubs, which includes the in-depth business case guidance for developing hubs (particularly in more rural areas), as well as creating an online mapping tool to help partners identify locations with the greatest potential for transport interchange. We continue to move forward, to help accelerate and enable the funding and deployment of hubs within the EEH region.

This work has involved establishing and setting out an investable proposition document to 'market' mobility hubs with the EEH region. Based upon extensive consultation with our partners, we are identifying the most suitable sites that could better offer a 'return on invest' for private and public funders and stakeholders.

### Next steps:

To support these opportunities further, we will be facilitating a 'triaging investment' workshop (early in 2025) so we can bring together our partners and the private and public stakeholders to fully understand the opportunity and challenge of investing in transport infrastructure such as mobility hubs. In the meantime, we continue to offer direct consultancy support, provided by Systra, to those partners who wish to pursue mobility hub delivery further, such as individual site assessments or transport services audits.

## Journey Planning

EEH has been working with [www.journey-alerts.com](http://www.journey-alerts.com) on a project to improve the flow of real-time information between transport systems and users to increase multi-modal connectivity and reduce single occupancy car use. The journey alerts technology platform generates accurate passenger intent data at station/vehicle level to identify both areas of high and less transport demand and access. Real-time multi-modal journey information will also be delivered directly to passengers via WhatsApp and Messenger and will include personalised updates on disruption and first/last mile travel options, with passengers simply accessing the information and updates via QR codes on bus stops for example.

### Next steps:

We are looking to launch and trial the project in partnership with Bedford Borough Council.

## Multimodal ticketing system (Project Coral)

Simplifying payment for bus travel is an important part of encouraging more people to use public transport within the region and is a priority for all EEH local transport partners. Working with Project Coral (a consortium of local authority, bus operators and the Department for Transport), EEH has been progressing with the opportunity that the project gives its local authority and bus operators. Once introduced, this 'tap and go' solution, could give the travelling public within the region (using their bank card or mobile phones) the opportunity to purchase tickets, irrespective of which bus operators they use, based upon the best value fare available, per single or multi journeys.

### Next steps:

Project Coral is ongoing, but the consortium (depending on funding availability) is looking to deliver the system at a national scale later in 2026/27.



## Integration with rail

Alongside planned changes to the way buses are planned and delivered, there are also significant changes planned for the rail network, with trains being brought into public ownership and the setup of a new strategic rail body, Great British Railways, to oversee management of both infrastructure and services.

This brings major opportunities for better public transport integration, and greater regional and local influence over how public transport is planned and delivered, for example through strong new partnership arrangements such as the Wider South East Rail Partnership.

EEH is well placed to support development of better integration through the evidence and study work undertaken. The Rail Main Line Priorities report includes an assessment of interchange facilities and options at several key station hubs across the EEH area. It considers stations' level of connectivity with surrounding bus services and recommends where improvements could be made.

The study also identifies the opportunity to develop better fares and ticketing options in EEH, for example ticketing across rail and bus. Recognising that this is a complex area, for example in relation to fare apportionment between rail and bus operators, integrated ticketing options should be easier to develop following delivery of the planned rail and bus reforms.

### Next steps:

EEH will work with partners to progress the priorities identified within the Main Line Priorities report.

## East West Rail 'Door to Door Plus'

The 'East West Rail Legacy Programme' is a collaboration between East West Railway Company, England's Economic Heartland and other partners in the region. It will help to ensure that the long-term benefits of East West Rail are maximised for the communities and businesses in our region.

As part of this, EEH is leading on the 'Door to Door Plus' workstream. This builds on East West Railway Company's door to door strategy, which considers last mile connectivity to East West Rail stations.


Door to Door Plus will aim to facilitate the behaviour change necessary to maximise the use of interventions, such as new cycling infrastructure or public transport routes, which might be brought forward through the strategy. It will identify how East West Rail should benefit the region as a whole, beyond the immediate station locations.

### Next steps:

EEH is taking a lead on East West Rail Door to Door Plus workstream, given the alignment with its role for the region. We are supporting the East West Railway Company and Department for Transport through facilitating engagement activity with the region's bus operators, working towards an integrated cross-boundary transport network, with passengers at its heart. The engagement will seek to identify the opportunities and risks associated with establishing route and service integration across rail and bus travel, incorporating walking and cycling.




## Get in touch

 England's Economic Heartland  
EEH Business Unit  
c/o Buckinghamshire Council  
Walton Street  
Aylesbury  
HP20 1UA

For general enquiries please contact 01296 383645  
or email [businessunit@englandseconomicheartland.com](mailto:businessunit@englandseconomicheartland.com)

 [www.englandseconomicheartland.com](http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com)

 @EconomicHeart

