Oxford-Milton Keynes 'Call for Evidence' analysis
July 2021

1. Context

1.1. England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is undertaking a series of connectivity studies.

1.2. One of the first 2 studies underway is the Oxford-Milton Keynes (Ox-MK) study.

1.3. As part of the evidence gathering stage a public 'call for evidence' was undertaking, spanning June 2021 (1st – 30th June). The call for evidence was made public on the EEH website and promoted specifically to 'tier 3' stakeholders, those stakeholders with an interest in the study but not involved in either the steering or stakeholder groups.

1.4. 4 questions were asked as part of the study, each with the opportunity to provide feedback in free text.

1.5. The 4 questions posed were:

　　1.5.1. What are the key themes for the study area?

　　1.5.2. What do you consider to be the key movements in the area?

　　1.5.3. What are the key connectivity challenges and opportunities in the area?

　　1.5.4. What interventions do you think the study should consider?

1.6. 30 people or organisations responded to the call for evidence. 11 were residents, 14 were organisations or interest groups and 5 were Town or Parish Councils.

1.7. This report gives an overview of the outputs from the call for evidence.

2. Question 1 – Key themes

2.1. The first survey question asked respondees what they felt the most important themes to consider within the study were.

2.2. The 5 most common themes identified as important were:

　　2.2.1. Active travel (active travel was the most common theme identified as important to the study)

　　2.2.2. Public transport

　　2.2.3. Decarbonisation

　　2.2.4. Digital

　　2.2.5. Environment

🌐 www.englandseconomicheartland.com　　　　🐦 @EconomicHeart

2.3.   There were some strong themes emerging in question 1, by far the highest ranking theme was sustainable travel (often active travel combined with public transport, ie. end to end sustainable journeys). Decarbonisation, digital and the environment all ranked strongly as important themes. Other themes which were noted by respondees were safety, integration of transport systems, levelling up and tackling car dependency.

2.4.   Below are some quotes or extracts from survey responses:

"Transport connects communities and them with goods and services. Needs to be inclusive and accessible to all; 'levelling up' must mean addressing disparities."

"We must adopt a multi-modal approach to solutions and not view different modes in isolation. It is the door-to-door customer experience we must look at to ensure a sustainable option for travel if is available. Rail stations need access plans to improve way finding and public transport / active travel access."

"Digital connectivity to allow remote working. This requires broadband and mobile phone infrastructure which is currently exceptionally poor in rural areas"

3.   Question 2 – Key movements

3.1.   The second question in the survey asked what were considered key movements and who was making the movements.

3.2.   The question on key movements was answered in 2 ways – specific corridor movements and types of movements. The breakdown for each type of response is considered below.

3.3.   The most common responses to the key movements question were:

3.3.1.   Linking centres and communities to each other for services and employment

3.3.2.   Linking villages and outlying settlements to local towns or cities

3.3.3.   First mile last mile/ local connectivity within towns and cities

3.4.   The most highly mentioned specific movements were:

3.4.1.   Oxford – Milton Keynes

3.4.2.   Buckingham to Milton Keynes

3.4.3.   Bicester – Didcot

3.4.4.   Aylesbury – Bicester

3.5.   There were a number of comments about linking centres and communities to each other for services and employment, with specific mentions of Milton Keynes, Bicester and Oxford. This was couples with a strong response for connecting (sustainably) local villages to their nearby town centres. One resident responded: *"Despite Thornborough being 3 miles from Buckingham, no attractive or safe easy way to cycle avoiding the A421. All new developments and road improvements should consider opportunities to improve walking/cycling attractiveness, safety and accessibility - and also consider retrofit measures, such as cycle paths separated from busy roads."*

3.6.   Another response addressed that the effect of the pandemic has meant that the need to physically move between places had significantly shifted but that access to digital (internet availability) was challenging in some areas and for sectors of the population.

🌐 www.englandseconomicheartland.com   🐦 @EconomicHeart

3.7. Although it wasn't one of the most directly referenced movements, rural connectivity did also come up in the survey responses;" Local connectivity for villages and market towns must not be forgotten. Rural areas suffer from the worst public transport provision with car dependency as a consequence and isolation for those without access to a car. There is much scope for hub-and-spoke solutions and innovative demand-responsive services"

4. Question 3 – Opportunities and Challenges

4.1. Question 3 asked for the opportunities and challenges related to connectivity in the study geography.

4.2. The most frequently mentioned opportunities are;

    4.2.1. Making best use of East West Rail (EWR)

    4.2.2. Sustainable access to EWR stations

    4.2.3. Investment in the road network (specifically at pinch points)

4.3. The most frequently mentioned challenges were:

    4.3.1. Funding

    4.3.2. Culture shift (away from private car)

    4.3.3. Integration of land use planning and transport

4.4. Comments about connectivity to rail stations (either specific stations or general concept) ranked highly in the responses to the survey.

4.5. Challenges and opportunities for the freight industry were also noted in this section, including a request for 'blue sky thinking' in relation to rail freight opportunities.

4.6. Below are some quotes from survey responses received;

Members of the business community called for free flow of goods: *"We encourage the study to consider an approach that ensures its effectively support business and enables business to undertake its business, and the free flow of goods and services, unhindered"*

A number of responses focussed on public transport (particularly improvement in bus connectivity); *"Buses should serve new housing developments and industrial estates from the outset in order to encourage public transport use before residents and employees get into the habit of car use, after which it becomes too late."*

"Last mile journeys, and bus networks must be improved"

"Public transport should be coordinated across modes and with cycling/walking provision to encourage use, and all opportunities to develop the provision of public transport (network, frequency, routes) actively explored. Consider perspective of what would encourage people to chose it in preference to a car, not just for those without a car - frequency, door-to-door time, connectivity."

5. Question 4 - Interventions

5.1. Question 4 asked for potential interventions to consider as part of the study development. Again this question was answered in 2 different ways – location specific interventions and themes.

5.2. The most commonly mentioned thematic interventions were:

    5.2.1. Digital

    5.2.2. Public transport

    5.2.3. Active travel

    5.2.4. Sustainable access to stations

    5.2.5. Provision for EV

5.3. The most common location specific interventions were:

    5.3.1. Bus services to Buckingham

    5.3.2. Investment in the A421

    5.3.3. Improvements to the A41

    5.3.4. Delivery of EWR in full

5.4. Where highly ranking thematic interventions were mentioned, they were often accompanied by examples, these tended to be specific to the location of the person or organisation responding and therefore did not rank highly in the most common location specific interventions. For example, lack of segregated active travel network came across a strong theme with examples, of North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire as well as around Buckingham.

5.5. Public transport provision was noted in many responses, again with notable mentions for Buckingham as well as in South Oxfordshire.

5.6. Although not one of the highest rating interventions there was support for the provision of mobility hubs, with suggestions of locations off the A421 and A4074.

5.7. East West Rail was heavily supported as a positive intervention for connectivity in the study area.

6. Survey representation

6.1. The 'call for evidence' was open to the public and promoted specifically to interest groups, national groups, Parish Councils, business groups, universities, places of strategic importance (as outlined in the Transport Strategy), housing developers, key tourist attractions and transport groups.

6.2. In the case of the Oxford-Milton Keynes Call for evidence it should be noted that more responses were received from Oxfordshire and those in the Buckingham area. This may have impacted the prevalence of location specific interventions suggested during the call for evidence.