



# **Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford 'Call for Evidence' analysis**

*July 2021*

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## **1. Context**

- 1.1. England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is undertaking a series of connectivity studies.
- 1.2. One of the first two studies underway is the Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford (Pet-Nor-Ox) study.
- 1.3. As part of the evidence gathering stage a public 'call for evidence' was undertaken, spanning June 2021 (1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> June). The call for evidence was made public on the EEH website and promoted specifically to those stakeholders with an interest in the study but not involved in either the steering or stakeholder groups.
- 1.4. Four questions were asked as part of the study, each with the opportunity to provide feedback in free text.
- 1.5. The four questions posed were:
  - What are the key themes for the study area?
  - What do you consider to be the key movements in the area?
  - What are the key connectivity challenges and opportunities in the area?
  - What interventions do you think the study should consider?
- 1.6. A total of 42 responses were received regarding the Pet-Nor-Ox call for evidence. 35 responses were from residents, and seven from organisations/ interest groups (this includes four responses which combined responses on Pet-Nor-Ox with the other connectivity study on Oxford-Milton Keynes).
- 1.7. A disproportionate number of responses from residents referred to connectivity in and around Northampton. This may be as a result of the Northampton Chronicle picking up on and publicising the call for evidence.
- 1.8. Organisations which provided a response were:
  - Campaign to Protect Rural England
  - English Regional Transport Association
  - Harborough Rail Users
  - Logistics UK
  - Rail Freight Group



- Stagecoach Bus
- Stop the Arc Group

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

## 2. Question 1 – Key themes

2.1. The most common themes referenced by respondents were:

- **Improving public transport** and journey times by modes other than car (and the subsequent reduction in car trips)
- The importance of **decarbonising** the transport system
- The importance of considering connectivity for **all trip types**: not just for work-related/ commuting trips, but also leisure/ tourism/ culture/ education/ healthcare, with the needs of students (and the significant student populations in Oxford and Northampton) referenced several times.
- **Economic growth**, jobs, and connectivity acting as a catalyst for regeneration
- A transport system **accessible to all**, with improving social mobility and reducing deprivation referenced several times.
- Better **active travel** provision and, related to this, improved **first/ last mile** provision.

2.2. A selection of received responses include:

2.3. **Resident:** It must be cost effective to encourage people to travel by rail. They must see a benefit in giving up their private travel arrangements, e.g. the cost of petrol, the cost of parking charges.

2.4. **The Rail Freight Group:** Decarbonise the economy while supporting the freight and logistics industry.

2.5. **Campaign to Protect Rural England:** It is difficult to pick just three themes as the most important as the examples given are interrelated. Furthermore, some e.g. decarbonisation are largely dependent on progress with national – rather than local – policy and initiatives. Nevertheless, we would list the following as the top three:

- Protection and enhancement of the rural environment
- Access to public transport, together with walking and cycling provision
- Reducing the need to travel (and therefore more and better digital connectivity)

### 2.6. Stagecoach:

- High levels of demand growth
- Extensifying and evolving patterns of travel
- Healthcare provision; education; retail
- Network congestion and delay
- Disinvestment from public transport



### 3. Question 2 – Key movements

3.1. The most regularly mentioned specific movements were:

- The length of the **A43** corridor, but particularly movements between the M1 and M40 (and included with this broader movements between Oxford and Northampton)
- Movements from the **A14 and A605 onto the A1**
- The importance of local movements into and out of **Northampton** as a key regional hub, eg, to Brackley; Silverstone, Northampton Gateway, Wellingborough, Kettering, and Corby.

3.2. Some responses focussed on the reason behind the trips being made, as in paragraph 2.1.3, with freight movements also frequently cited as an important consideration.

3.3. A selection of received responses included:

3.4. **Resident:** As a Northampton resident, I travel to Peterborough for work and leisure, and to Oxford for leisure. This is very difficult and time consuming via public transport. To Oxford, a single National Express coach journey is possible but infrequent, with a more regular, but longer, two bus journey on Stagecoach. For Peterborough, a single Stagecoach bus journey is possible but lengthy. As a result, the car is often used. This is quick to Oxford via the A43 and relatively quick to Peterborough though the A605 is slower and accident prone.

3.5. **CPRE:** The level of warehousing development in Northamptonshire and around Peterborough in particular has unwelcome consequences in maximising the HGV road traffic. This also applies to the Bicester area, which has otherwise been billed as a 'garden / healthy / eco town' and was promised high tech jobs as part of the 'knowledge spine' in Oxfordshire but is instead being ringed by large warehouse development. Heavy freight movements in the Corridor represent a major proportion of road traffic, with their negative environmental effects and demands for road space. We do not want to see these increase. Alternatives need to be sought, including transferring more freight to rail for appropriate journey lengths, in order to minimise pollution, congestion and carbon impacts. We recognise that this generates a need for rail freight interchanges and that, by definition, these have to be near both a railway and major road junction.

3.6. **Stagecoach** provided a very detailed response, turning the question to 'what movements exist in the study corridor, for which bus and coach could credibly offer a relevant choice?'. In summary:

3.7. South of Northampton:

- A clear gap exists between Brackley, Silverstone Park and Towcester.
- Equally, there is no fast direct service between Towcester and Northampton – including Northampton Station.
- Brackley is the largest settlement within 1 hour's potential bus journey time that is not directly linked to Oxford.
- Finally end-to-end public transport connectivity between Northampton and Oxford – including the regionally important acute hospital services at John Radcliffe Hospital in Headington – involves a lengthy and indirect route changing at Milton Keynes Station between the X6 service and Stagecoach East X5. The journey time, dependent on connections, can exceed 3 hours. Reaching the JRH site demands a further 45 minutes local bus service, as well as a substantial walk across Oxford city centre between Gloucester Green and the High Street.



### 3.8. North of Northampton:

No meaningful competitive public transport connectivity exists between

- Kettering and Northampton town centres
- Corby and Northampton
- Thrapston and any other town
- Rushden and Northampton
- Wellingborough, Rushden, Raunds direct to Oundle and on to Peterborough, via the A45/A605.
- The lack of direct bus service between Corby and Market Harborough is also notable, given the size of the towns and their proximity, and increasing demand for movements to access facilities including retail and post-16 education.

### 3.9. However, Stagecoach said the above masks much bigger limitations in connectivity:

- Kettering General Hospital is still poorly accessible by bus despite recent improvements in cross-town connectivity, providing a great deal better local direct links. Frequencies are relatively low.
- Northampton General Hospital is even worse served – though after many years of effort direct services are now available from many of the newer southern neighbourhoods of Northampton, to stops at the main entrance.
- Large out-of-town employment areas on the fringes of all the big towns are in most cases exceptionally isolated and thus highly dependent on car-borne access...Vast distribution parks around Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough are in many cases entirely unserved by public transport; Park Farm in Wellingborough stands out, as does Victoria Park. Over 4m sq ft of logistics space off Geddington Road in Corby is also entirely unserved.
- Rail-bus connectivity is weak, albeit slowly improving. Much better facilities at least exist at Corby and Wellingborough stations, but the level of service on offer is poor. The location of stations strongly militates against effectively tying the bus network to the railway: stations lie on “dead ends” or off-line of the main through corridors. In every case the stations at Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough lie on that side of the town centre with by far the least adjacent population.
- The rise in importance of post-16 college movements, especially since the Participation Age was raised, has seen a substantial reorientation of routes to the main Further Education sites, particularly Northampton College at Booth Lane.

## 4. Question 3 – Opportunities and Challenges

### 4.1. The most referenced opportunities/ challenges for improving the transport system along this corridor included the following:

- **Improving public transport connectivity.** This included opening various branch lines (see intervention section below) and realising the northern arc as detailed in EEH’s Transport Strategy. Opportunities for extended direct services on East West Rail (ie from Northampton) alongside interchange were also frequently referenced. Improving both local and longer-distance bus service connectivity, with a highlighted challenge being cuts to bus services and rural connectivity



- **Utilising disused rail lines**, both in terms of reopening lines, or creating new cycle routes alongside them (eg, between Brackley - Woodford Halse). The potential for a cycle route alongside HS2 was also highlighted.
- The opportunity to **embed new travel behaviours** in new developments if infrastructure is delivered in a timely manner.
- Improving **the first/last mile** of journeys. Within this the potential for mass rapid transit was highlighted for the larger centres along the corridor, with Peterborough seen as particularly suited to this. The need to improve travel information at more isolated bus stops was also referenced, as was the design of Northampton's bus and rail stations. The importance of active travel was highlighted, including the need to expand the national cycle network.
- The opportunity to increase modal shift to **rail freight**
- The challenge of **congestion** came out strongly, causing unreliability of journey times, particularly highlighted for bus travel. The economic and environmental impact of congestion on logistics was also highlighted, with stop-starting of HGVs a significant contributor of emissions.
- Another significant concern was over the **difficulty in securing and delivering** new infrastructure, due to high costs and potential environmental impact, and the opposition to new schemes which forms from this.

4.2. A selection of received responses include:

4.3. **Logistics UK:** The region identified in the connectivity study has been identified by the DfT's National Lorry Parking Survey as having HGV parking shortage issues, particularly in the Milton Keynes and Northampton Arc. The Survey notes that Welcome Break Oxford Services and Extra Peterborough Services are two sites in the South East with Critical Utilisation at 114% and 120% respectively. Without secure lorry parking, drivers can often be the target of crime as the survey also reports that one of the areas found to have the biggest freight crime problems from data and stakeholder interviews was Northampton.

#### 4.4. **Stagecoach:**

Between Oxford-Northampton:

- Rural nature and high affluence has led to extremely high car ownership/ use
- Traditionally services have been focussed within county boundaries, not cross-border
- Congestion, particularly at Towcester
- "It is clear that a single seamless new high-quality regular express service between Oxford and Northampton could resolve the vast majority of strategic connectivity issues."

Between Northampton-Peterborough:

- Congestion: the main arteries connecting and bypassing the main centres, especially Corby Kettering and Wellingborough, now exhibit severe problems at peak periods. The heavy sectoral dependency on manufacturing (including food), logistics and distribution means that no benefit from any permanent change to increased levels of home-working by administrative and office workers can be expected.

Opportunities:



- Northampton-Kettering-Corby (fast via A43) potentially directly serving existing and committed large scale development on the west side of Corby.
- Corby-North Corby-East Corby employment fast via A43 or A4300 to North Kettering and beyond potentially linking to Burton Latimer
- Northampton-Wellingborough-Rushden Lakes (fast via A45)-Rushden
- Rushden-Warth Park-Thrapston-Oundle-Peterborough (fast via A45/A605)
- Northampton-NGH-Brackmills-Park Farm-North Wellingborough-Wellingborough Station
- Wellingborough-Station-Stanton Cross-Rushden Lakes-Higham-Rushden.

- 4.5. **Resident:** The key challenge and opportunity of this study is to think big. There is no viable alternative to travel on this route on public transport. A northern east west rail route linking Oxford, Bicester, Buckingham, Silverstone, Northampton, Wellingborough/Kettering, Thrapston/Oundle, Peterborough, Cambridge would open up so much more opportunity on the Arc and really integrate particularly the automotive and aerospace industries in to the Arc growth. This could be particularly pertinent over the next few decades with decarbonising of these industries and jobs and opportunities this could raise.
- 4.6. **Resident:** I travel a lot from Northampton to Weldon (Corby) via bus which takes nearly 2 hours.
- 4.7. **CPRE:** The overall strategy and individual interventions should be 'rural-proofed' in order to assess and mitigate their impacts on rural communities, agriculture and the countryside. Particular protection should be maintained for rural heritage, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), County Wildlife Sites and ancient woodland, but also for locally-valued landscape areas, whether formally designated or not. Tranquillity needs to be maintained and light pollution avoided. There should be no community severance. Rights-of-way should be protected and not severed or subjected to lengthy diversions. Access to the countryside and open space 'on the doorstep' is vital for recreation and wellbeing.

## 5. Interventions

- 5.1. Rail-based interventions were most commonly cited, including:

- New rail line connecting Oxford-Northampton-Peterborough
- Northampton-Wellingborough rail
- Oxford-Northampton rail (or via direct extended East West Rail service)
- Chord from Harringworth on the Midland Main Line to Luffenham facilitating through passenger trains from Kettering and Corby to Peterborough
- A west-to-north chord at St Neots from EWR to the East Coast Main Line, which can also be used for freight.
- Welland Valley Rail (Kettering-Corby-Peterborough-Wisbech)
- Northampton-East Midlands Rail (also known as Northampton-Market Harborough) with possibility of a station at Brixworth and a parkway where the line meets the A14 parkway

- 5.2. Other interventions included:



- Improving local/ bus connectivity to Northampton rail station/ improving Northampton station
- Converting disused railway from Yarwell Junction (near Peterborough) through to Rugby into a 'Heart of England' cycleway

5.3. A selection of responses included:

- 5.4. **Resident:** To link Northampton with Peterborough, and so link to East Coast Line services north to Yorkshire, the North East and Scotland via a change at Peterborough, a new rail formation should be established between Northampton and Wellingborough; services could go south to Bedford as an extended Thameslink service, and north to Wellingborough as a new Cross Country service.
- 5.5. **Resident:** Few out of town busses go near Northampton station. There is a spare plot opposite, maybe that could be used or a bus station. Interlinking east west and north south bus/coach services. North south coaches where trains don't go from Northampton, i.e. Nottingham. Create a network.
- 5.6. **Resident:** You also need to introduce more railway buses linking suburbs of eg Northampton to the train station to prevent the overflow of traffic from/to the station at rush hour and to keep the intervention eco friendly.
- 5.7. **Rail Freight Group:** The study area includes Northampton which could provide access to the Daventry Strategic Rail Freight Interchange near Rugby if such a route existed. This would permit freight from Felixstowe to access via Ely if this were not to be achieved via Bletchley and East West Rail. Aggregate traffic from Somerset would also find this a convenient route if not provided by East West Rail or as a diversionary route.
- 5.8. **Harborough Rail Users:** We keenly look forward to the delivery of East-West Rail (EWR), with good interchange with the MML at Bedford, especially for the transformative effect this will have on travel to Oxford and onward to the Thames Valley. Properly delivered, East-West Rail, including links to Aylesbury and Milton Keynes, and good interchange with the East Coast Main Line at St Neots, will provide a step-change in connectivity across the EEH region. 'Properly delivered' therefore includes the need for recognition that the value of EWR lies more in the opportunities it brings for intermediate journeys, as opposed to primarily end-to-end between Oxford and Cambridge. The full EWR service pattern should include Oxford to Northampton, rather than terminating trains at Milton Keynes; this would enhance connectivity massively on the western half of the current EEH study area.

