

Strategic Transport Leadership Board

Minutes

20th June 2025

11:00 – 13:00

In Person

Present:

Cllr Liz Leffman (Chair)
Cllr Steven Broadbent
Cllr Thomas Broom
Cllr Chris McGiffen
Cllr Javed Hussain
Cllr Mark Arnull
Cllr Alex Beckett
Cllr Chris Watts
Cllr Tracey Wye
Cllr Nicola Gribble
Cllr Paul Zukowskyj
Cllr David Rouane
Phil Southall

Leader, Oxfordshire County Council
Leader, Buckinghamshire Council
Cabinet Member, Buckinghamshire Council
Executive Member, North Northants Council
Deputy Leader, Luton Council
Leader, West Northants Council
Portfolio holder, Cambridgeshire County Council
Cabinet Member, Swindon Borough Council
Cabinet Member, Central Bedfordshire Council
Portfolio holder, Bedford Borough Council
Executive Member, Hertfordshire County Council
Leader, South Oxfordshire District Council
Managing Director, Strategy and Performance at Go Ahead Group

Also in attendance:

Lord Patrick Vallance
Cavendish Elithorn

Dan Taylor

Minister for Science, Research and Innovation
Director, Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor Unit,
HM Treasury
Deputy Director, Department for Transport

Apologies:

Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew
Mayor Paul Bristow
Cllr Lucy Nethsingha

Cabinet Member, Milton Keynes Council
Mayor, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough
Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council

EEH Team Members Present:

Naomi Green
James Golding-Graham
Adam King
Fiona Foulkes
Hanane Elmaarouf
Abi Nichols
Balal Farooqi
Mingfei Ma
Milly Murray
Trevor Brennan

Managing Director
Head of Decarbonisation and Innovation
External Affairs and Policy Manager
Capability, Excellence & Governance Manager
Business Operations Assistant
Project Lead
Data Analyst
Analysis and Modelling Manager
Senior Transport Strategy Project Officer
Project Lead

1	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) opened the meeting and asked attendees if they were content with accuracy of previous meeting minutes.</p> <p>There are four ongoing actions. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New Government update, including fiscal events, and EEH financial update - <i>The 'Securing Investment in the Region' paper includes information on public sector finance, with suggested actions for progressing understanding.</i> 2. Buses - <i>Further work to explore the Luton to Dunstable extension options is being commissioned, including an extension to the ECML at either Hitchin or Stevenage. Demand levels at either end and along its existing route are being captured as part of the study.</i> 3. Integrated Transport - <i>The Mobility Hubs matter will be presented to the Board in July 2025, with an updated report that includes Wellingborough as a site, based on feedback from North Northamptonshire officers.</i> 4. Rail prioritisation and planning - <i>we have engaged consultants to look into this and are awaiting their input.</i>
2	<p>Public Questions</p> <p>There were no public questions or public speakers.</p>
3	<p>Oxford - Cambridge Growth Corridor</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) welcomed and introduced Lord Patrick Vallance.</p> <p>Lord Vallance outlined the aims of the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor, highlighting economic growth, infrastructure development, and a joined-up government approach. He also stressed the importance of local input and the potential for inward investment.</p> <p>Cllr Nicola Gribble (NG) Raised concerns about the East West Rail construction through Bedford, highlighting potential destruction of countryside and the town centre, and negative impacts on the local hospital. She proposed an alternative route that she would save money and invited Lord Vallance to visit Bedford.</p> <p>Lord Vallance Acknowledged the concerns and committed to taking them back to the team for review. He said that the project is about the whole area, not just Oxford and Cambridge.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett (AB) asked about how elected representatives can be part of the joined-up approach and feed into the process. He also asked how far the vision extended beyond Cambridge.</p> <p>Lord Vallance spoke of the importance of local representatives and requested feedback from Councillor Beckett on how to improve engagement.</p> <p>Cllr Paul Zukowskyj (PZ) raised the issue of capacity constraints on rail linkages into and out of the East West Rail corridor, particularly the northern links from London to Cambridge. If there were unlocked it could lead to further growth through developments along these corridors.</p>

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Lord Vallance said he is committed to looking at the capacity constraints and other important lines. He mentioned the development of an integrated digital planning tool.

Cav Elithorn (CE) acknowledged the comments from Bedford's concerns and agreed to follow up.

CE, in response to wider comments about rail capacity and connectivity suggested an opportunity could lie in reviewing possible timetabling changes.

Cllr Steven Broadbent (SB) highlighted the "missing link" in Phase 1 of East West Rail from Milton Keynes to Aylesbury and requested its reinstatement to support economic growth in the region. He also inquired about ensuring the central section of the corridor is included in the plans.

Lord Vallance said he would raise the "missing link" with Lord Peter Hendy. He mentioned the importance of the central section of the corridor.

Cllr Tracey Wye raised concerns about the environmental impact of infrastructure development, particularly on agricultural land and food production. She suggested alternative solutions such as extended park-and-ride facilities.

Lord Vallance acknowledged the concerns and emphasised the importance of getting the environmental and nature right.

Cllr Chris Watts highlighted the potential for "low hanging fruit" by improving the direct Bristol to Oxford link, which would also bring in Bath and Bristol universities.

Lord Vallance said he would ensure that the Bristol to Oxford link is raised with Department of Transport colleagues.

CE said the Aylesbury link had been considered by Ministers and offered to a follow up discussion. He also said that East West Rail has funded some local growth strategies and offered to follow up.

Naomi Green (NG) Explained the concept of a regional summit to convene local authorities and set the direction for the region. This will tackle several key challenges, and she invited members if they had views on what these should be.

SB suggested that the "wicked issue" could be how we ensure land is used for the best purpose.

NG outlined the East West Rail Legacy project, which aims to maximise the impact of East West Rail for existing residents.

SB asked about the four towns being looked at for the 'thriving communities' study.

Adam King (AK) said that the project, led by two universities, will be an academic research initiative and said committed to briefing SB on the towns being considered.

AK said that plans are underway for another bus symposium, which is expected to take place around winter 2025. The symposium will focus on integration and bus integration. East West Rail may be close to opening, and its integration will be included on the agenda.

LL said there is a strong interest in revisiting the bus symposium and its outcomes. She suggested that this topic be included on the agenda for the next meeting, with a possible presentation to DfT to discuss their ideas and how they can assist in developing strategies for the region.

Verity Quinn (VQ) said EEH are planning to send out a communication to officers across the region in the next couple of weeks to bring them together on the topic of homeschool transport.

Cllr Tracey Wye (TW) Emphasised the importance of safe cycling and walking infrastructure.

NG said that EEH has secured additional funding from the Department for Transport for a project called "Door to Door Plus." The project is evolving into a broader integration initiative, this involves extensive use of data and encompasses home to school transport, bus work, and overall integration efforts. An update on this package as well as a substantive item on East West Rail will be provided at a subsequent board.

PZ asked about linkages with airports in the area.

NG said she would include information on airport linkages in the papers for the next meeting.

Action: Information on wider linkages and integration, especially with airports in the area to be added to papers for the next meeting.

The Board noted the activities and events which have taken place since the growth corridor was announced by the Chancellor in January, including the Spending Review.

The Board discussed the implications of the growth corridor, opportunities and challenges

The Board agreed the ambitions behind the hosting of a Regional Leaders' Summit in autumn; provides a steer on the topics to be discussed.

The Board noted progress on the East West Rail 'legacy' projects.

Technical Capacity and Capability – the EEH Centre of Excellence

Fiona Foulkes (FF) introduced the item and presented the EEH Centre of Excellence and its five focus areas.

James Golding-Graham (JGG) Showcased the tools available for use by local authorities, including the Alfie tool, station usage data, EV planning tool, data hub, Cadence, and EEHLUM.

Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) suggested that the catalogue be distributed to a wide group of officers to ensure that the information reaches as many relevant officers as possible.

Cllr Paul Zukowskyj (PZ) asked about the data being available in a format that can be dropped into a council-wide GIS. **PZ** also asked about horizon scanning around the New Towns Task Force.

JGG confirmed that the data is available in that format.

Cllr Steven Broadbent (SB) asked about the potential to license other data sources.

JGG said the team is willing to ingest any data provided, as long as the licensing allows it. He also said that they have a limited budget, so if the cost is too high, it might not be feasible. However, if the cost is within the data budget, they are open to discussing it further and seeing how they can help.

SB said that the central government recently announced that fully autonomous, no-safety-driver trials would start next year. He would like to understand the implications of this development over the next 10 years, as it could have significant effects on buses, home-to-school transport, and other areas. **SB** asked if EEH could look into potential implications.

NG said that EEH are working with Government to try and ensure transport is a key consideration by the New Towns Task Force. If Board members wished, in due course to use EEH data to support their considerations of the implications of Government decision making, such as New Towns, EEH could be able to support. In the case of possible New Towns, the EEHLUM tool could be used by local partners to consider their implications.

SB asked if the EEHLUM is the only tool that requires additional payment. And asked if the pamphlet includes all the data points. He requested a list of these data points to ensure officers can utilise them effectively. **SB** also asked about EEH running anything cross-borders.

JGG said that EEH can produce mapping that shows wider connections in relation to HGV infrastructure.

Cllr Javed Hussain (JH) welcomed the new tool and said that transport is crucial for delivering any initiative, as the first questions are always about how people will get to work and how goods will be moved. He said that transport is an enabler of economic growth, which is often overlooked. **JH** said he is looking forward to using the tool and said that councils must recognise the integral role of transport in economic growth and working styles.

AK said that EEH produce a policy and data bulletin, which is available to all members and officers and is sent out twice a week. This bulletin compiles all instances where MPs discuss



infrastructure in Parliament, providing key headlines from events like the spending review. It also includes data alerts or new data released by the DfT website. **AK** said that if any members are not receiving the bulletin and would like to, to let him know so he can add them to the distribution list.

Paul Thomas (PT) highlighted an opportunity to enhance the value of the EEH data bulletins by aligning them with government discussions and initiatives. He suggested that integrating new government schemes, such as the EV scheme, with existing data could help identify gaps and areas of application. By running these integrated data sets through the EEH model, additional insights and value could be gained.

Antony Swift (AS) mentioned how they have worked with EEH's data for various projects. For instance, all the planning and forecasting work for EV charging, including the number of charge points, has been validated by the data. The isochrones and evidence base used for this planning also came from the data bank. Also, the station usage data for the redevelopment of Luton station was sourced from the EEH database. **AS** emphasised the importance of sharing these tangible examples with senior managers and officers to demonstrate the real value provided by leveraging this data.

Action: To distribute EEH tools catalogue to a wide group of officers and make available on the website.

Action: James to produce mapping that shows wider connections in relation to HGV infrastructure.

The Board noted the support available to local partners

The Board noted the publication of the EEH Tools Catalogue, setting out each of the data and analytical tools that have been developed by EEH, for the benefit of our local authority partners

2025/26 Business Plan

Naomi Green (NG) introduced the item and presented the EEH Business Plan for 2025-2026 and the response to the Oxford-Cambridge corridor activity.

Cllr Steven Broadbent (SB) said he greatly values the work EEH does. However, from reading the business plan he is concerned that EEH has a focus on picking up the responsibilities of the former pan-regional partnership: this must not come at the expense of building upon core EEH work which has taken place over many years. For example, the business plan does not reference priorities such as the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link, or how the outputs from connectivity studies are being rolled forwards. He questioned whether EEH has lost sight of things that go on beyond the 'growth corridor'. **SB** was concerned that the workplan has been sent to DfT, and therefore they may be drawing conclusions from it. **SB** suggested that the workplan should include helping local partners respond to the infrastructure considerations of any new towns located in the region, when these are announced. Airports are also a vital consideration, including Heathrow, whose runway is just 200 or so metres from Buckinghamshire's boundary. **SB** also referenced a line on page 9 of the work programme which reads: '[EEH's] work will ensure the transport system is planned as a single network with housing and economic growth opportunities embedded'. He questioned whether that meant EEH is involved in where allocations would be going. If so, that would be way beyond EEH's remit.

NG said **SB** had made a very fair challenge. She committed to updating the workplan to ensure these matters are explicitly included. **Dan Taylor (DT)** confirmed that the workplan was iterative in nature and therefore amendments would be accepted by the Department.

With regards to **SB's** point on housing, **NG** agreed the line could be misconstrued, and was actually a reference to supporting authorities respond to the infrastructure needs of housing growth, including new towns. She confirmed that EEH has never been involved in stipulating where housing should go, but that it has a key role in making clear to MHCLG that new homes must be supported by appropriate infrastructure including good transport connectivity.

LL agreed it was vital that new homes are supported by appropriate infrastructure, and that far too many housing developments currently come forward with the necessary transport in place.

7	<p>Cllr Chris Watts (CW) said that the Bristol-Swindon-Oxford link should remain explicitly within the work programme. He welcomed the significant work EEH has done to date on this, but it has not yet been committed to by government, and should remain a priority.</p> <p>LL agreed.</p> <p>SB recalled a paper from six months ago that discussed NESO and its role in the energy sector. He suggested it would be helpful to invite a representative from RESP to a future meeting to provide a detailed overview of their energy-related initiatives.</p> <p>Action: The EEH work programme to be amended to reflect comments made during the agenda item. This will be brought back to the next meeting.</p> <p>Action: Invite representatives from RESP to a future meeting to explain their work.</p> <p>The Board agreed the role that EEH should play in supporting wider infrastructure conversations particularly around power and digital connectivity.</p> <p>The Board noted the aspiration for a long-term funding settlement for STBs, for the duration of the Spending Review.</p> <p>The Board noted the letters seeking annual partner contributions for 2025/26, as agreed in March 2025, will be sent following the meeting.</p> <p>The Board agreed to the principle of moving Strategic Transport Leadership Board meetings to being on Thursdays to better manage diary conflicts.</p>
9	<p>Future Meeting Dates</p> <p>The Board agreed the following 2025 dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 11th July 2025 (virtual) - 26 September 2025 (virtual) - 16th October 2025 (in person) - 4 December 2025 (in person)