

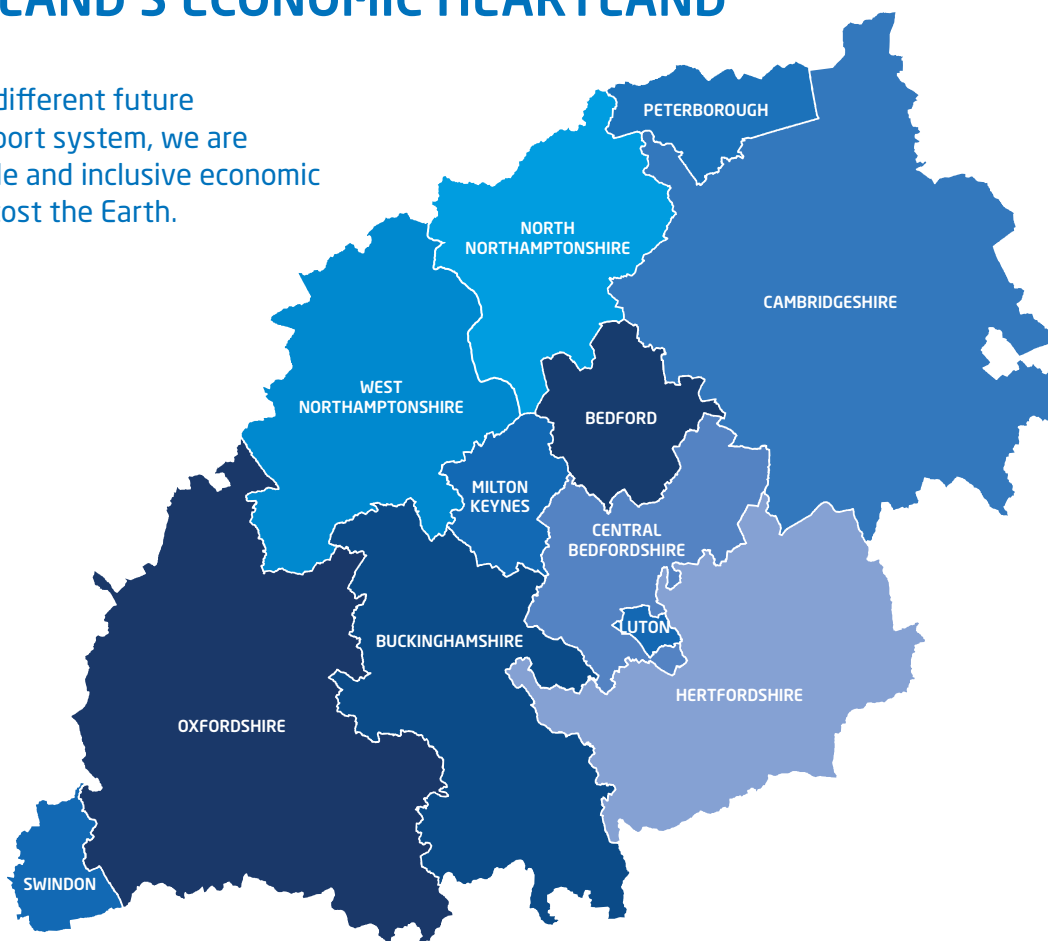
# Annual Report 2020/21





## ABOUT ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND

Through unlocking a different future for our region's transport system, we are supporting sustainable and inclusive economic growth that doesn't cost the Earth.



England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is one of seven sub-national transport bodies (STBs) which cover the entirety of England outside of London.

Jointly funded through local contributions and the Department for Transport (DfT), EEH provides leadership on transport issues of strategic interest.

It does this by maintaining a regional evidence base, upon which it has prepared and published the region's transport strategy, and which it then uses to advise government on regional investment priorities.

The importance of STBs continues to grow, a reflection of both the added value they provide to the partners, and the value placed on their advice by the Department for Transport. Indeed, STBs are the DfT's preferred structure for engagement on issues of genuinely strategic significance.

The accumulated knowledge, experience and insight held by EEH on behalf of its partners is increasingly used by the DfT to inform national policy priorities.

### A region of ambition

Our region is a net contributor to the Exchequer, but the continued success of our region cannot be taken for granted.

Published local plans and local industrial strategies prepared by the local enterprise partnerships contain significant levels of growth, all of which requires additional investment in supporting infrastructure if it is to be delivered in a way that is sustainable for the long term.

In addition, the entirety of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc sits within the Heartland, a national economic priority for government.

If we are to collectively achieve the ambition of realising economic potential whilst achieving net environmental gain it will require significant and sustained investment in our infrastructure.

Our residents and businesses are ambitious in seeking to achieve a net zero transport system sooner than the legal requirement of 2050. To do so will require a systems approach to strategic infrastructure – one that sees transport investment aligned with that in digital infrastructure and our energy systems (both generation and distribution).

Our work associated with the regional transport strategy – *Connecting People, Transforming Journeys* – gives us a vision-led, evidence-based framework that working as EEH we will use to make the case for that investment.

### A commitment to collaboration

EEH's political and business leaders are committed to working collaboratively on issues of strategic importance. Their collective vision is shaped by using our regional evidence base to understand the scale and nature of the issues, informed by the cutting-edge technical work undertaken by EEH working with partners right across the Heartland.

By working collaboratively in this way our partners are able to harness the added value of EEH by being able to better plan for:

- Strategic infrastructure issues and solutions that extend beyond any one single area
- Issues that are common to one or more local areas that benefit from a co-ordinated response
- The case for investment in strategic infrastructure that is strengthened by having a single voice at a scale that has influence and impact.

As of April 2021, England's Economic Heartland was chaired by Cllr Martin Tett (Buckinghamshire Council). EEH's detailed work on the regional transport strategy was overseen by our Strategic Transport Forum chaired by Mayor Dave Hodgson (Bedford Borough Council).

Meetings of the Strategic Transport Forum are held in public, its reports and minutes are publicly available on our website, and there is ability of interested parties to address the Forum on any relevant matter.

Our small core team of dedicated staff – operating as the EEH business unit – continues to provide EEH both a capability and expertise that enables the region's ambitions to be realised. With a strong focus on the power of collaborative working as a means of 'getting things done', the business unit keeps bureaucracy to a minimum whilst being accountable to the partners for its work.

As of April 2021, the business unit was led by Martin Tugwell as programme director.

The business unit's work is greatly assisted by the support provided by officers drawn from our partners. Meeting as the Transport Officer Group, they provide advice and guidance on the EEH work, including participation in steering groups overseeing commissioned work.

The continued commitment of partners to invest in the work of EEH as the sub-national transport body unlocks funding from the Department for Transport.

In 2020/21 the local contributions were as follows:

- County council: £50,000
- Unitary council: £30,000
- Other partners: £30,000.

For 2020/21 the Department for Transport provided core funding of £500,000 in support of the work of EEH.



## 2020-2021: A MILESTONE YEAR FOR ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC HEARTLAND

## OUR TRANSPORT STRATEGY: CONNECTING PEOPLE, TRANSFORMING JOURNEYS



In February 2021 EEH published the region's transport strategy, 'Connecting People, Transforming Journeys'. Submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport at the same time, the strategy sets out an ambitious policy framework the purpose of which is to shape the future of our transport system over the next 30 years.

A vision-led, evidence-based approach underpins the commitment to the step-change in approach required when it comes to planning, developing, and implementing strategic transport investment. In this way our transport strategy will enable the Heartland to support sustainable growth, decarbonise our transport system and enable our people and businesses to realise their potential.

Central to turning vision into reality is our five-point plan of action to:

- Harness the region's expertise in clean technologies to deliver a greener transport system and create new economic opportunities
- Champion digital technologies to make transport smarter and reduce the need to travel
- Use investment in East West Rail and mass transit systems as a catalyst for transforming public transport across the Heartland
- Improve local and rural connectivity, creating better, healthier places
- Support the freight and logistics sector while reducing its environmental impact, including modal shift onto rail.

Publication of the transport strategy was the culmination of nearly three years' work by EEH and its partners.

Having engaged on our outline transport strategy in summer 2019, July 2020 saw the publication of our draft transport strategy for public consultation. The draft strategy was downloaded more than 5,000 times. EEH held 20 engagement events during the consultation period, including an online webinar on the day of launch which attracted more than 300 delegates.

Having received a total of 210 consultation responses, feedback on the draft strategy was positive, with 76% of survey responses indicating overall support. The single biggest message that came through the consultation – from residents, campaign groups and local authorities alike – was the need for the strategy to be more ambitious in decarbonising our transport system.

There was a clear consensus on the importance of achieving net zero carbon sooner than the legal requirement of 2050. In preparing the final version of the transport strategy EEH worked with its partners to strengthen the policy framework in response to this very clear message. And it was on this basis that the final strategy adopted the ambition to achieve a net zero carbon transport system by as early as 2040.

The development of the regional transport strategy was shaped and informed by the 'Integrated Sustainability Appraisal' (ISA). Published alongside the draft strategy in July 2020, the output from the appraisal helped inform the consultation responses received by EEH. It was also used by the Strategic Transport Forum as they agreed the final strategy.

The ISA was updated, and a post adoption statement published alongside 'Connecting People, Transforming Journeys'.

## **OUR WORK DURING 2020/21: DEVELOPING THE EVIDENCE, PROVIDING THE TOOLS AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

Maintaining and developing the regional evidence base that supports our work has continued to be a core activity for EEH throughout the year.

The evidence base is always available to our partners (both within the region and nationally) ensuring that EEH, its partners and indeed government are working from a consistent evidence base line for the Heartland. By making the evidence base freely available to partners, including government, it's been possible to avoid spending time and money on re-establishing the base line at the start of individual pieces of technical work.

EEH has made it a key requirement that the database and models comprising the regional evidence base can be used without the need for specialist knowledge or skills, further enhancing their added value.

## **GIS DATABANK AND POLICY SCENARIO MODEL**

Our 'geographic information system' (GIS)-based databank contains up to date information on known plans for economic and housing growth. It is updated annually using information supplied by local planning authorities and local enterprise partnerships. During 2020/21 the databank was enhanced further with the inclusion of all planned housing development over 25 dwellings (previously it had shown developments of over 500 dwellings). This level of detail, when combined with the database's ability to map the location of planned growth over time, provides EEH and its partners with a highly effective tool.

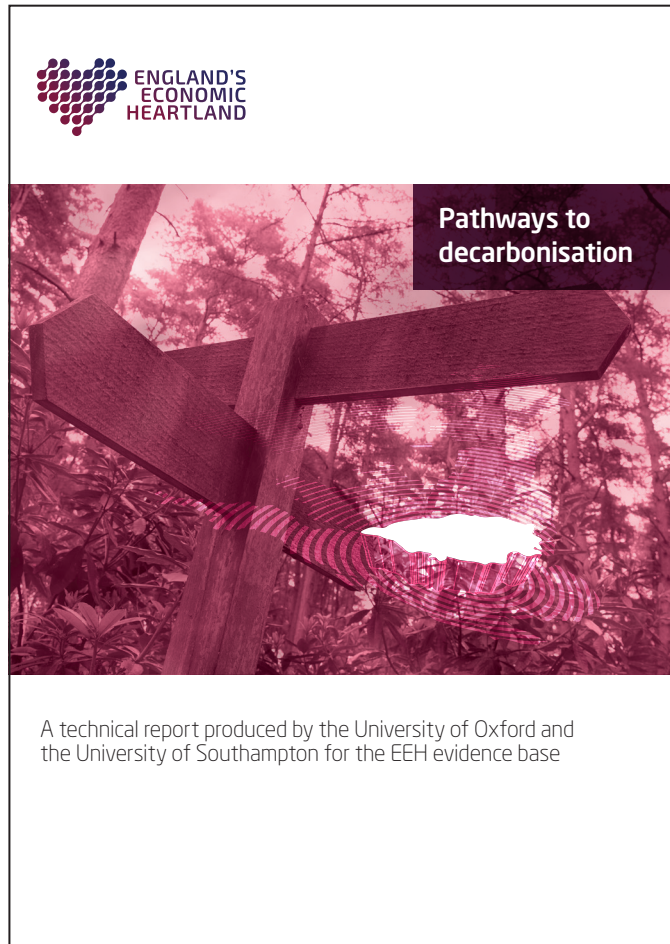
An increasing number of EEH partners are using the database for their own purposes. In addition, EEH continues to ensure that government departments – including DfT and MHCLG – are fully aware of the capability, and have access to, the regional database. Bodies such as Homes England and rail operators have also found it particularly useful.

Investment in our regional policy scenario model was specifically in response to EEH recognising the importance of having the capability to assess the relative implications of alternative scenarios.

The model, which has continued to evolve during 2020/21, has the ability to consider both alternative development scenarios, such as the scale and distribution of future growth, and alternative policy scenarios, including the relative impact of policies on carbon emissions. Its back-casting ability enables the interventions required to achieve a particular outcome to be explored.

The information and tools forming the regional evidence base continue to underpin EEH's work, including our programme of connectivity studies.

## PATHWAYS TO DECARBONISATION



EEH commissioned the universities of Oxford and Southampton to harness cutting-edge modelling tools to inform its work on the transport strategy. By harnessing the capability available in the 'National Infrastructure Systems Model' (NISM), EEH's work on de-carbonisation has started to embed a systems approach to infrastructure planning.

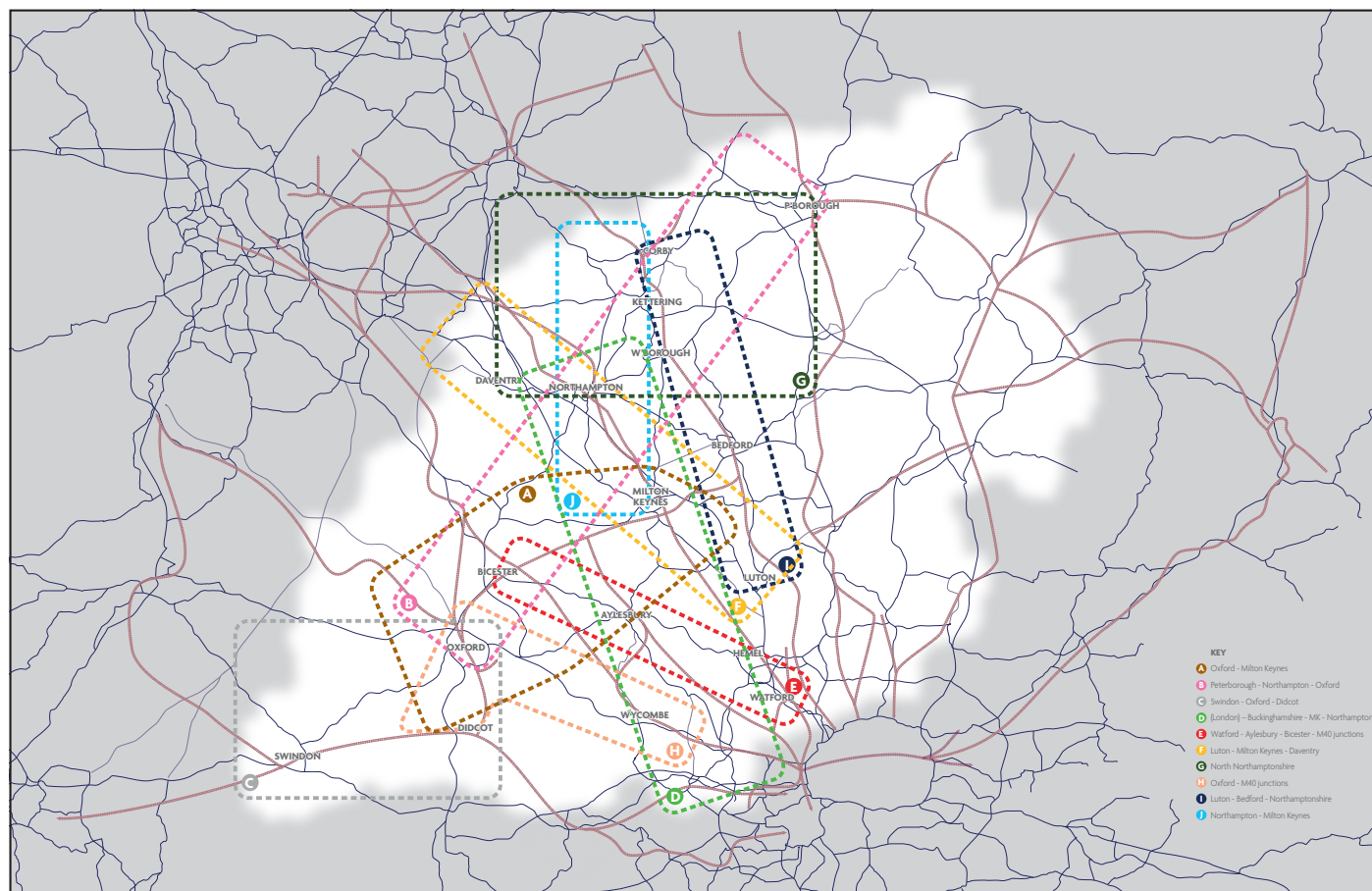
The output of this commission, 'Pathways to Decarbonisation', was published alongside our draft transport strategy in July 2020.

It has directly informed EEH's approach towards achieving decarbonisation that is set out in our transport strategy. This sets out the need for a highly connected future through a step-change in digital connectivity, alongside advocating for a policy led behavioural shift in which decision makers at all levels agree to deploy policy levers targeted at reducing the number of car trips.

As part of the ongoing commitment to accelerate the decarbonisation of our transport system, and reflecting the public sentiment expressed through our public engagement work, our work on pathways is being used to develop a more detailed decarbonisation road map for the Heartland.

The publication of the DfT's 'Transport Decarbonisation Plan' explicitly recognises the key role that STBs in general have to play in achieving decarbonisation. As the lead STB nationally for decarbonisation, EEH continues to provide leadership on this issue not just for the Heartland but nationally too.

## CONNECTIVITY STUDIES



Map for illustrative purposes only. The boundaries of the connectivity studies are not fixed and will be decided in due course after consultation with partners.

Our programme of connectivity studies directly flows from input from EEH partners and in response to comments raised as part of the public engagement phases during the development of the region's transport strategy.

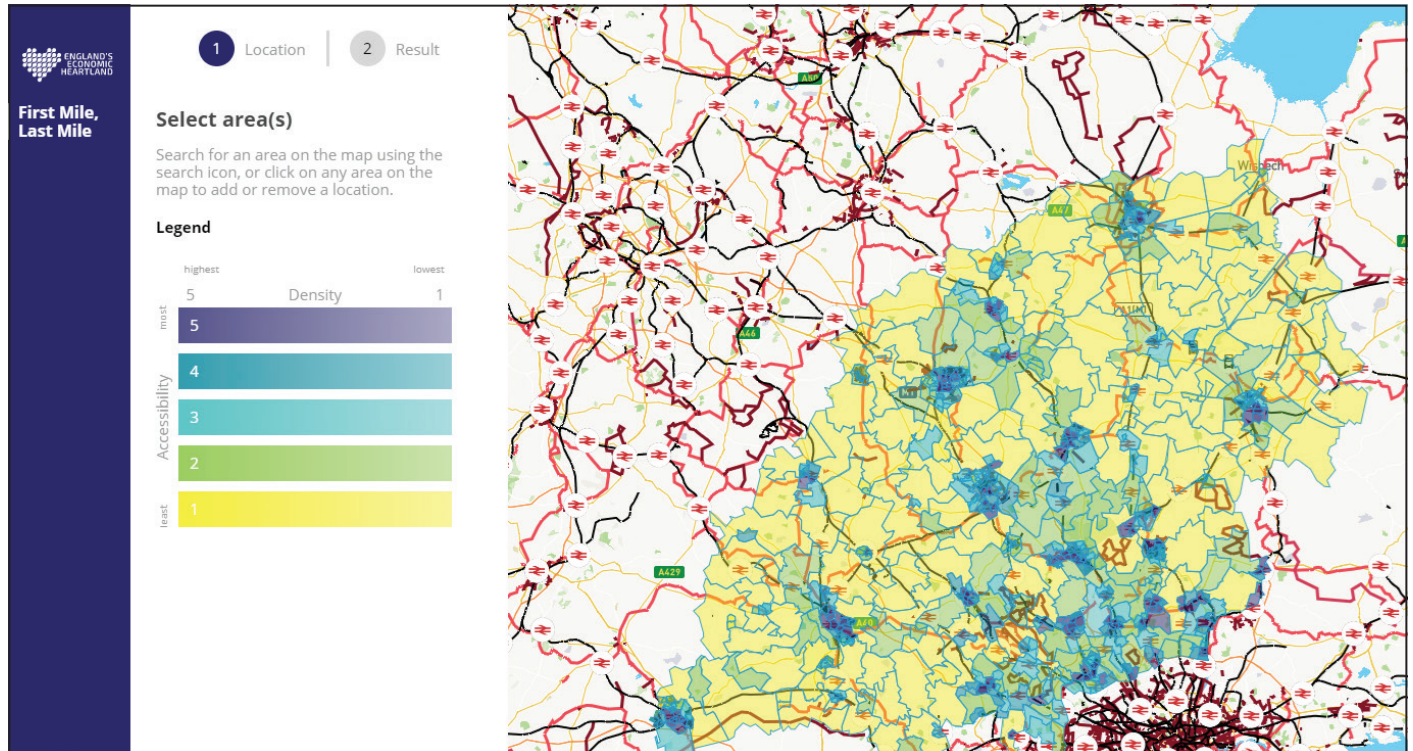
Each of the 10 proposed connectivity studies reflects the need to work with partners with a view to identifying the infrastructure required to deliver agreed outcomes. Each study provides the opportunity to apply the policy framework set out in the transport strategy, with the output expected to be agreement on the package of measures required to enable delivery of planned growth and achieve net zero carbon.

In the latter half of 2020/21 EEH commissioned work on the first two studies: Oxford-Milton Keynes; and Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford.

Each study is guided by a steering group comprised of partners, including all the local authorities and local enterprise partnerships within the study area.



## FIRST MILE, LAST MILE TOOLKIT



EEH's pioneering first mile, last mile toolkit was developed during 2020 in response to the need to ensure that solutions take forward better reflect the needs of the user. By using information held in commercially available datasets it was possible to develop a detailed picture of the personas of the Heartland's population and to better understand the specific propensity for sustainable and public transport choices in different places.

The resulting toolkit – which is available to all EEH partners – factors in human behaviour around transport choice, particularly in respect of first mile, last mile (FMLM) travel. This results in the user of the tool having an evidence-led approach to identification of potential solutions and the targeting of investment in support of active travel.

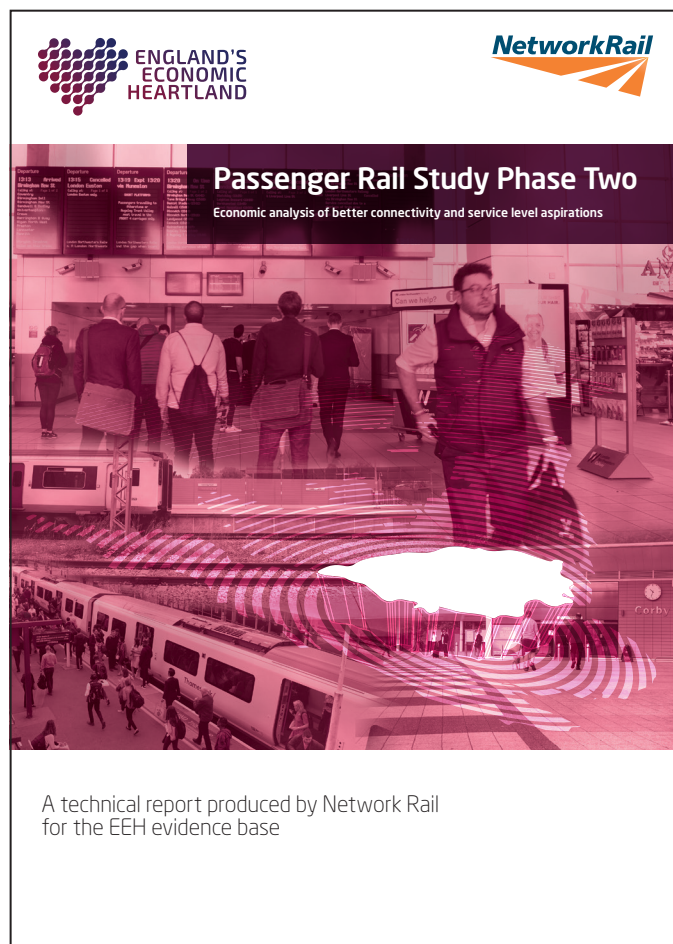
The toolkit has been used by EEH partners over the course of the year to plan interventions and in support of funding bids to government.

It was also used as the basis for a specially commissioned piece of work identifying FMLM requirements necessary to enable the full benefit of investment in East West Rail along the Marston Vale line. Feedback from EEH partners involved in the work highlighted the additional benefit of the work in informing the development of future strategic planning briefs.

The toolkit was highly commended in the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation 2021 awards.



## PASSENGER RAIL STUDY PHASES ONE AND TWO



Working with EEH, Network Rail conducted a baseline assessment and review of the existing rail network and levels of service in the region, published in July 2020.

This process enabled EEH to identify and understand where significant rail connectivity gaps exist, what rail enhancements are in development or delivery and what decarbonised/ non-decarbonised services there are on the network.

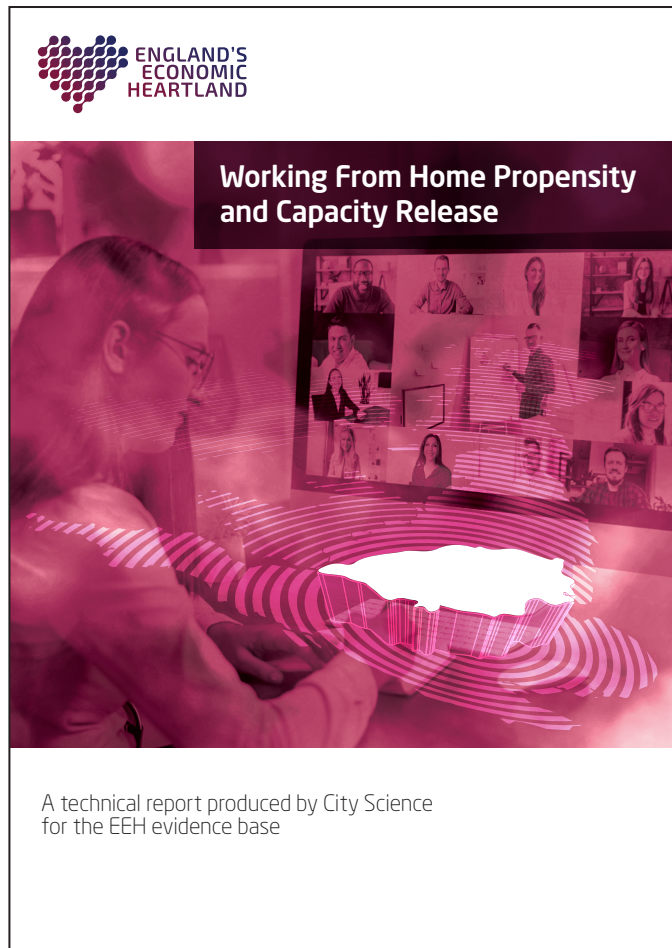


Work on phase two of the study took place throughout 2020/21. It has identified and prescribed aspirational service level outcomes for priority journey pairings where analysis demonstrated stronger connectivity by rail would generate a significant return on investment.

The output from this will be used to prepare conditional outputs that set out the requirements of the region, as we work alongside the new Great British Railways single governing body.



## WORK FROM HOME PROPENSITY AND CAPACITY RELEASE



EEH commissioned research to understand how the legacy of COVID-19 could transform capacity on the region's roads. Bringing together EEH's understanding of the sector-mix of the regional economy with our mapping of personas and understanding of demographics more generally, the work enabled us to make a realistic assessment of the potential to release some capacity on our existing roads infrastructure.

Understanding the potential for releasing capacity is important given that the performance of our infrastructure during peak hours is a key determinant in identifying the need for investment. Released capacity as a consequence of flexible/hybrid working offers the potential to reduce the need for and/or scale of infrastructure investment.

## INVESTMENT IN THE STRATEGIC AND MAJOR ROAD NETWORKS

Throughout 2020/21 EEH has continued to work in support of its partners in taking forward schemes included in the first Major Road Network (MRN) programme.

At the same time, we have worked in support of Highways England as they take forward delivery of schemes identified for the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in the 'Road Investment Strategy' (RIS2). A focus has been to support Highways England as it develops the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet scheme ready for the submission of its development consent order (DCO).

Investment in our highway network remains a priority given the role the network continues to play in support of economic activity and the delivery of planned growth. Reflecting the policies set out in the transport strategy, EEH is working with scheme promoters to ensure that the design of schemes taken forward support the need to encourage the role of our highways for public transport and active travel modes.

## DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

EEH's work in support of the development of the transport strategy, and in particular its work on 'Pathways to Decarbonisation', demonstrates the importance of embedding a systems approach to strategic infrastructure. Our work with the universities of Oxford and Southampton have further highlighted the critical role – from a transport perspective – of improved digital connectivity.

During 2020/21 EEH worked with the Satellite Applications Catapult to develop a strategic case in support of the need for ubiquitous digital connectivity (UDC).

The strategic case – entitled 'Transition' – puts forward a practical and viable proposition that we believe will facilitate the required step change in approach to planning and delivering improved digital connectivity. A key activity during 2021/22 will be seeking to secure the wider support within government that will enable this approach to be taken forward.

In the meantime, EEH continues to work with scheme promoters to ensure that the scheme requirements for new strategic transport infrastructure include the need to plan for and deliver it as digitally enabled infrastructure.

In spring 2020/21 EEH secured funding from the Government's 'Build Back Better' fund (via the Buckinghamshire LEP), that, together with contributions from local partners, will see the next stage of East West Rail delivered as digitally enabled infrastructure. Our experience with this scheme has demonstrated the importance of including such provision within the scheme requirements - with the cost of enhanced digital connectivity being delivered at 10% of that required to retrofit such a provision.

# THE YEAR AHEAD: OUR 2021/22 WORK PROGRAMME

EEH's 2021/22 work programme will focus on the development and delivery of the policy and investment priorities set out in the transport strategy.

## SUPPORTING THE HEARTLAND

### Regional Evidence Base and Monitoring

In autumn 2021, EEH will begin the annual update of the regional evidence base, including gathering updated data from local partners on local plan delivery, including housing and economic growth.

This is the final year of the current contract for the regional evidence base. During the first half of 2021/22 EEH will work with its partners to review options for the next version of the regional evidence base.

In addition, EEH will commission the work required to undertake the first annual monitoring of the region's transport strategy.

### Connectivity Studies

With work now commenced on the first two studies, the third study, Swindon-Didcot-Oxford is scheduled to be commissioned in autumn 2021. The scope for the fourth study, London-Buckinghamshire-Northampton, will be agreed with partners in spring 2022, with a plan for work to commence early in 2022/23, subject to resources being available.

The output from the first two connectivity studies is scheduled to report in the final quarter of 2021/22, with this feeding into an update of the investment pipeline associated with the transport strategy.

Alongside the connectivity studies themselves, EEH has commissioned an additional piece of discrete work tasked with identifying a set of 'alternative futures'. Working with EEH partners, this considers the scope for future global and national uncertainties on the demand for travel. This is common practice in strategic transport planning and allows us to ensure that solutions taken forward into the investment pipeline are robust and remain valid were circumstances to change.

### Speaking up for the region in the Spending Review



The region's transport strategy identified both the scale of planned growth across the Heartland and the need for additional investment in our transport system if that growth is to be realised in a way that is sustainable for the long term.

In this context we will prepare a submission for the autumn 2021 fiscal event, widely anticipated to be a three-year Spending Review.

The critical need for additional investment to enable the region to continue to be a net contributor to the Exchequer has been set out consistently by EEH and its partners. Key themes for this year's Spending Review is funding to enable:

- Delivery of immediate infrastructure priorities required to commence no later than 2025
- A scheme development fund to enable known priorities to become 'oven ready'
- Revenue funding to develop the region's capability and capacity to develop schemes, including a 'centre of excellence' in which expertise is pooled amongst our partners
- Core funding, delivered in a three-year settlement, to allow EEH to carry out its ambitious programme of work and implement the transport strategy.



## DECARBONISING THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

### Decarbonisation Road Map

Building on 'Pathways to Decarbonisation', we will develop and publish a detailed road map against which progress towards decarbonisation can be monitored. In so doing we will build upon and reflect the proposals set out in the Government's 'Transport Decarbonisation Plan'.

In addition, as part of our programme of work to support decarbonisation of our transport system we will commission the work required to produce a baseline map of current infrastructure provision in support of alternative fuels – including electric and hydrogen.

## IMPROVING STRATEGIC CONNECTIVITY

### Future rail (passenger) service requirements

Building on the outputs from phases one and two of our rail passenger study (undertaken in partnership with Network Rail), EEH will commence work to develop conditional output statements that can be used to inform the future requirements for passenger rail services as they become direct awards and/or concessions.

### Express Coach and Regional Bus Services

Responding to a request from our partners to provide them with support in respect of the potential role for regional, cross boundary bus and coach services, we will commission work to define a long-term future for mass transit services across the Heartland.



We will be working closely with the EEH Bus Operators Association to ensure that the proposal is practical and achievable. The output of this work will be available to support and inform the work of individual partners as they prepare their bus service improvement plans.

### Future Roads Requirements

EEH will continue to work with its partners to ensure their requirements are fed into the development of the third 'Road Investment Strategy' (RIS3) – work on which is already underway. At the same time we will work with our partners to identify those schemes that may be contenders for the next five-year MRN investment programme.

Highways England has recently commenced work on its route strategies programme and EEH will respond to calls for steers and evidence as they are taken forward.

In addition, following the Secretary of State's decision to cancel the Oxford to Cambridge expressway project between Oxford and Milton Keynes, there remains a need to identify the infrastructure required to deal with existing issues on the network. The EEH business unit is working with DfT and Highways England to take forward an additional DfT-funded piece of work designed to answer this question.

## IMPROVING LOCAL CONNECTIVITY

### Improving first mile, last mile connectivity

Work is being scoped to consider options for improving local connectivity in rural and semi-rural communities. This takes forward the concept of 'mobility hubs' as identified in the transport strategy.



## COLLABORATIVE WORKING

The underlying philosophy of EEH is to realise the added value of working collaboratively on issues of genuine strategic importance. This philosophy is embedded throughout our work and reflected in our ongoing partnerships with 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 the East West Main Line: an ambition to use delivery of the current East West Rail project as a stepping stone towards linking Ipswich and Norwich, with Cambridge, Bedford, Milton Keynes, Oxford, and beyond that towards Swindon and onwards to Bristol and South Wales.

The EEH business unit continues to provide the secretariat function for the Consortium, working with local authority and local enterprise partnerships across both the Heartland and Transport East regions. More recently, Western Gateway STB has also become involved in the Consortium's work.

During 2020/21 the Consortium has:

- Developed the preliminary strategic outline business case for the Eastern Section, from Cambridge to Ipswich and Norwich
- Supported the work of EEH and Transport East to deliver and implement their transport strategies, with a focus on delivering modal shift to rail freight
- Started to map out a longer-term strategic ambition for a 'coast to coast' East West Main Line
- Supported and part-funded work to find a solution to the London Road level crossing in Bicester, which will be closed for the majority of the time once Oxford-Cambridge East West Rail services begin
- Supported and part-funded the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study.

For 2021/22, the Consortium's work will include:

- Maintaining momentum on the Eastern Section
- Exploring local connectivity needs from East West Rail stations
- Managing and mitigating construction impacts - ensuring that lessons learnt during the ongoing construction of the Bicester to Bletchley section of East West Rail are used to inform future stages of the project.

### The Oxford-Cambridge Arc

The entirety of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc falls within the Heartland geography. Identified by the Government as a national economic priority, the work of EEH as the sub-national transport body provides leadership on strategic transport infrastructure requirements.

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 ensures that those wider linkages are properly considered to the benefit of the Arc.

### Delivery Partners

Right from the start EEH partners recognised the importance of harnessing the knowledge and experience within the private sector companies providing consultancy and professional services to each of their constituent members. The resulting Delivery Partners Group has been part of our extended network of collaborative working arrangements.

Collaboration with the delivery partners enables our work to be shaped by their understanding of scheme development and delivery. It also provides a means by which EEH is able to access additional technical skills when these are required to support our programme of work.

### EEH Bus Operators Association

Established in 2018, the EEH Bus Operators Association enables EEH to engage the sector on issues of strategic importance. The significance of this relationship is reflected by the association having a seat on the Strategic Transport Forum. The association will play a key role in EEH's bus study during 2021/22.

## 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 as a catalyst for transformative change.

Our close working relationship with Network Rail as system operator enables us to harness the skills, knowledge, and expertise

within the rail sector in support of implementation of the transport strategy. Moving forwards, we will use our strong working relationship with Network Rail as the basis for developing an equally strong relationship with Great British Railways.

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. In 2021/22 EEH will lead the STBs' decarbonisation and communication groups.

## Get in touch

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