

## Strategic Transport Leadership Board

12 July 2024

### Agenda Item 5 – Buses Update and the 'Heartbeat' Regional Bus Network Concept

#### *Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the Board:**

- a) Notes the progress following EEH Bus Symposium 'statement of intent' actions.**
- b) Agree that EEH can further develop the feasibility of a concept of a regional bus network 'Heartbeat' concept including further stakeholder engagement and establishing its viability and deliverability of such a network within the region.**

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. This paper provides Board members with a summary of progress following EEH Bus Symposium 'statement of intent' actions, including:
  - Total Transport
  - BSIP Refresh Support and Regional Transport Network including the identification of a regional bus network concept, the 'Heartbeat' network.
  - Bus Delivery Network Models
  - Journey Planning, including mobility hubs

#### **2. Key points to note**

- 2.1. Following last September's Bus Symposium and subsequent agreement by Board, EEH has been progressing with the four areas agreed by Members. An update is provided below.
- 2.2. As part of these actions, it was agreed that EEH should develop a "concept" for better regional bus connectivity.
- 2.3. This work should include a map/infographic setting out a regional bus/coach routes, to help strengthen the importance of buses and coaches and their networks and inform local transport authorities (LTA) within the region when drafting their bus service improvement plan refresh submissions on the benefits of regional bus connectivity.
- 2.4. This work has resulted in the identification of a concept regional bus/coach network the 'Heartbeat' network.

#### **3. Progressing Bus Symposium Actions**

- 3.1. Following last September's Bus Symposium and subsequent agreement by Board, the EEH has been progressing with the four agreed areas.

### **Area A: Total transport**

- 3.2. EEH has commissioned Better Futures to understand the demand, supply, needs, challenges, and opportunities that could be unlocked through a holistic approach to transport provision (Total Transport). This has involved exploring both statutory and discretionary transport services, including Home-to-School Transport (taxi, minibus, coach), Adult Social Care (taxi, minibus, coach), Community transport, public buses (inc. DRT) and Non-emergency patient transport.
- 3.3. More broadly the commission will help to identify and apply for funding (private sector, DfT, co-creation funding etc) to develop a possible AI based solution to better coordinate these differing transport services. The initial outputs of the commission (which is currently being reviewed) have already been used to support a bid to DfT's Transport Research Innovation Grant to help develop the 'Total Transport' concept further.

### **Area B: BSIP Refresh Support and Regional Transport Network**

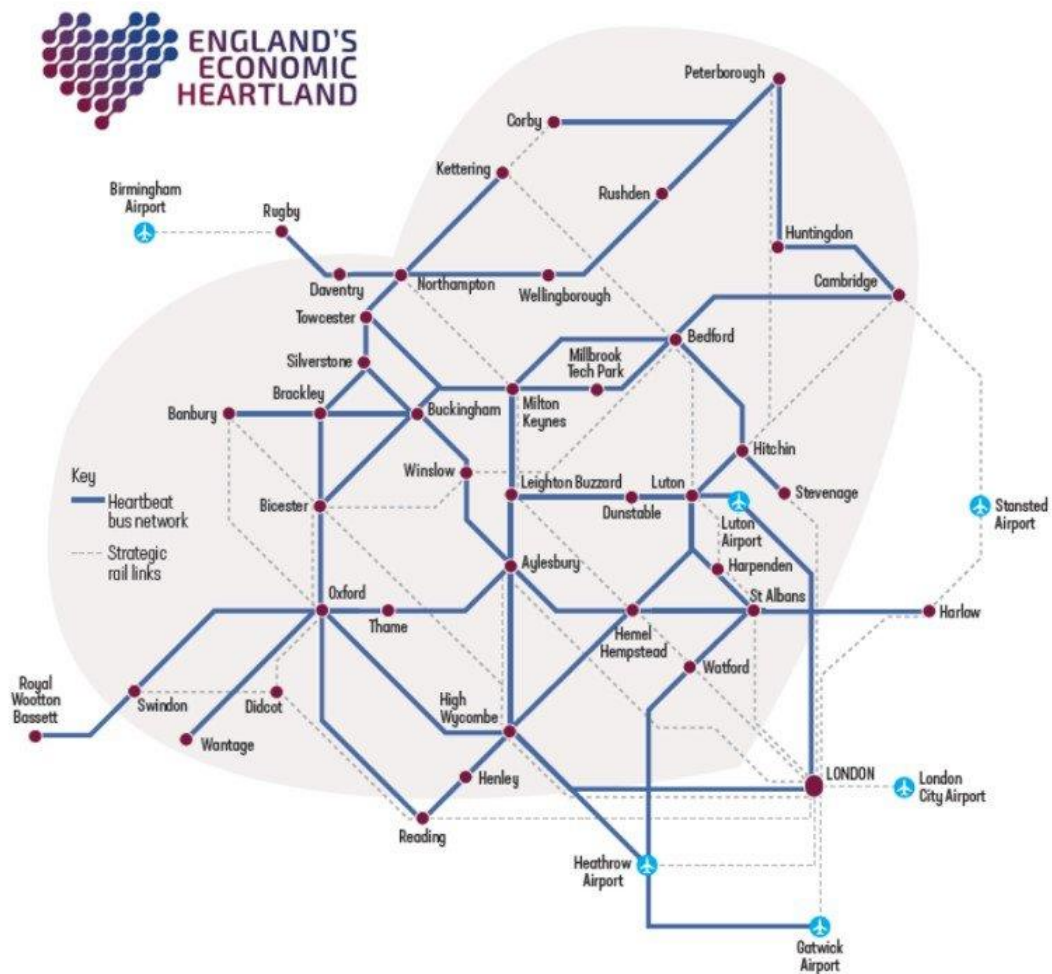
- 3.4. BSIP refresh support has been completed and provided to LTAs as part of their BSIP refresh submissions.

#### *Regional Bus Network Concept "Heartbeat" Network*

- 3.5. It was agreed that part of the buses work should focus on creating better regional bus connectivity. This work should include a map/infographic setting out a regional bus/coach routes, to help strengthen the importance of buses and coaches and their networks and inform local transport authorities (LTA) within the region when drafting their bus service improvement plan refresh submissions on the benefits of regional bus connectivity.
- 3.6. This work has resulted in the identification of a concept regional bus/coach network: the 'Heartbeat' network.
- 3.7. The concept, developed by our consultants Systra, brings together existing services and identifies new connections to create a regional bus transport network that also complements existing rail provision across the region.
- 3.8. The network is based upon connecting transport hubs and key destinations within EEH region, providing for cross-local transport authority journeys, and integrating with the existing local networks within the LTAs.
- 3.9. The benefits include boosting local and regional economies by improving access to jobs, education, and services, to improving the overall quality of life by providing a convenient, affordable, and sustainable mode of transport, making it easier for people to travel for leisure and daily activities.
- 3.10. It also helps to strengthen the case for regional transport investment (which would also support local services) much stronger.
- 3.11. The network is currently a "concept" that needs to be developed further to determine feasibility and deliverability. However, it is being developed from a sound basis of 36 routes that are based on: 16 existing routes; increased frequency to 11 other existing routes; and the identification of 9 new connections. These are outlined in more detail in Annex A.



Below: Heartbeat' network concept map



3.12. The 'Heartbeat' concept has been presented and shared with the EEH Regional Bus Forum members, for review and any further suggestions as to route options. The comments received so far are also included in Annex A.

3.13. If EEH Board Members see further merit in the development the 'Heartbeat' concept, EEH officers will continue to work with the Regional Bus Forum members, to take forward the concept through to feasibility. Some of the detail will include:

- Developing further the peak vehicle requirement (PVR) for the routes and the associated costs for service provision, to establish the viability, deliverability, and the long-term nature of support (funding/resourcing staff and infrastructure) required for a regional bus network.
- Establishing or prioritising how and when proposed routes could be improved or delivered, for example based on levels of funding available, commercial viability or quantum of movements etc.
- A clear understanding of passenger needs, so that service expectations can be met, such as timetabling, traveller experience etc.
- Consideration and development for example of regional ticketing, route branding/marketing or governance of the network.
- Exploring further 'new' route suggestions, to add more bus connectivity within and beyond the region.
- Extensive consultation with LTAs / Bus Operators on agreed levels of service and roles and responsibilities and opportunities.

### **Area C: Bus Delivery and Network Models**

- 3.14. Also, included as part of the bus commissioned work, was an evaluation and advice note to our partners on emerging bus delivery models, so they are better prepared and informed if legislation is changed, or government bus priorities change, a draft of this work is currently being reviewed.
- 3.15. Improving public transport in a polycentric economy with many rural and peri-urban communities is one of the biggest challenges in the EEH region. To understand this better EEH, also commissioned a supplier to build a solid evidence base which reflects different network bus models which could lead to bus market reform, including hub and spoke models, demand responsive and community transport etc, this is currently being drafted.

### **Area D: Journey planning**

- 3.16. EEH is continuing to partner and support Project Coral, which is the national contactless public transport ticketing scheme, and we continue to work through the EEH Regional Bus Forum, to understand fully the opportunity or challenge of EEH LTA's adopting Project Coral as a ticketing solution.
- 3.17. We are continuing to explore the merits of a marketing and promotions to encourage more people to use public transport, highlighting the ways in which they can plan and integrate their journeys by working in partnership with [www.journey-alerts.com](http://www.journey-alerts.com) to offer EEH LTAs access to their door-to-door journey and live alerts platform.
- 3.18. We are continuing to work with partners on ensuring world class local connectivity to East West Rail stations will serve as a catalyst for improving bus services to transport hubs across the region.

#### *Mobility Hubs*

- 3.19. In addition to the requirements focused on improving bus service delivery, EEH have also commissioned work to help accelerate the deployment of mobility hubs within the region. This work currently underway, involves establishing an investable proposition narrative document to 'market' mobility hubs, facilitating a "triaging investment" workshop to bring together LTAs and private and public stakeholders to accelerate delivery and provide direct consultancy support to LTAs within the region with mobility hub development.

### **4. Next steps**

- 4.1. If EEH Board Members agree that the 'Heartbeat' concept should be further developed, then EEH will continue to work with the EEH Regional Bus Forum, to establish its viability, costs and deliverability within the region. Updates on progress will be provided to future Board meeting for noting and agreement.
- 4.2. Following the success of last September's Bus Symposium, EEH are proposing to revisit the 'statement of intent' actions and consider further the changing bus market in the region with Members/officers, by holding another **Bus Symposium 2024**, on Thursday 10 October at the Vulcan Works building in Northampton. Full details, agenda and speakers will be provided as soon as available.
- 4.3. In addition to progressing the Bus Symposium 'Statement of Intent' actions, EEH will continue to work with its public transport operators and local authority partners to deliver its existing buses work programme as part of its Regional Bus Forum and Strategy, to further the case for a more integrated regional public transport network.

**Trevor Brennan**  
**Project Lead**  
**July 2024**



## Annex A Regional Bus Network Concept

The network is currently a "concept" that needs to be developed further to determine feasibility and deliverability. However, it is being developed from a sound basis of 36 routes that are based on: 16 existing routes; increased frequency to 11 other existing routes; and the identification of 9 new connections.

The suggested concept does not replace successful existing routes, but suggests improved reliability, speed, frequency, comfort on the existing routes, as well as where feasible providing the new or improved links that have been identified in previous EEH studies, particularly our range of [Connectivity Studies](#) and [Regional Bus Study](#).

The routes identified fall into three categories:

- 16 existing higher-frequency short bus routes linking residents to major centres and major business destinations, shown in green.
- 11 existing lower frequency services at around every 30 minutes, operating reliably all day and linking hubs in the region, scheduled with other routes for a 'pulse' arrival and departure to optimise interchange at hubs throughout the region, shown in orange.
- 9 new routes, providing longer-distance services linking major centres and airports within and around the region, again with interchange optimised at regional hubs, are shown in yellow.

**Table of existing and proposed bus routes in the 'Heartbeat' network concept\***

Bus Route Number	Origin - Destination	At target frequency	Operator
S6	Swindon - Oxford	Yes	Stagecoach
S5	Royal Wootton Bassett - Swindon	Yes	Stagecoach
S9	Wantage - Oxford	Yes	Stagecoach
X1	Wantage - Oxford	Yes	Oxford Bus Company
800/850	Reading - Henley-on-Thames - High Wycombe	Yes	Arriva
X7	Oxford - Thame - Aylesbury	Yes	Arriva
X9 / X90	High Wycombe - Aylesbury	Yes	Arriva
Oxford Tube	Oxford - London	Yes	Stagecoach
The Airline	Oxford - High Wycombe - Heathrow - Gatwick	Yes	Oxford Bus Company
X5	Aylesbury - Hemel Hempstead	Yes	Arriva
301/302	Hemel Hempstead - St Albans	Yes	Arriva
321	Luton - Harpenden - St Albans - Watford	Yes	Arriva
101	Luton - Hitchin - Stevenage	Yes	Arriva
9A/9B/9C	Stevenage - Hitchin - Bedford	Yes	Stagecoach
X5	Bedford - Milton Keynes	Yes	Stagecoach
Busway A/B	Cambridge - Huntingdon	Yes	Stagecoach
724	Harlow - St Albans - Watford - Heathrow Airport	No	Arriva
1	High Wycombe - Hemel Hempstead - Luton	No	Carousel
X4/X40	Aylesbury - Leighton Buzzard - Milton Keynes	No	Arriva
87	Northampton - Brackley	No	Stagecoach
88	Silverstone - Northampton	No	Stagecoach
X6	Aylesbury - Winslow - Buckingham - Milton Keynes	No	Arriva
X10	Northampton - Kettering	No	Stagecoach
X4	Northampton - Wellingborough - Corby - Peterborough	From Northampton to Corby	Stagecoach
905	Bedford - Cambridge	No	Stagecoach
D1	Daventry - Rugby	No	Stagecoach
788	Peterborough - Cambridge	No	National Express
New	Northampton - Oxford	-	
New	Banbury - Brackley - Buckingham - Bicester	-	
New	Milton Keynes - Towcester - Silverstone - Buckingham	-	
New	Northampton - Towcester - Brackley - Oxford	-	
New	Northampton - Wellingborough - Rusden - Peterborough	-	
New BRT	Leighton Buzzard - Luton - Hitchin - Stevenage	-	
New	Luton - Hemel Hempstead - High Wycombe	-	
New	Bedford - Millbrook Technology Park - Milton Keynes	-	
New	Aylesbury - Princes Risborough - High Wycombe - Heathrow	-	

**\*Note table was produced prior to proposed closure of Arriva depots in Aylesbury and High Wycombe**



**Feedback from the Bus Forum members on the Heartbeat Network (note: subject to Member feedback, the below issues will be addressed as part of the next phase of work on the Heartbeat Network)**

- Generally supportive of the principle of a better regional bus network and the concept.
- Concerned about the viability of such a network when LTA/operators already have an existing challenge of supporting bus services within and between LTA boundaries.
- Who would provide financial support/funding for the identified and new routes, would it be either LTA funding or as a commercial service only.
- How would routes be prioritised, as currently funding or demand would not be sufficient to support all the routes suggested.
- Additional suggestions of extra routes.