



# **Strategic Transport Leadership Board**

14 July 2023

## **Agenda Item Number 3: Supporting Road Investment**

### *Recommendation:*

**It is recommended that the Strategic Transport Leadership Board:**

- a) Receives a presentation from National Highways on the third road investment strategy**
- b) Agrees the draft position statement on roads for EEH (annex 2)**
- c) Approves EEH's consultation response on DfT's Strategic Road Network initial report (annex 3)**
- d) Notes EEH's further activity to prepare technical responses to National Highways' reports: 'Connecting the Country' and individual Route Strategies.**

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

1.1. The purpose of this report is to outline EEH's proposed updated position on road investment in the region in the context of achieving the aims of EEH's transport strategy and the current consultations on the Third Road Investment Strategy.

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

- 2.1. EEH's transport strategy, published in 2021, outlined the connectivity priorities for the region. The strategy acknowledges that to achieve these priorities it was no longer right to take a 'business as usual' approach which sought to predict future transport demand and provide additional capacity to meet it ('predict and provide').
- 2.2. On that basis, the transport strategy set out the conditions on which road investment in the future would best be supported, recognising both our duty towards supporting the transition to a net zero transport system and the essential role that roads have in supporting our region.
- 2.3. In order to develop the region's position further, and to provide greater clarity on the context in which the transport strategy position would be supported, EEH commissioned consultants Jacobs to undertake a technical 'think piece' on the future of roads in the EEH region.
- 2.4. This work is still on-going but has informed an updated proposed position statement on roads.

### **3. Context**

- 3.1. EEH's regional transport strategy, agreed by partners across the region was published in 2021. The strategy set the context for strategic transport in the region, guided by four key principles:
  - Achieving net zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050, with an ambition to reach this by 2040

- Improving quality of life and wellbeing through a safe and inclusive transport system accessible to all which emphasises sustainable and active travel
  - Supporting the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities
  - Ensuring the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways, in a way which lessens its environmental impact
- 3.2. Road based modes and particularly the private car, are at present the dominant form of transportation across the EEH area. The region's dispersed urban geography, poorly connected rural areas, and central position in the UK (leading to significant volumes of strategic freight traffic crossing the region) mean that for many journeys, there may not be a viable alternative to private vehicles.
- 3.3. For passengers, alternatives to the private car, such as bus and active travel, are still predominantly road-based forms of transportation and therefore continue to require well maintained, reliable road infrastructure.
- 3.4. EEH's transport strategy (policy 24) highlights support for investment in road infrastructure where it meets one or more of the following criteria and is consistent with wider environmental objectives:
- Protects and enhances the existing infrastructure asset;
  - Delivers a solution to an identified problem on the existing infrastructure asset;
  - Enables access to new economic opportunities and/or housing growth; or
  - Enables delivery of sustainable transport linkages such as public transport and active travel improvements.
- 3.5. Since the publication of the transport strategy, further studies and technical work progressed by EEH, along with emerging policy from Government and recent consultation on the third road investment strategy (RIS) has brought further need for EEH to further clarify its position on roads and road investment.
- 3.6. Recently, the announcement by the Climate Change Committee (28 June 2023) that a systematic review of current and future road-building projects is required to assess their consistency with environmental goals, justifies further the need for EEH to develop its thinking in this area.

#### **4. Approach**

- 4.1. To support our position, EEH commissioned consultants to undertake a 'think piece' on the future of roads in the EEH region to determine if the approach to major road investment was still aligned with the EEH transport strategy.
- 4.2. To inform their work, transport officers were invited to provide input and suggestions on how best to respond to the challenge. There was collective agreement in the important role that roads play in the region's transport system:
- Road infrastructure is key to the delivery of planned economic and housing growth and connecting people and places across our polycentric region.
  - The region has many rural areas for which road-based modes of transportation are the only realistic means of travel.
  - Roads provide key links between our region and the rest of the UK and provide a vital role in supporting the freight and logistics sector.
  - Roads support the delivery of several transport modes including: bus, taxi, micromobility, and active travel, providing most walking and cycling infrastructure.
- 4.3. The workshop highlighted several key priorities for roads in the EEH region including:

- Decarbonising roads – both in construction and supporting alternative fuels
  - Delivering mode shift – reflecting the fact that well planned and well managed roads can be genuinely multi modal in nature
  - Improving connectivity and supporting growth
  - Conserving and enhancing the natural, historic and built environment
  - Delivering a future-ready road network (embracing technology)
  - Supporting road freight
  - Protecting existing assets
  - Improving safety
- 4.4. Officers highlighted the need to balance the impacts of road transport (on the environment, health and wellbeing, and the character of the public realm) with the connectivity that people and businesses need. The workshop also considered where road investment is best focused and identified recommendations under each of these themes. A draft of the outputs of our engagement activity is included in as annex 1 to this paper.
- 4.5. The workshop highlighted criteria that should be considered before major new off-line road infrastructure to provide significant additional capacity is constructed. These included:
- There must be compelling evidence that the use of existing assets have been maximised;
  - The potential use of technology to achieve a solution to squeeze maximum value out of existing infrastructure must have been considered and implemented as appropriate;
  - Realistic alternative solutions to reduce unnecessary traffic on the network and to potentially release capacity in other ways have been considered and sought as appropriate. For example, increasing capacity for rail freight as a way of reducing congestion on the road network.
- 4.6. Based on the initial outcomes of the future of roads work and in response to publications such as Climate Change Committee and the third Road Investment Strategy consultation, EEH has developed a draft position statement on the future of major road investment in the region. A copy of the position statement is included at Annex 2 to this paper.
- 4.7. The statement assesses if the EEH transport strategy policy is still relevant and also identifies the context of when roads-based solutions should be considered:
- It is multi-modal or supports multi-modal integration;
  - Designed in such a way as to minimise its impact on the wider community;
  - It considers the transport system as a whole and new infrastructure is prioritised to support a whole corridor / route / end to end journeys;
  - That the strategic narrative, safety and decarbonisation and not just journey time savings are included in key indicators of success;
  - That it protects and enhances the existing infrastructure asset;
  - Delivers a solution to an identified problem on the existing infrastructure asset;
  - Enables access to new economic opportunities and/or housing growth; or
  - Enables delivery of sustainable transport linkages such as public transport and active travel improvements.

## **2. Securing investment in strategic roads – RIS3 (2025 – 2030)**

- 2.1. National Highways are in the process of developing its advice to Government to inform the third Roads Investment Strategy (2025 – 2030).
- 2.2. As part of that, in June 2023, National Highways published a series of key documents, including the Strategic Road Network (SRN) Initial Report and a supporting report “Connecting the County”.

2.3. The Strategic Road Network (SRN) initial report outlines how network investment is planned by the government. It outlines (non-scheme specific) proposals for the third road period, which covers the years 2025-2030.

2.4. The document outlines the following objectives that the government would like to achieve in roads period 3 including:

- Improving safety for all
- Making the most of the network we have
- Evolving the customer and community offer
- Driving decarbonisation and environmental sustainability
- Taking a targeted approach to enhancing the network
- Reshaping and evolving how National Highways deliver.

2.5. Following publication of the document, DfT and National Highways are consulting on it. The deadline for responses is 13 July 2023. DfT has however agreed that EEH could submit a draft response, pending approval by the Strategic Transport Leadership Board.

2.6. A draft response, set out in Annex 3, raises the following key points:

- Supportive of the acknowledgement that making best use of the existing asset is important and that bringing forward maintenance schemes as is small-scale enhancements to ensure that the SRN operates as effectively as possible. The need for targeted investment mirrors our policy position from our Transport Strategy published in 2021.
- Reiterates the need for investment certainty, for both existing schemes and emerging priorities. Uncertainty and delays in investment is detrimental to the UK economy and our partners' ability to lever the maximum return on investment from the infrastructure.
- Agrees with the sentiment that transport should be considered as part of a whole system approach, one which considers all modes of travel and how they interact. The majority of journeys start and end on a local network and therefore the interaction with the SRN and local roads (including the MRN) and therefore there should be parity of funding for roads improvements regardless of who is responsible for it.
- Early engagement with STBs and local authorities is vital to understand local plans and networks, including the impact of the SRN on local communities.
- Welcome the ambition to make designated funds more accessible and simpler to apply for. EEH believes that elements such as active travel should be considered as part of the core schemes rather than an 'add on'.
- Supportive of the investment in technology and digital approach but that this must be implemented as part of schemes as business as usual.
- That the delay in committing to and delivering schemes can cause uncertainty for partners in network planning. We are committed to working with National Highways and Local Authority partners to express the strategic case for pipeline schemes in the region, where they are supported by the Local Authority

2.7. A Department for Transport led consultation on the document runs until 13 July. EEH has secured an extension to allow the proposed consultation response to be reviewed by the Board.



### **3. Response to National Highways RIS Consultation – Connecting the Country and Route Strategies**

- 3.1. In addition to the SRN initial report, EEH business unit is will coordinate a technical response to the supporting reports published by National Highways. These include:
- Connecting the Country – National Highways Long terms strategic plan to 2050.
  - Individual Route Strategies - nine of which cover the EEH region.
- 3.2. EEH has already met with a number of partners authorities and responses are currently being drafted. These will be shared with officers to allow them to comment to ensure that they reflect local priorities and points they would like to raise, prior to them being submitted to National Highways.
- 3.3. The [Connecting the Countries consultation document](#) outlines a proposal for the SRN to be categorised into national corridors, inter-regional routes and regional connections, with associated 'levels of service' for each:
- National corridors would be those classed as the vital spine of the network, supporting the highest levels of demand. These routes will be the key long-distance corridors, connecting major urban economies, acting as major freight routes and linking international gateways.
  - Inter-regional routes would be high-demand, multiple-lane roads. These routes will connect regional economies and carry significant levels of freight and goods.
  - Regional connections would link local economic centres, both to each other and the national network.
- 3.4. The levels of service which would be assigned to each category would be in themes relating to safety, digital, decarbonisation, customer experience, sustainable network development and asset resilience.
- 3.5. EEH business unit is developing a response to Connecting the Country that sets out the need for much more detailed discussion on the concepts and the levels of service proposed. This includes whether there is a proposed split of funding for different categories, with a concern that funding will be concentrated on a certain network category. A further report will be provided to the Board in the autumn.

**Suzanne Winkels**  
**Technical Programme Manager**  
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