

Annual report 2023/24: Improving connectivity – together

FOREWORD

Welcome to England's Economic Heartland's annual report for 2023/24.

Last year's annual report showcased how England's Economic Heartland 'adds value' to government and our local authority partners. That work only accelerated through 2023/24, whether through the development of new tools and data to bolster the region's evidence base, securing investment in infrastructure or sharing best practice.

However, when reviewing the achievements of the past year, another aspect of our work which particularly stood out was the way in which our partnerships have been significantly strengthened during 2023/24 - building on our ethos of collaboration to deliver real results for the region.

By working together, during 2023/24 we have:

- Secured government commitment to the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements, working in partnership with local and combined authorities and LEPs, Transport East, MPs and the private sector.
- Galvanised the region's approach to boosting bus journeys, bringing leaders and experts around the table for our Bus Symposium - EEH is widely regarded as a leading voice amongst the STBs on bus.

- Made the delivery of Oxford-Swindon-Bristol rail services a real possibility within the next 12-18 months, thanks to collaboration between Network Rail and Western Gateway STB.
- Supported and were part of multiple bids for innovation funding, working with universities, private sector and our local authorities.
- Created the powerful 'Wider South East' partnerships for rail and freight with Transport East and Transport for South East, giving us a powerful voice to work with national bodies such as Great British Railways and logistics sector.

I am particularly excited by the collaboration of regional partnerships (EEH, Oxford to Cambridge pan-Regional Partnership, Arc Universities Group, Supercluster Board and East West Railway Company), which has emerged since the start of this year. It gives us the best chance to maximise the benefits of East West Rail for our communities and businesses. With East West Rail between Oxford and Milton Keynes potentially opening within the current financial year, securing its legacy will continue to be a major priority for EEH during 2024/25.

During 2023/24 work started on gathering evidence for EEH's flagship 'Connecting Economies' brochures (due summer 2024) which will set out the economic rationale for improving connectivity in the region. The emerging evidence reinforces just what a compelling economic narrative there is for our region: the world class expertise in science and technology, the sheer amount of globally important assets, the vital role the region plays for the UK's freight and logistics networks.

However, there are issues, including our productivity gap relative to the national average (though productivity rates do vary widely throughout the region). Bridging the gap is not helped by inadequate levels of transport infrastructure in many of our places. Our evidence base, which has made significant progress during 2023/24, is demonstrating the impact this is having on levels of congestion, emissions, and the ability of our residents to access jobs. Ultimately, it is a barrier to our businesses collaborating; deepening clusters; as well as accessing skilled labour, markets, commercial premises and supply chains.

With an ethos of genuine collaboration to achieve real-world results, EEH is at the forefront of addressing these connectivity challenges: boosting economic growth, cutting emissions and improving the quality of life in our communities.

I would like to thank our local authority partners and the Department for Transport for their continued financial support for EEH. I look forward to working with colleagues on the Strategic Transport Leadership Board as we steer EEH through another successful year.

INTRODUCTION

England's Economic Heartland is at the forefront of planning and promoting the transport infrastructure and policy framework required to realise our region's economic potential while reducing the transport system's impact on the environment.

As one of seven sub-national transport bodies covering the entirety of England outside of London, we are jointly funded by the Department for Transport and our local authority partners.

This annual report reviews the progress made on our 2023/24 work programme and looks ahead to our work in the coming year under the following themes:

- Adding value to our partners and the region
- Building a comprehensive evidence base
- Delivering the transport system of the future
- Securing investment in strategic connectivity
- Realising a regional approach to local transport

A commitment to collaboration

Meetings of the Strategic Transport Leadership Board are held in public, its reports and minutes are publicly available on our website. Interested parties have the ability to address the Board 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, led by managing director Naomi Green, aims to operate with agility, keeping bureaucracy to a minimum whilst being accountable to the partners for its work.

During 2023/24 we strengthened the business unit's competence further, developing a procurement and risk management function that remains central to our business unit's capability and ensures we operate as effectively as possible. We have also maintained our commitment to investing in EEH staff, as a regional resource for all local partners. This included working with Cranfield University on communication and engagement techniques. There remain significant gaps in EEH's analytical capability – an area of important focus for the business unit in 2024/25.

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.

There is a continued commitment of partners to invest in the work of EEH as the sub-national transport body, amounting to £449,616 in local contributions in 2023/34. This

unlocks funding from the Department for Transport. For 2023/24, our DfT grant settlement was £1,350,000.

ADDING VALUE TO OUR PARTNERS AND THE REGION

Whether it be providing additional resource to develop plans, creating tools to give greater understanding of places, or establishing forums to share best practice, delivering added value to our partners and the region was a central part of our work in 2023/24 and will continue to be so.

Collaboration

Collaboration is key to everything EEH does. The past financial year has seen us significantly enhance the way we collaborate with partners both within and external to our region.

The Five: Regional collaboration on securing a world class legacy for East West Rail

While the economic potential of our region is undoubted, connectivity and infrastructure constraints have always been a barrier to its success.

Delivering East West Rail connectivity is a critical factor in removing this barrier and there is a clear expectation that East West Rail should be designed to bring benefits for our existing local communities and businesses above all else. To achieve this requires the commitment and buy in across a wide range of people – a body like EEH can not work in isolation.

During early 2024 EEH managing director Naomi Green met with Oxford to Cambridge pan-Regional Partnership, the Science Supercluster Board, Arc Universities Group and East West Railway Company to explore what a shared approach to creating a legacy for East West Rail could look like and how, together, an alliance of local partners can best deliver the region's priorities for the scheme.

This is partnership working in the purest sense: the 'alliance' may in time aim to go deeper than the levels of collaboration that would rightly be expected as standard. Operating in this way means:

- Being better able to share priorities with the fair expectation that other members of the alliance will give them due regard;
- Opening up opportunities for partners that otherwise wouldn't be possible;
- Identifying and acting on shared priorities;
- Drawing on the best expertise we have across our organisations in doing so;
- Operating at such a scale that we are more able to influence government decision making at all levels.

The collaboration will focus on adding value and considering matters that are known priorities for the region:

- Improving connectivity
- Preserving and enhancing our quality of life, place, heritage and culture

- The built and natural environment
- Skills and learning
- Business, investment and knowledge

The Government has recently formed a 'growth board' for East West Rail: a group led by HM Treasury that has representation from across Government departments. The growth board's remit is to ensure Government is able to better coordinate its own ambitions for East West Rail. This regional alliance provides the right framework, alongside individual local authority partners to advise the growth board, to represent the region's views and to consider the growth board's response. Our single voice is the most powerful and effective route to ensuring national government is clear about the region's ambitions and expectations of what is necessary to achieve them.

Wider South East Rail Partnership

The rail network in the wider south east of England plays a vital role in supporting the rail network across the whole of England. During 2023/24 EEH led the creation, on behalf of ourselves, Transport East and Transport for South East, of the Wider South East Rail Partnership. The Partnership, now in full operation can ensure the agreed transport strategies for regional connectivity are embedded in Great British Railway's approach and that due regard is given to our identified priority interventions. The Wider South East Rail Partnership is providing strategic oversight of how rail service provision and rail infrastructure investment is being planned in the most effective way for businesses and communities across the wider region, as well as for the benefit of the rail network as a whole. It provides a forum through which discussions about: rail services in and out of London both now and in the future can be considered; how future devolution frameworks for rail can be coordinated for the benefit of cross boundary rail movements; the interaction between passenger and freight demand on the rail network; and the need to plan a rail network as part of an integrated transport system. The first meeting took place in February 2024 and meets quarterly.

Wider South East Freight Forum

The movement of goods does not stop at borders. To recognise this, in 2023 EEH, Transport East, and Transport for South East established the Wider South East Freight Forum, which brings together freight and logistics industry representatives such as Logistics UK, the Road Haulage Association, local authorities, business representatives, and ports and airports. The forum will support a better understanding of each member's needs, identify areas for collaboration and joint working and be a mechanism to share expertise, knowledge and good practice across the wider south east. The forum will also enable members to support the implementation of EEH, TE, and TfSE's work on freight.

The first meeting was held in December 2023. At the second meeting in March 2024 a forward work programme was agreed, including topics such as decarbonisation, alternative fuel infrastructure, and lorry parking and welfare facilities.

Bus Symposium

Improving bus journeys and patronage across the region is an important area of focus for England's Economic Heartland. On 15 September 2023 it held its Bus Symposium 2023 at Stockwood Discovery Centre in Luton. The event, attended by EEH Board members, heard

from a number of expert speakers from national and local government and bus operators about what can be done to increase patronage and ensure bus journeys make a vital contribution towards giving people an alternative to the car, connecting them to jobs and services and reducing carbon emissions. From this meeting, a 'statement of intent' was formed which is guiding EEH's major programme of work on bus and mobility hubs.

EEH Board

Cllr Liz Leffman, the leader of Oxfordshire County Council, was elected as Chair of England's Economic Heartland in September 2023.

'Board Champions' have also been elected to provide additional oversight and support profile raising of EEH workstreams. These are:

- Strategic connectivity: Cllr Steven Broadbent (Buckinghamshire)
- Innovation: Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew (Milton Keynes)
- Integrated transport system: Cllrs Graham Lawman (North Northamptonshire) and Jim Weir (Bedford).

Alongside its role in steering the work of the EEH business unit, the Board meetings are an opportunity for members to make representations to senior DfT officials who are present. In addition to this, throughout 2023/24, a number of speakers from different organisations have appeared before the Board, providing a unique opportunities and insights for members.

These include:

- Presentation by Oxfordshire County Council on innovation, held at Milton Park
- Introduction to the new Chair of the Oxford to Cambridge pan-Regional Partnership
- Presentation by Network Rail on HS2 released capacity
- Presentation from National Infrastructure Commission on the Second National Infrastructure Assessment
- Presentation by Hertfordshire County Council on its mass rapid transit proposals
- Presentation from DfT on its bus plans

Corporate directors meeting

In 2022 a new corporate directors meeting was launched, bringing together the senior managers from our partner authorities on a quarterly basis. The meetings provide a space for discussion of key strategic challenges and opportunities.

Transport officer group

Our transport officer group provides a vital part of EEH's governance: bringing together our partners' transport officers to guide and scrutinise our work, while also providing a means for them to speak directly with Department for Transport officials.

Officers also receive presentations from external bodies which supports their work. During 2023/24 topics have included:

- Rail updates (Network Rail)
- Roads Investment Strategy (National Highways)
- Local Transport Plans (multiple authorities showcase)
- East West Rail (East West Railway Company)
- Milton Keynes mass rapid transit (Milton Keynes Council)

East West Main Line Partnership

EEH continues to provide the officer support for the East West Main Line Partnership, which includes local authority, local enterprise partnership and sub-national transport body representation from the west of England right through to Norfolk and Suffolk.

In 2023/24, on behalf of both the East West Main Line Partnership and EEH Boards, the business unit have commenced a significant programme of support work, coordinating engagement on the legacy for East West Rail, as well as the door to door strategy for the scheme.

Conferences

In November 2023 EEH hosted its annual conference at the Guildhall in Cambridge. The event provided a platform for our partners to showcase their work, from the success of Luton's DART to Peterborough's plans for its station quarter development. Attended by nearly 200 delegates from across local and national government and the private sector, the event received extremely positive feedback.

In September 2023, we collaborated with Transport East, East of England Local Government Association and Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) for the inaugural East of England Net Zero Conference, also in Cambridge, which was very well received and will return in 2024. Naomi Green and Cllr Liz Leffman spoke on-stage.

In November 2023, EEH held a 90-minute question-and-answer session at the inaugural Oxford-Cambridge pan-Regional Partnership.

Pan regional partnerships

As the sub-national transport body covering the entirety of the Oxford to Cambridge region, EEH has a seat on the partnership's board. Swindon Borough Council's membership of the Western Gateway Pan Regional Partnership also provides an important link between the EEH region and wider south west England and Wales.

Sub-national transport bodies

England's seven sub-national transport bodies continue to collaborate on a wide range of issues.

During 2023/24 EEH took over the leadership of the important Sub-national Transport Body Liaison Group, which meets quarterly. This sees senior officers from the seven STBs meeting over two days every quarter, to discuss common interests, explore opportunities for collaboration and share best practice. The meetings also provide a platform for DfT and its agencies to update the STBs on initiatives and policy. EEH will hold this role until June 2025. During the year the STBs explored models for strengthening STB engagement with government to deliver better outcomes for regions, including the need for a national transport strategy. We hosted meetings and visits from government officials – raising the region's profile and government understanding of our opportunities and challenges – including from DfT, DHLUC, Treasury and BEIS.

EEH played a key role in establishing the inaugural STB Conference in 2022, which returned for its third iteration in February 2024 as part of the Interchange event held in Manchester.

It was attended by senior representatives from Department for Transport and the private sector.

During 2023/24 EEH collaborated with other STBs on projects including electric vehicle charging infrastructure (with Transport East); rural connectivity (a joint project between all seven STBs); and Bus Back Better, including expert training for officers and members (with Transport for South East and Transport East).

Speaking up for the region

During 2023/24 EEH continued to represent the region's priorities on the national stage, providing thought leadership at events and conferences throughout the year. Our continuous engagement with organisations such as DfT, National Highways, Network Rail, Great British Railways, Active Travel England ensures our partners' requirements are well understood. In addition, we have responded on behalf of EEH (and in some cases the wider region) to a number of consultations throughout 2023/24, including on the following topics:

- London Luton Airport Expansion (EEH also appeared as an expert witness at the Planning Inquiry)
- Train Station Ticket Office Closure (raising serious concerns)
- Road investment strategy Transport Committee inquiry
- National Networks Policy Statement (DfT)
- National Highways Route Strategies
- Scrapping of London Travel Cards (raising serious concerns)
- Rail Reform Legislation
- Infrastructure Levy
- Consultations held by various sub-national transport bodies
- Freight, logistics and planning system (DfT)

Parliamentary engagement

During the last year EEH has stepped up its engagement with Parliament and the region's MPs. This includes:

- In March 2024, EEH's managing director Naomi Green gave evidence on East West Rail to the Transport Committee, as part of its inquiry into strategic transport objectives, with East West Rail being used as a case study. Naomi set out the transformational benefits of East West Rail in the context of the DfT appraisal and decision-making process.
- In June 2023, we held an event in Parliament to launch our Keeping Trade on Track brochure on the need for investment in Ely Junction (see page XX).
- We regularly meet with members of Parliament to discuss their issues and priorities, for example in relation to our upcoming Luton-Bedford-Corby connectivity study.
- Through our membership of the East of England All-Party Parliamentary Group, we support MPs as they advocate for infrastructure investment in the East, and attended a number of infrastructure-themed events in Parliament throughout the year.

A regional voice on the national level

Throughout 2023/24 EEH officers and Board members have spoken at a number of national (and, indeed, international) events to represent the region's importance and priorities.

Here's just a snapshot of some of the places we've spoken at:

- United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe, Inland Transport Committee, Working Party on Rail Transport, Passenger Hubs, Fifth session in Geneva (April 2023): On mobility and East West Rail.
- UKREiIF (May 2023): On the opportunities of improved connectivity in the region.
- RAC/ Rees Jeffreys Fund Motoring discussions and debates : on the future of roads
- Mobility Hub 2023 (May 2023): On mobility hubs.
- Westminster Social Policy Forum (June 2023): On supporting economic growth in the region.
- Transport Practitioners Meeting (June 2023): On our active travel strategy.
- Cycling Cities Oxfordshire (July 2023): On our active travel strategy.
- CIHT Reducing Emissions presentation (September 2023): On joint-STB work to reduce emissions.
- Highways UK (October 2023): On the importance of road connectivity in the region
- Smart Transport Conference (November 2023): On EEH's work, including mobility hubs.
- Sub-national Transport Body Conference: Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew presented on the opportunity of East West Rail for Milton Keynes; the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority spoke on the importance of Ely Junction.
- Future of Rural Mobility Symposium (March 2024): On mobility hubs.
- Rail Stations and Property conference (March 2024): On our strategic rail objectives work.
- ADEPT Practitioners Meeting (DATE): On our carbon assessment playbook tool.
- Highways Sector Council (DATE): On the carbon baseline tool EEH has commissioned on behalf of the Wider Southeast STBs.

Enhancing capacity and capability

EEH has worked hard this year to develop our centre of excellence, expanding the capacity and capability and skills of our partners.

Forums and masterclasses

EEH continues to run and manage a wide number of diverse forums which bring together local authority officers, private sector, DfT and other stakeholders. These forums are a space for discussion, sharing best practice and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

As well as running existing forums EEH has established several new forums this year. This includes the Early Careers Network, which provides opportunities for training, best practice site visits and career development. The network is a resource for anyone who considers themselves to be early in their transport career and welcomes all job roles as we value the skills and learning that this brings.

Our forums enjoy high engagement rates and positive feedback from attendees. These include:

- Early careers network (established during 2023/24)
- Rail Officer forum (established during 2023/24)
- Freight Officer forum (established 2023/24)
- Capacity and Capability forum
- Regional Bus forum
- Active travel forum
- Decarbonisation and Net Zero working group
- Innovation working group
- Strategic Road Priorities (continuous engagement between EEH, DfT and National Highways).
- Ely Taskforce (led by EEH)

EEH is also developing a series of masterclasses which provide knowledge and training to our partner officers. These will be delivered through our various forums or stand-alone sessions. Several training sessions have been delivered on specific subjects including the Intelligent Traffic Management Fund (ITMF).

Review of business cases

As part of the Centre of Excellence work, EEH has provided constructive support to local authorities, giving detailed reviews and gap analysis of scheme business cases against current DfT Business case guidance. We have also ensured that transport planning colleagues have access to expert training for our powerful new Cadence 360 tool.

Digital library

During 2023/24 EEH has developed a digital library for our partners to use. This is an internal website which provides information on our forums, workstreams and tools. The library was developed with consultation and feedback from our officers to ensure its utility. It will be progressed in the upcoming financial year to expand the content and support provided.

Skills workstream

EEH has been progressing its skills workstream with a focus on understanding challenges and barriers within the transport industry. Towards the end of the 2023/24 we engaged specialised support to create a clear skills pathway for the sector in the region. This work is being progressed and will create a skills and competency framework, developing a 'skills toolkit' and, by having an understanding of the employee experience, recommending solutions to increase skills retention and uptake.

BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL EVIDENCE BASE

EEH continues to update and maintain an evidence base on behalf of the region. The evidence base both informs EEH's work and is also an invaluable resource for all our local

authority partners. Our work during 2023/24 means we now have a comprehensive suite of evidence covering all modes – alongside an exciting new data platform.

Crucially, the evidence base is being used to support EEH and the region in making the strongest case for, and ultimately securing, the improvements to the transport system we require (see page XX and XX).

Work completed or progressed on our evidence base during 2023/24 includes:

Investment prioritisation framework (IPF)

The IPF provides, for the first time, a complete database of known priority interventions in the region, as identified by EEH's technical work, or national agencies. It will help us record, track, and assist in the prioritisation of strategic transportation interventions that have been proposed in, or may significantly benefit, the EEH region. Interventions have been brought together into one place, with intervention detail captured and assessed against 'levels of service' which are built on the principles of our Transport Strategy. The framework can therefore be used to identify how interventions meet different levels of service and communicate the strategic rationale for investment in the interventions.

The database will be updated over time to reflect the latest scheme changes and wider developments. For example, an intervention recommended in a connectivity study will see its details and 'Levels of Service' assessment against the Framework's outcomes-based criteria evolve as the scheme moves from an opportunity to strategic outline business case and so on.

Development of the Framework has been a collaborative process, involving rounds of engagement with our partners and a wide range of stakeholders.

Oxford to Cambridge Connectivity: Roads Study

Throughout 2022/23 England's Economic Heartland worked with DfT and National Highways to take forward work to identify where investment in the region's road network may be required to support economic growth and to alleviate existing issues and constraints. The study is now complete and we are working with National Highways and DfT to ensure the priority areas for further work, identified in the study are now taken forward as investment priorities for National Highways.

Connectivity Studies

Our multimodal studies identify potential interventions to improve the transport system across a number of strategic corridors. In December 2022 the EEH Strategic Transport Leadership Board agreed its first two connectivity studies: Oxford-Milton Keynes; and Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford. The third study, Swindon-Didcot-Oxford, was published in September 2023. Two further studies, Thames Valley-Buckinghamshire-Milton Keynes-Northampton' and the 'southern east-west corridor' (covering Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire) are due to go before our Board in May 2024 for approval. The final study in the current programme, Luton-Bedford-North Northants, has commenced and is due to complete late 2024/ early 2025.

Bus

Following the Bus Symposium in September, EEH has commissioned a major programme of work to improve bus patronage and journeys, and deliver mobility hubs (see page XX for more details).

Strategic Rail Objectives

This report brings together strategic objectives for rail for each mainline grouping in EEH (based on existing EEH strategy/ evidence). It has set the context for the more detailed EEH Main Line Priorities Study now underway, as well the EEH Freight Plan.

Active Travel Strategy Phase Two

The second phase of the Active Travel Strategy was completed in May 2023. It outlines high potential cross boundary links which are included in the investment prioritisation framework.

Places of strategic importance

In April 2023, work on data led evidence on places in the EEH region was completed. The work identified a number of data sources and trip attractors in 'built -up areas'. The work has supported EEH in the development of the Investment Prioritisation Framework and the outputs were shared with partners.

Cadence

EEH's significantly improved evidence base platform launched in spring 2023. Cadence includes a new geographic information system (GIS) tool which supports local level transport planning. The platform also hosts mobile network travel data down to neighbourhood (LSOA) level, allowing authorities to understand hyper-local movement by time, mode and demographic. It enables rapid development of mapping and representation of spatial datasets including transport model data, road congestion, journey times by public transport, local plan housing sites and freight volumes. Cadence has played a key part in the development of EEH's 'Connecting Economies' brochures (see page XX). It can be used by local authority colleagues: during 2023/24 we ensured all relevant officers had access to training for it.

Freight data

EEH has procured regional data from the latest iteration of the Great Britain Freight Model to guide and validate our freight action plan work. Our authority partners will also have access to new datasets and mapping – including a comprehensive view of warehousing and consolidation centres in the region – and the key freight routes and freight growth forecasts enabling better strategic plan delivery and development.

As part of the wider work on freight we have also partnered with other STBs to undertake a mapping tool development project, 'alternative fuelling for freight' which will look at transport and utility network data as well as existing HGV/LGV rest stops to identify the most suitable sites for the deployment of charging and refuelling infrastructure.

DELIVERING A TRANSPORT SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE

England's Economic Heartland is a region world-renowned for its innovation. EEH is playing a leading role in supporting its partners, including local authorities, businesses and universities, to harness new technologies to deliver the decarbonised and smarter transport system of the future. Unique to EEH as an STB, and a long standing priority of the EEH Board, is the way we enable strong collaboration between us, our local authority partners and innovative solutions and approaches. The year 2023/24 has seen real successes in our approach to innovation, including being part of several collaborations who have been successful in securing funding for new approaches to transport planning.

Smart junctions

An important aspect of our approach to net zero is using the latest technologies and innovation to extract maximum value from existing infrastructure. During 2023/24 we completed a study which examines the benefits of smart junction technologies to maximise the use of the existing highway network. The conclusions of the study, due to be published in May 2024, will provide the next step in an evidence base on which EEH can work with local authorities across the region to develop a proposition for a region-wide pilot of the latest smart junction technologies.

Artificial intelligence transport model

EEH has with partners, submitted a funding bid for a project to leverage the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline and optimise the creation of multimodal transport models. A novel, end-to-end, AI-driven process would be developed, offering significant benefits, including time and cost savings. If funded - the outcome will be a multi-modal transport model for the region. This collaboration is a demonstration of the value of public and private sectors joining together to solve national and regional challenges.

SME innovation funding

EEH has submitted a funding bid to work with Connecting Places Catapult and DfT to enhance the delivery of the digital and data infrastructure required to support the decarbonisation of our transport system, through enabling and utilising analytics to better manage and monitor transport networks. Connected Places Catapult and DfT are keen to bring innovative smaller and medium sized businesses (SMEs) into the sector. EEH are well placed to support new approaches to enhancing EEH's regional evidence base and dashboard.

Carbon Assessment Playbook (CAP)

As part of the CAP tool and our work to respond to the transport decarbonisation plan, during 2023/24 EEH developed a 'transport carbon baselines tool' to support our local authorities develop informed place-based approaches to cutting emissions. The tool provides a consistent suite of data on current and forecasted transport emissions per local authority area. By utilising regional transport models, it allows officers to interrogate emissions by, for example, vehicle type, trip purpose, road type and trip genesis.

Combined with a second tool, this enables officers to understand the impact of ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ decarbonisation policies for a given locality: allowing them to quantify the likely impacts of particular groups of interventions. It can therefore be used as a ‘sandbox’ for the development of local transport plans.

The Carbon Assessment Playbook tool, the thought leadership and development of which was spearheaded by EEH, is now being rolled out for use by STBs across England with potential opportunities for a wider roll out in other parts of the UK.

HERT

EEH worked with partners including Hertfordshire County Council and City Science to secure over £275,000 for research projects into the potential use of both segregated and mixed traffic environments to run ‘dedicated, driverless’ articulated buses, along sections of the HERT network. This is now in progress, and the outcomes of this work will provide both a better technological understanding of how connected and autonomous vehicles could operate but also consider any costs savers over traditional mass rapid transit systems. Roads that would benefit from segregated self-driving vehicle operations have been identified using previous research conducted by the project team for the National Infrastructure Commission.

5G innovation region

England’s Economic Heartland the East West Main Line Partnership supported a successful funding bid to government which could see businesses and residents near East West Rail benefit from 5G technologies.

A consortium led by Oxfordshire County Council, including Buckinghamshire, Central Bedfordshire, Peterborough and Cambridgeshire councils, won £3.8m from the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) to establish a ‘5G Innovation Region’.

The consortium – England’s Connected Heartland – plans to initially invest in two major 5G projects – the East West Rail project between Bicester and Bletchley, and the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus.

The East West Rail 5G project will demonstrate how enhanced digital connectivity for track operations and passengers can be met with a pilot 5G network. This will also provide trackside communities and businesses with improved connectivity, for example enabling agri-tech applications which improve productivity on nearby farms.

National Hub for Decarbonised, Adaptable, and Resilient Transport Infrastructures (DARe)

The National Hub for Decarbonised, Adaptable, and Resilient Transport Infrastructures brings together leading UK universities (including University of Cambridge), and diverse industry, government, and civic partners (including EEH) to find viable pathways and solutions for a transition to a resilient, net zero transport system that works for all. The DARe Hub was awarded funding of £10 million by the UK Government’s Department for Transport, National Highways, HS2 Ltd, Network Rail, and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). DARe comes under UKRI’s Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

Letters of support

As a sub-national transport body with an agreed transport strategy and clear accountability to its board of elected leaders, EEH's support for innovation projects carries significant weight. We have worked with partners to support the following projects during 2023/24 and, where these have received funding, will play a key role in the project steering groups to ensure the work has real-world applications:

'ECOSYSTEM' (Environmental sCience and innOvation for SustainabilitY in SouTh East Midlands): Delivered in partnership with Cranfield University, University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, and AtkinsRéalis, concerning the creation of a place-based research platform able to leverage digital twinning technologies, AI and digital engagement.

THRIVE: This five-year programme will establish connected 'Thriving Places Decision Labs' across four universities (Cranfield, Cambridge, Oxford and Open) with strong industrial leadership from AtkinsRéalis. The labs will enable a platform for direct participation by communities in future decisions on land use and infrastructure.

East Anglia Digital Innovation for Places (EADIP): Supporting Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Cambridge's bid for 'Place-Based Impact Acceleration Account' funding. The project will bring together academics, private sector experts, and potential users to outline potential solutions to a range of place-based challenges facing the wider region. Expert panels comprising representatives from civic partners, academia, private sector, and investors will evaluate project proposals and allocate funding to successful teams to further develop their ideas.

TRANSITION-UK: Transdisciplinary research hub delivering health co-benefits of the transition to a net-zero transport economy' successfully submitted to UKRI-NIHR on 17 April led by Dr Suzanne Bartington at the University of Birmingham, Dr Felix Leach (University of Oxford) and Professor Nigel Gilbert (University of Surrey).

SECURING INVESTMENT TO IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY

A core function of England's Economic Heartland as a sub-national transport body is to advise the government on and advocate for the strategic transport infrastructure the region needs to grow the economy while reducing emissions. During 2023/24 EEH has demonstrated its ability to make the strongest case for investment through a single voice supported by a compelling strategic narrative based on its comprehensive evidence base.

Ely Area Capacity Enhancements

A major priority for EEH during 2023/24 was to make the case for the upgrade to Ely Junction in Cambridgeshire: increasing capacity for rail freight to the equivalent of 98,000 lorries per year, while also allowing service frequencies to be increased between Ipswich and Peterborough.

EEH, in partnership with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Transport East, Rail Freight Group and other partners, produced the Keeping Trade on Track brochure, putting forward a convincing case for Ely with input from senior figures from both the public

and private sector. This was launched in Parliament in June 2023. EEH worked with the East of England All Party Parliamentary Group to ensure that MPs had the information they required to advocate for the scheme.

The work of EEH and its partners bore fruit when in October 2023, the government announced Ely would indeed be funded. From this point, EEH and its partners have pressed the government to make sure Network Rail receives funding as soon as possible so that detailed design work can begin.

In March 2024 EEH organised a briefing on Ely for the Shadow Minister of State for Rail, Stephen Morgan MP. This was attended by Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Dr Nik Johnson and EEH managing director Naomi Green, alongside colleagues from Rail Freight Group, Freeport East and Network Rail.

East West Rail

East West Rail is the over-riding transformational opportunity for our region. As our transport strategy states, it must be the catalyst for improving the transport system across the whole region. During 2022/23 EEH and the East West Main Line Partnership played a pivotal role in securing the government's recommitment to delivering East West Rail to Cambridge. A big focus during 2023/24 and moving forwards is ensuring East West Rail delivers for local residents and businesses through high quality 'door to door' connectivity. Using our own evidence base and building on our long term aspiration that East West Rail should be a catalyst for a world class integrated transport system for both now, and the future, the door to door project will ensure East West Rail can – maximise its potential by ensuring as many people as possible can access stations from their homes and places of work.

In October 2023, EEH facilitated a session bringing together local authorities at a workshop to commence discussions with East West Railway Company on its Door to Door Strategy. Throughout this time, we have made the strongest representations that local authorities – which are responsible for transport infrastructure outside of station boundaries – co-design the strategy and, crucially, receive the funding to turn its ambitions into reality.

EEH has also worked with partners to ensure that £15 million of DfT to develop 'local opportunity plans' for stations served by East West Rail provide the best possible legacy for the region. And it has continued to press the case for the scheme to be delivered in full, including the link from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes, which would unlock the wider Northampton-Milton Keynes-Aylesbury-Wycombe-Old Oak Common rail corridor.

Rail Main Line Priorities

Building on the rail objectives study, during 2024 EEH commissioned a new project which will specify the priorities for development of the rail network - defining the required 'conditional outputs' across our main lines. The work will focus on passenger service expectations (e.g. frequency and journey times) between rail hubs, but also other key areas such as interchange and decarbonisation. It will also review 'blockers' and 'enablers' to achieving desired outputs. In doing so, it provides a significant step forwards to developing and ultimately securing investment in strategic rail priorities.

Oxford to Bristol services

EEH's clearly articulated ambition for improved rail connectivity from the west of the Heartland, alongside its close working relationship with the rail industry and Western Gateway STB, has provided an important role in unlocking the opportunity for a new direct train service between Oxford, Swindon and Bristol. Network Rail is developing the business case, supported by a contribution from the East West Main Line Partnership to fund economic analysis – recognising that such a service would be the first stage in improving onward western connectivity from the East West Rail core route. The business case is expected to be submitted to DfT during 2024, and the service could be operational within the next 12 or so months.

Connecting Economies brochures

EEH's 'Connecting Economies' brochures will showcase the economic rationale for investment in key transport priorities in the region. Designed to provide at-a glance information to stakeholders including members of Parliament, they will form a major part of our advocacy work during 2024/25. There will be seven brochures in total, largely based on the corridors within our connectivity studies, with the majority due to be launched in summer 2024. The economic analysis for each corridor was commissioned during winter 2023. During early 2024 the business unit has used EEH's comprehensive evidence base, including connectivity studies and the investment prioritisation framework, alongside engagement with local and combined authorities, to collate scheme priorities to showcase in the brochures.

REALISING A REGIONAL APPROACH TO LOCAL TRANSPORT

A significant part of EEH's work is focused on improving bus journeys in the region – we are regarded as a leading STB voice on this.

During 2023/24 we made significant progress in its work to realise an integrated and joined-up transport system, which maximises opportunities to increase sustainable travel uptake. A key driver of this was our Bus Symposium held in Luton in September 2023, from which a work programme was agreed by Board members. This work aims to make a tangible, practical difference: securing funding for, and ultimately delivery of, on-the-ground improvements to services and related infrastructure.

Following the symposium, EEH went through a significant procurement process during autumn 2023. Work commenced in early 2024, and is due to deliver in phases throughout the year. It will:

- Help EEH and local authorities identify and apply for collaborative funding and other viable funding options to develop a possible AI based solution to better coordinate differing transport services (delivering 'total transport').
- Produce a 'regional chapter' to enhance and support local authorities' future bus funding bids. This will include setting out the importance of buses in the region and

explicitly why regional bus and coach is vital in reducing social inclusion and providing access to education and jobs.

- Promote the concept of the 'Heartbeat Network' - a regional bus network – with analysis of what service improvements are required to realise this ambition and how these can be realised.
- Provide advice on emerging models for bus, including consideration of franchising in a 'polycentric' region, concessions models, municipal bus companies, provider of last resort and enhanced partnerships, so that our partners can be better prepared and informed if legislation is changed, or government bus priorities change.
- Give evidence and advice for local authorities on different network models which could lead to bus market reform, including hub and spoke models, and demand responsive and community transport. Non-bus opportunities will also be considered including shared transport, rural mobility-as-a - service, drone-based delivery, and "pulse timetabling".
- Accelerate and enable the funding and deployment of mobility hubs within the EEH region. This will establish and set out an investable proposition narrative document to 'market' mobility hubs within the region. A "triaging investment workshop" will be held which brings together local authorities and private and public stakeholders to explore investment opportunities. Direct consultancy support will also be offered to local authorities who wish to pursue mobility hub delivery further.

END OF YEAR FINANCIAL STATEMENT

EEH 2023/24 – End of Year Budget

INCOME			2023/24 Income
Carry Forward from 21/22	£ 1,740,068		
Local Contributions	£449,616		
DfT Grants	£1,350,000		
Additional Contributions	£30,600	Contribution from East West Mainline Partnership towards secretariat costs	

Other income	£172,544	Contributions to joint projects from other STBs and EWR Co.
TOTAL	£3,724,830	
NON-PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE	2023/24 Spend and Committed	
Staffing	£748,478	Includes pension, NI and other staff costs such as training
Operational Expenditure	£48,424	Includes office costs, service charges, conferences, meetings, document production and website.
Reserve	£400,000	Reserve held at £400,000 each year.
SUB-TOTAL	£1,196,902	
DfT 2023/24 Programme	2023/24 Spend and committed	
Regional Evidence Base	£81,441	Continued upgrading of the regional evidence base to integrate more data sets, improve data quality and support for tools. Includes response to the English National Transport Strategy and policy intelligence support to Local Authorities.
Planning for net zero	£122,233	Dissemination of the Quantified Carbon Reduction (QCR) Tool with local authority partners, and improvements/updates as required to baselines

		<p>and functionality. This includes additional functions for policy levers was added to the project budget (£12K) following clarifications with DfT.</p> <p>Seconded staff</p>
Improving strategic connectivity	£440,935	This includes delivery of the freight action plan, a sixth connectivity study and planning roads for the future. It also included seconded staff costs.
Innovation	£0	<p>We are continuing to collaborate on the future of mobility with the region's innovators in business, academia and local government through creation of a pan-regional cross-sector innovation network and community of best practice.</p> <p>While EEH holds a budget line of £40,000 for this project, to date our innovation successes have been based on the contribution and expertise of our staff rather than relying on a funding contribution. Holding funds in this budget line does allow EEH staff to confidentially explore innovation collaboration opportunities, even if funding is then not required.</p>
Driving Investment Opportunities	£282,625	This includes the ongoing projects; rail investment priorities, economic narratives and a proportion of spend on the 'Improving regional bus services' project.
Skills development	£86,585	<p>Project include support for our forums work, creation of Centre of Excellence as defined by DfT within their business plan guidance (focusing on LTPs, QCR, delivery of major infrastructure projects and investment pipelines), as well as developing skills intervention pilots.</p> <p>Recently commissioned work through the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) to work on skills to take our skills work forward to create a Skills Matrix for transport professionals across the region.</p>

		Consideration to the remaining funds is being given to ensure the best use of the funds to address the skills challenges in the region.
Sub-total	£1,121,124	
DfT 22/23 Tail programme	2023/24 Spend and Committed	
Regional Evidence Base	£112,436	<p>Delivery of carry forward projects;</p> <p>Regional evidence base refresh; transport strategy monitoring; places of strategic importance and Common Analytical Framework readiness</p> <p>Underspend of £5,000 due to dependency on supplier decision re first mile last mile tool platform.</p>
Planning for Net Zero	£95,201	Delivery of carry forward projects; national travel survey study and the required change control for the decarbonisation playbook.
Improving Strategic Connectivity	£329,622	Projects include: connectivity studies; rail strategic objectives; ticketing engagement – public opinion survey; freight action plan and rail freight growth target, bus business case and BSIP support.
Connectivity and Integration	£30,000	<p>Projects include; mobility hubs mapping.</p> <p>Some of this budget has been allocated to the current ongoing 'Improving regional bus services' work.</p>

Innovation	£38,000	Projects include: smart corridors phase 1 and innovation pump priming.
Scheme Prioritisation and Development	£145,800	Projects include: investment prioritisation, exploration of land value capture opportunities and capacity and capability.
SUB-TOTAL	£751,099	
TAIL 21/22 PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE	2023/24 Spend and Committed	
Supporting the Heartland Region	£78,664	<p>Delivery of carry forward projects;</p> <p>Completion of Swindon – Didcot – Oxford connectivity study</p> <p>Commencement of capacity and capability local authority support</p>
Decarbonisation of the Transport System	£232,037	<p>Delivery of carry forward projects;</p> <p>Toward the finalisation of the 'Carbon Assessment Playbook'</p>
Improving Strategic Connectivity in Support of Planned Growth	£3,709	<p>Carried forward carry forward projects;</p> <p>Completion of 'Future of Roads' think piece</p>
Improving local connectivity	£11,770	<p>Delivery of Carry forward projects;</p> <p>Finalisation of Active Travel Strategy Phase 2</p>
SUB-TOTAL	£326,251	Carried forward into 2022/23: £1,203,557

	Actual Spend	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£2,995,194	Excludes money committed for reserves
Balance to carry forward into 2024/25: £729,454		
<p>Alongside this carry forward, £400,000 is held as reserves.</p> <p>The 2024-25 DfT grant monies are awaiting, and therefore a conscious decision was made at the end of the 23-24 financial year to slow down spend commitments in order to maintain staffing for programme delivery through the first part of 24-25.</p>		