

Strategic Transport Leadership Board

Minutes

2nd October 2025

11:00 – 13:00

Virtual

Present:

Cllr Liz Leffman (Outgoing Chair)	Leader, Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Adam Zerny (Incoming Chair)	Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council
Cllr Steven Broadbent (Incoming Vice Chair)	Leader, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Thomas Broom	Cabinet Member, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Chris McGiffen	Executive Member, North Northants Council
Cllr Chris Watts	Cabinet Member, Swindon Borough Council
Mayor Tom Wootton	Mayor, Bedford Borough Council
Cllr Jim Weir	Deputy Mayor, Bedford Borough Council
Cllr Paul Zukowskyj	Executive Member, Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Lucy Nethsingha	Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council
Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew	Cabinet Member, Milton Keynes Council
Cllr Javed Hussain	Executive Member, Luton Council
Cllr Nicola Gribble	Portfolio Holder for Environment, Bedford Borough Council
Phil Southall	Managing Director, Strategy and Performance at Go Ahead Group

Apologies:

Mayor Paul Bristow	Mayor, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough
Cllr David Rouane	Leader, South Oxfordshire District Council

EEH Team Members Present:

Naomi Green	Managing Director
James Golding-Graham	Decarbonisation and Innovation Manager
Adam King	External Affairs and Policy Manager
Suzanne Winkels	Technical Programme Manager
Hanane Elmaarouf	Business Operations Assistant
Balal Farooqi	Data Analyst
Nathalie Mazhunga	Project Officer

1	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman (LL) opened the meeting.</p> <p>There are four ongoing actions The ongoing actions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New Government update, including fiscal events, and EEH financial update - <i>The 'Securing Investment in the Region' paper includes information on public sector finance, with suggested actions for progressing understanding.</i> 2. Buses - <i>Further work to explore the Luton to Dunstable extension options is being commissioned, including an extension to the ECML at either Hitchin or Stevenage. Demand levels at either end and along its existing route are being captured as part of the study.</i> 3. Better Busses - <i>EEH is in the process of updating its existing guidance on DRT to incorporate lessons learned on rural connectivity and will reshare it with officers and Members once complete.</i> 4. Making the Case for Investment - <i>We are seeking clarity from Homes England. Also awaiting the New Towns announcement, expected imminently.</i>
2	<p>Statement from outgoing Chair</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman said that her two-year term of office had come to an end and that it had been a privilege to serve in the role. She said she was proud of how EEH had supported the region through significant changes at the local, regional, and national levels. The EEH officer team, led by Naomi Green, had done excellent work in building an evidence base and supporting local transport officers. She said EEH had strengthened cross-regional collaboration, formed alliances with the Supercluster Board and the Universities Group, and worked closely with East West Rail Company and Lord Vallance's Growth Corridor team. She also said that EEH's convening role was vital in bringing together coalitions to address regional challenges. She said her tenure had included key achievements such as support for East West Rail, the regional bus symposium, BSIP applications, and advocacy for active travel and major road schemes. Cllr Leffman concluded by saying she was confident in EEH's future and wished her successor well.</p>
3	<p>Election of new Board Chair</p> <p>Naomi Green outlined the election process, explaining the governance framework and voting rules. Each partner authority had one vote, and where multiple representatives were present, a single voting member was designated.</p> <p>Cllr Adam Zerny was elected Chair and thanked members for their support and said he was honoured to take on the role. He shared his enthusiasm for the work ahead and highlighted his strong regional ties, including personal and professional connections across the region. He said he looked forward to working with each member individually to understand their priorities. He then nominated Cllr Steve Broadbent, as Vice-Chair. Cllr Broadbent accepted and said they were both committed to collaboration and would support each other in their respective roles.</p> <p>Naomi Green confirmed the appointments and thanked all members for their participation in the election process.</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman congratulated both Cllr Zerny and Cllr Broadbent and said she looked forward to seeing the Board's continued progress under their leadership.</p>

4	<p>Public Questions</p> <p>There were no public questions or public speakers.</p>
5	<p>EEH – Future Focus</p> <p>The Board discussed the future focus of EEH.</p> <p>The board agreed to the creation of a Board Subgroup that will review and shape EEH’s future focus.</p> <p>The board agreed that, for the duration of the 2025/26 business year, EEH officers should continue to deliver the agreed business plan, pausing only a small number of unstarted projects and proactively investing in other opportunities, where the case is right for them to do so.</p>
6	<p>Integration</p> <p>Naomi Green (NG) introduced the item and updated the Board on EEH’s major workstream considering how East West Rail can be fully integrated into the wider transport system, for the benefit of local communities, alongside information on responses to the Transport Committee’s integration call for evidence; Universal Studios consultation; and EEH’s bus work.</p> <p>Verity Quinn expanded on the work, saying that Officers across the region had shown strong support for the integration programme. She said the ambition was to define a coherent vehicular network that included all modes of transport and worked across local authority boundaries. Verity noted that the integration work was not limited to individual authority areas but would include cross-boundary working. She confirmed that EEH is working closely with East West Railway Company to ensure that local authority integration priorities were reflected in the Company’s plans.</p>

6	<p>Cllr Lucy Nethsingha said she was pleased to see the work progressing and noted that integration had been a major gap in East West Rail's planning. She suggested that active travel should be given more prominence in the framework and cautioned against placing it at the bottom of any priority list, as this could send the wrong message to stakeholders and advocacy groups.</p> <p>Cllr Paul Zukowskyj questioned the use of a 10-mile boundary in the integration phase one report and suggested a destination-based approach might be more effective. He said that integration should consider how people actually travel and where they need to go, rather than relying on arbitrary distances.</p> <p>Cllr Jim Weir raised concerns about East West Rail Company's communication with Bedford Borough. This included recently announced plans to demolish flats, businesses, and a Polish community centre.</p> <p>Naomi Green agreed that good engagement was crucial. She said EEH had a role to support local authorities and improve engagement with East West Rail. She offered to visit Bedford to discuss how EEH could provide additional support.</p> <p>Naomi Green said that the integration framework was still in development and that feedback from Board members would be incorporated before the final version was presented in December.</p> <p>Action: EEH to develop integration paper further, incorporating members' feedback.</p> <p>The Board received a presentation on the East West Rail Legacy Integration Programme Framework (Annex 1) and agrees the proposed approach to further engagement, including that it be brought back to the Board for approval in December.</p> <p>The Board agreed EEH's Response to the Transport Select Committee call for evidence on Integration (Annex 2).</p> <p>The Board noted EEH's response to the Universal Entertainment Complex in Bedford Consultation.</p> <p>The Board noted the update on EEH's work to support better bus services.</p>
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Local Innovation Partnership Fund, UKRI

Naomi Green (NG) introduced the agenda item by explaining that **Alistair Lomax, Director, Oxford to Cambridge Universities Group**, had been working closely with EEH on the legacy of East West Rail. She said Alistair was keen to collaborate with EEH partners on a potential funding proposal to the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Local Innovation Partnership Fund. Naomi Green then handed over to Alistair to present the proposal.

Alistair Lomax provided a presentation on the on the Local Innovation Partnership Fund. He said that the Oxford to Cambridge Universities Group has been leading efforts to develop skills and talent across the region, which boasts the highest density of graduates and PhDs in the UK and a concentration of high-skilled, high-value jobs. However, with a projected need for over 400,000 additional knowledge-intensive workers, the group proposed the "Talent for Growth" initiative to bridge the skills gap. Central to this is a regional "Opportunities Hub" comprising four components: an Intelligence Hub to map opportunities, a Talent Hub to connect employers and individuals, a Multi-Mentor Hub for mentorship, and an Experience Hub offering practical resources. The initiative builds on Innovate Cambridge's work and is designed to complement, not compete with, local bids to the UKRI fund by fostering collaboration and adding value.

Naomi Grenn clarified that the proposal would not require direct financial contributions from local authorities. Instead, match funding would come from in-kind contributions such as staff time and mentoring. She said the immediate goal was to submit an expression of interest by 31 October, with a full bid due by the end of March. She added that the government would prefer to see individual authority endorsements alongside EEH's support, but that could be secured later in the process.

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha expressed strong support for the proposal. She said it was important to have a regional bid that complemented local efforts and ensured that all areas benefited from the initiative.

Cllr Steve Broadbent asked whether the proposal would duplicate any existing work being done through local growth boards.

Alistair Lomax said that the proposal was focused on high-value skills and would not overlap with broader skills initiatives. He said the aim was to strengthen local bids by providing a unifying regional framework.

Cllr Steve Broadbent also said that Heather Dean from Buckinghamshire Business First might be involved and said he would follow up with her.

Alistair Lomax said that the proposal was about unlocking the region's full potential and ensuring that people across all communities had access to high-value opportunities. He asked whether the Board would support the direction of travel and the submission of the expression of interest.

Cllr Adam Zerny confirmed that the Board supported the proposal in principle and looked forward to further updates.

8	<p>Impact on road decisions</p> <p>Suzanne Winkels introduced the item by providing an update on the impact of recent government announcements on roads and implications for the EEH region. The A47 Wansford to Sutton scheme was cancelled, despite its importance for safety and growth. Of 28 confirmed MRN/LLM schemes, only one is in the EEH region; seven others are under review. She recommended writing to the Secretary of State to express these concerns. She also noted RIS3's £24.9bn funding envelope and confirmed EEH's continued advocacy for regional priorities in collaboration with National Highways and DfT.</p> <p>Cllr Adam Zerny said that the A47 scheme had been particularly important for Peterborough and asked whether any explanation had been given for its cancellation.</p> <p>Suzanne Winkels said that no specific reason had been provided by the government.</p> <p>Cllr Adam Zerny said he was pleased that EEH was standing up for its members.</p> <p>The Board noted the recent announcements by the government on roads investment decisions.</p> <p>The Board agreed to send a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport regarding the impact of delays in decision making on the MRN Programme.</p>
9	<p>Future Meeting Dates</p> <p>2025 proposed dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 December 2025 (in person) <p>2026 proposed dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 29/01/2026 (virtual) - 19/03/2026 (virtual) - 25/06/2026 (in person) - 24/09/2026 (virtual) - 03/12/2026 (in person)