

Strategic Transport Leadership Board

4 December 2025

Item 7: Progress on Priorities

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board

- a) Notes the actions and progress on EEH workstreams** including the visitor economy action plan; Rail update; Bus Symposium: themes for future work; Electric Vehicles, including publication of the 'REVEAL' report (annex 1).
- b) Notes the response to different consultations** as included in the annexes to this paper: response to the Draft Third Road Investment Strategy (annex 2) and response to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (annex 3).
- c) Reviews the regional priorities table** (annex 4), which is updated ahead of each Board meeting to reflect EEH work.

1. Visitor economy action plan

- 1.1. East West Rail will connect a remarkable number of significant, existing visitor destinations as well as new arrivals such as Universal and Puy Du Fou bringing people to the region in unprecedented numbers.
- 1.2. This presents significant economic opportunities. Crucially, the connectivity offered by East West Rail in creating a regional visitor economy offer will also enhance the regional 'lifestyle offer': improving quality of life for existing communities and helping to attract and retain the talent and skills required to support the ambitions of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.
- 1.3. As part of the East West Rail legacy funding received from Government, it was agreed that EEH undertake work to understand how East West Rail can be a catalyst for the region's visitor economy.
- 1.4. As preparation ahead of the procurement process, we sponsored, at very low cost, a Masters data student to assess East West Rail's 'potential for tourism accessibility' and supplemented this with desktop research of destinations and work done so far. The outputs helped EEH engage with destination management organisations (DMOs), local visitor economy partnerships (LVEPs), local authority officers, East West Railway Company and potential consultants.
- 1.5. As a result of this work, it is clear there is significant interest amongst relevant parties within the region to work together, and that they would value EEH playing a convening role in this.

- 1.6. Our conversations highlighted how quality connectivity to and from East West Rail stations to destinations is vital. However, it was clear that factors such as marketing and skills were equally important considerations. The importance of 'green and blue' natural/open spaces, alongside traditional visitor attractions, was another clear message made by stakeholders.
- 1.7. We are therefore proposing to commission an action plan from sector specialists which addresses: 'How can East West Rail and major new visitor attractions such as Universal, Puy du Fou and the National Forest provide a catalyst for a regional visitor economy and enhanced lifestyle offer?'
- 1.8. The work will include an audit and public-facing mapping of visitor destinations in proximity to the East West Rail line (with an audit of connectivity to those places conducted by EEH in-house); data and insights into the current (and future) visitor economy; and a shared action plan which considers issues including connectivity, business support, skills and marketing.
- 1.9. Procurement will take place during December/ January, with work expected to take place during the first half of 2026.

2. Rail Update

- 2.1. EEH's new rail officer is now in post and progressing rail priorities across the region. What follows are short summaries of developments within the sector, and EEH work.

The Railways Bill

- 2.2. The Railways Bill was introduced to Parliament on 5 November 2025. It represents the biggest overhaul of Britain's railways in 30 years, aiming to create Great British Railways (GBR) as a single, publicly owned body responsible for both track and train operations. The second reading is expected before the end of 2025 with anticipation of GBR coming into being in 2027.
- 2.3. The Bill introduces new powers for Mayoral authorities. GBR will be legally required to consider local strategies when making decisions, ensuring national and local priorities are aligned. Established mayoral authorities will have a new legal mechanism to request devolved control over local rail services, stations, or infrastructure. This means mayors can apply to take over suburban or commuter rail routes, subject to government approval and guidance

Contactless ticketing

- 2.4. The DfT have announced the latest expansion of contactless ticketing in the south east - the EEH region is the biggest beneficiary. Contactless ticketing has been extended to:
 - Baldock (Great Northern / Thameslink)
 - Harlington (Thameslink)
 - Aylesbury Vale Parkway (Chiltern Railways)

New rolling stock

- 2.5. Chiltern Railways announced the replacement of its oldest carriages on the line between London and Birmingham with a fleet of 13 new Mark 5A trains in a phased rollout during 2026. EH along with LTA partners attended the launch of these trains that will replace nearly 50-year-old Mark III carriages and will feature modern comforts like Wi-Fi, power sockets, and improved accessibility. This acquisition will allow Chiltern to add 10,000 more seats daily to its network from December 2026 to address commuter overcrowding. The new trains will serve Chiltern Main Line routes to Birmingham and Oxford. This will enable some existing rolling stock to be re-deployed to the London-Aylesbury via Amersham line and other local suburban services, also boosting capacity on these services.



Swindon-Birmingham

- 2.6. Midlands Connect was joined by EEH for an event at Swindon Station to highlight the potential reinstatement of a direct train service between Swindon and Birmingham for the first time in two decades. The proposal is to provide an hourly service from Swindon to Birmingham, providing 130 additional trains per week resulting in an additional two million additional seats per year.
- 2.7. EEH continues to support proposals for a regular Oxford-Swindon-Bristol service.

East Coast Main Line

- 2.8. Major changes to services on the East Coast Main Line are due as part of the December timetable change. While many areas have increased services or faster services, the following impacts have been highlighted:
- Peterborough – fewer InterCity services to London in the AM peak
 - Stevenage – InterCity services switched to boarding/alighting only, removing ability for Stevenage residents to travel on InterCity services to London

EEH continue to work with Network Rail and Local Authority partners to ensure that local priorities are progressed.

Mainline Studies

- 2.9. EEH continue to represent the region on Network Rail's strategic long-term advice. EEH are currently engaged on the following studies with Network Rail:

Eastern Region

- East Coast Main Line (ECML) Route Study
- Upcoming Midland Main Line (MML) & West Anglia Main Line (WAML) Route Studies

North West & Central Region

- West Coast Main Line (WCML) Long Term Strategy
- Chiltern Main Line Strategic Advice

Wales & Western Region

- Strategic work streams including: Swindon corridor assessment, depots and stabling strategy, Heathrow expansion

EEH workstreams

- 2.10. Work continues on the New Stations Toolkit and HS2/EWR Released Capacity reports, with completion due in the new year.
- 2.11. Scoping work on further development of and advocacy for the following key EEH rail priorities such as Ely and the Aylesbury link are progressing, further updates on which will be brought to this Board in spring 2026.

3. Bus Symposium: themes for future work

- 3.1. The third EEH Bus and Integration Symposium was held on 14 November 2025 at Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury. Around 50 delegates, including representatives from almost all local authorities, alongside DfT, bus operators and industry experts, attended the event to discuss strategies for creating a regionally integrated transport network.
- 3.2. Topics included bus funding, mobility hubs, demand analysis for transport infrastructure (Luton-Dunstable Busway use case), practical strategies for bus-rail integration, opportunities from new towns and growth, on-demand transport, and micromobility. All slides and materials from the symposium have been made available to delegates.



3.3. Throughout the day several opportunities for improving bus journeys in the region were discussed. These included:

- *Building public confidence:* The importance of positively marketing bus travel and spreading good news stories about new services or improvements to the passenger experience. This can be achieved through a number of channels such as social media, traditional media, newsletters and events.
- *Planning and provision:* There could be value in sharing best practice on 'de minimis' contract arrangements (including an audit of different LTA approaches) to support LTAs optimise these agreements.
- *Data integration:* Accelerating integration of bus data by supporting the development of a dashboard to monitor available real-time and historical performance data of bus services and routes within the region.
- *Franchising pilots:* Developing best practice and sharing lessons learnt from franchising pilots (noting that Hertfordshire County Council is included as an initial pilot area).
- *Community partnerships:* Identifying better collaboration opportunities in delivery of on-demand services through local community transport and third-sector providers in the region. Starting with the identification of different providers across the region.
- *Addressing operational challenges:* Further exploring the use of shared vehicles (Total Transport/DRT) with partners to maximise fleet utilisation across different services and geographic areas. This includes potential to streamline processes and reduce administrative barriers for licensing drivers to use bus and shared vehicles.
- *Integration initiatives:* Advancing ticketing alignment through regional collaboration and offers and conduct audits of existing ticketing offers within the region to establish a baseline of ticket type and coverage. Emphasise the importance of bus as an integration tool.
- *Journey time improvements:* Using available GPS and traffic data to map congestion hotspots within the region. This may lead to piloting targeted bus reliability improvements with LTAs on key corridors and evaluating their effectiveness.

3.4. EEH is currently exploring how the above themes and ideas could be incorporated into its work programme, alongside existing priorities (please see 'regional priorities table' for more information).

3.5. Further updates on progressing these priorities will be presented at the next Strategic Transport Leadership Board in January 2026.

4. Electric Vehicles

- 4.1. EEH continues to support our partners with access to and training on, the electric vehicle charging infrastructure (EVCI) tool.
- 4.2. In addition to this EEH has published an annual update to the REVEAL report (attached at annex 1) highlighting our region's progress and success in delivering EV charge points.
- 4.3. The region is now outperforming London in terms of the rate of charge points being installed which should be celebrated. This will support residents to make low carbon choices and provide confidence when considering vehicle replacement.
- 4.4. EEH has received (in draft) a report commissioned from Field Dynamics (a respected energy and EV consultancy) outlining the likely future EV energy demand in the region based on current patterns of car use. Field Dynamics (FD) have developed a hyper-granular view of EV energy demand through a comprehensive analysis of over ~ 95 million MOT records.



- 4.5. The MOT dataset, an annual test of vehicle safety, allows Field Dynamics to calculate actual miles driven, as well as the make and model for each anonymised vehicle by Postcode Area. By considering EEH MOT records and extrapolating future demand to develop scenarios based on planned housing growth published by MHCLG, it has been estimated that the region will require between 8 and 12 TWh of power for the private vehicle parc (i.e., all automotive vehicles in use at any given time within the region).
- 4.6. For comparison, 8-12 TWh of power would provide enough electricity for 2.5-3.5 million homes (depending on future power needs for heating and other domestic energy consumption trends).
- 4.7. Depending on the approach that authorities take to the blend of speeds/power output of charge points deployed, this figure, whilst significant, is deliverable and largely aligned with the government's own data and assumptions. The digital report / platform will be made available to officers and members before the end of the calendar year.

5. Consultation Response - Third Draft Road Investment Strategy (RIS3)

- 5.1. EEH welcomed the opportunity to provide additional comments on the Draft Third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) following its publication and the workshops held in September of this year.
- 5.2. EEH highlighted that since the previous RIS3 consultation response there have been key Government announcements and other commitments and developments that provide significant additional growth in the EEH region, including the announcement of new towns and Universal Studios.
- 5.3. EEH also highlighted how it works collaboratively in partnership with local partners, National Highways and DfT to identify and find solutions to transport challenges in the region and cited the example of the Oxford to Cambridge Road Study where we worked collaboratively with National Highways and DfT to identify the road priorities needed to ensure the economic growth of the region.
- 5.4. It also set out EEH's Strategic Road Network (SRN) RIS priorities including:
 - M1 Junction 13: a key priority that needs to be brought forward and delivered within RIS3 period to realise the ambitions of EWR, Milton Keynes new town and Universal Destination resort.
 - A404: The A404 has a strategic role as a key link between M40 and M4 and provides resilience for the wider SRN, including outer orbital journeys as an M25 alternative.
 - A34: The A34 links the ports in the south with midlands logistics hubs and is sub-standard solution for the A34 was put on hold and Bicester, which has significant growth, is identified as a key priority in the Oxford to Cambridge Road Study.
 - A1 Corridor: Sandy – Biggleswade (three specific junctions) – however, the corridor as a whole needs to be addressed to support new town at Tempsford and address the cancellation of the A1 smart motorway through Hertfordshire.
 - A421-A428: Although being addressed through improvements at Black Cat junction on A428 the corridor will be key to unlocking the new town at Tempsford.
 - A5: The A5 accommodates long distance movements and acts as an alternative route to M1. Key junctions include: Old Stratford Roundabout; Kelly's Kitchen Roundabout; Hockliffe Signals; and a new relief road through Towcester.
 - Bicester: M40 Junctions 9 and 10 and A43. There is significant growth in Bicester with a new town at Upper Heyford, proposed Oxford Strategic Rail Freight Interchange, and a new tourist destination Puy Du Fou along with significant local growth.

- A14: Connects the ports in Felixstowe to freight logistics centres in the Midlands. Junctions A14 J33-J36 (Cambridgeshire) were highlighted as key challenges in the Oxford to Cambridge Road Study and is key to supporting increased freight demands and housing/economic growth. In the long-term investment in Ely Junction is required to move more freight to rail if the road can continue to perform.
- 5.5. EEH also pointed out that the performance of the local road network, including the major road network, is crucial for the successful integration with the SRN, and it is important that both strategic and non-strategic road priorities are taken forward in the region. For example, the Oxford-Cambridge Roads Study highlighted the performance of the MRN around Aylesbury as scoring poorly across multiple levels of service.
- 5.6. EEH's full response to the Draft Third Road Investment Strategy is included in annex 2.
- 6. Response to consultation on Streamlining Infrastructure Planning**
- 6.1. EEH responded to the government's consultation on Streamlining Infrastructure Planning, based on feedback from local partners.
- 6.2. Timely delivery of major infrastructure projects is vital to support the economic success and growth of the region. We highlighted the number of NSIPs and potential NSIPs across the region.
- 6.3. EEH has an important role in supporting the NSIP process as a facilitator to ensure meaningful regional engagement, providing greater understanding of local and regional development projects and impacts, while working with promoters and local authorities to secure the best long-term outcomes for the region.
- 6.4. We raised concerns regarding the removal of the requirement for statutory consultation through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.
- 6.5. A recent meeting which included local authority cabinet members highlighted their concerns about the removal of statutory consultation from the NSIP process including:
- The risk that promoters will bring forward schemes for examination that have not been fully developed. There is a perception that NSIP developments will get approved as default which impacts on developer engagement with local authorities.
 - Need for clarity on how the changes will impact the ability of residents to be meaningfully engaged, as well as the capacity of parish and town councils in being involved in or manage NSIP engagement.
 - The need for national coordination of NSIPs i.e. a single controlling body, rather than decisions being made in "silos" by individual departments – this has particular impacts on the ground where communities are affected by cumulative concurrent multiple NSIP types.
 - The risk that removing statutory consultation may lead to key issues not being addressed ahead of submissions, resulting in overall slowing down the process and poorer quality applications being submitted.
- 6.6. There is significant focus on changes for local authorities and statutory consultees in the Bill, but EEH is also highlighted concern about the impact on non-statutory consultees and their ability to engage in the process. Non-statutory organisations, community groups, individuals and hard to reach communities still need to be provided with the opportunity to input on development that impacts them.
- 6.7. The full response is attached as Annex 3 to this Board Paper.

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