



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

Minutes

4 December 2025

11:20 – 13:00

Virtual

Present:

Cllr Adam Zerny (Chair)	Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council
Cllr Steven Broadbent (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
Cllr Paul Zukowskyi	Executive Member, Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Javed Hussain	Executive Member, Luton Council
Cllr Bethia Thomas	Leader, Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Alex Beckett	Cabinet Member, Cambridgeshire County Council
Cllr James Petter	Deputy Leader, West Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Richard Butler	Cabinet Member, West Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Judy Roberts	Cabinet Member, Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Katie Thornburrow	Chair, East West Main Line Partnership
Cllr Nicola Gribble	Portfolio Holder for Environment, Bedford Borough Council

Apologies:

Mayor Paul Bristow	Mayor, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew	Cabinet Member, Milton Keynes Council
Cllr Liz Leffman	Leader, Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Lucy Nethsingha	Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council
Mayor Tom Wootton	Mayor, Bedford Borough Council
Cllr Jim Weir	Deputy Mayor, Bedford Borough Council
Phil Southall	Managing Director, Strategy and Performance at Go Ahead Group

EEH Team Members Present:

Naomi Green	Managing Director
James Golding-Graham	Head of Decarbonisation and Innovation
Adam King	Head of Partnerships and Policy
Suzanne Winkels	Head of Transport Planning
Hanane Elmaarouf	Business Unit Coordinator
Fiona Foulkes	Capability, Excellence and Governance Manager



1	EEH Future Focus <p>This was a private session for Board members only.</p>
2	Introductions <p>Cllr Adam Zerny opened the meeting.</p> <p>There are four ongoing actions The ongoing actions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 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> 2. Better Buses - <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> 3. Making the Case for Investment - <i>We are seeking clarity from Homes England.</i>
3	Public Questions <p>Alan Francis, MK Green Party asked EEH to prioritise a direct East West Rail service between Milton Keynes Central and Bedford/Cambridge to support connectivity and future developments such as Universal Studios.</p> <p>Naomi Green said EEH would take this away and explore options with East West Rail and Network Rail.</p> <p>Action: EEH to engage EWR Co and Network Rail on options for a direct MKC–Bedford–Cambridge service and report back.</p>
4	Integration <p>Naomi Green introduced the item and update the Board on the EEH phase one integration report, which sets out nine ambitions for integration, and outlined the proposed approach to phase two, which will come before the Board for final agreement in January 2026.</p> <p>Cllr Javed Hussain said Luton has £1.7bn of investment in the town centre, airport expansion, Horizons Park, station works, and new housing. He said Luton merits its own TOP and the programme should reflect Luton's role as a gateway towards Milton Keynes for work and leisure.</p> <p>Naomi Green said EEH already work with Luton officers on station regeneration and will capture all current activity, timings, and evidence in a Luton TOP.</p> <p>Cllr Katie Thornborough said integration must be right for each place, with planning services funded to lead and involve consultants as needed. She said delivery should combine government, third-sector, and developer funding to go beyond EWR's direct remit, with stations acting as movement hubs.</p>



4	<p>Cllr Steve Broadbent asked three points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whether the Aylesbury Link workflow will include visitor economy spin-offs (e.g. Westcott) and be explicitly linked. 2. How local plan settlements (including potential new towns) will be picked up through timing, and whether EEH could conduct an annual review of TOPs to stay responsive. 3. How the Universal work intersects the SDO/DCO process, especially for interested parties and transport connectivity, and how governance will ensure regional needs beyond the site boundary. <p>Naomi Green said EEH will coordinate the Aylesbury Link with the visitor-economy programme. She said EEH will propose an annual TOP review linked to the timing of annual work planning processes, and will design governance with the board's oversight so the Universal TOP extends beyond the site limits.</p> <p>Verity Quinn said each TOP will have a defined officer working group across relevant authorities, and EEH will assemble current authority and developer activity rather than issue a fixed list.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett said Cambourne should be considered as a case study, given its mixed urban/rural character and status as a relatively new town. He said a hierarchy prioritising active travel and then public transport should be embedded from the start in station and place design, tailored to local context.</p> <p>Naomi Green said EEH would consider Cambourne in the TOP pipeline and embed a place-specific hierarchy within TOPs to secure consistent principles tailored to each location.</p> <p>Cllr Judy Roberts asked for integrated ticketing across modes to enable door-to-destination journeys, particularly given new leisure offers across the region.</p> <p>Naomi Green said EEH is exploring integrated ticketing (e.g. Project Coral) and information provision to support cross-boundary trips. She said EEH would pursue short-term improvements ahead of any wider devolution.</p> <p>Cllr Paul Zukowskyi said there is an inconsistency for Hertfordshire: Phase 1 considers HERT, while Phase 2 lists a TOP for Stevenage, which is not on HERT's indicative line. He said this appears unintegrated across phases.</p> <p>Naomi Green said EEH would revisit the wording to reflect Hertfordshire priorities more clearly.</p> <p>Action: EEH to incorporate feedback and develop prioritised TOPs (including a proposed Luton TOP, consideration of Cambourne and a review of the approach to Hertfordshire in the integration programme)</p> <p>The board agreed the East West Rail Legacy Integration Phase One Report as a framework to guide regional integration work</p> <p>The board agreed EEH's proposed approach to Phase Two, including developing the 'Transport Opportunity Plan' (TOP) concept.</p>
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4	<p>The board noted progress with supporting transport integration in and around the new Universal Studios resort site in Bedford.</p> <p>The board noted how EEH's wider work contributes to Integration across the region, and the potential for future TOPs to cover locations not directly in the geography of East West Rail</p> <p>The board noted the proposed Legacy Integration Programme Governance arrangements</p> <p>The board noted the wider announcements on East West Rail which were made in October and November (annex 4, below)</p>
5	<p>New Towns</p> <p>Fiona Foulkes introduced the item and updated the board on key points from the New Towns Taskforce report¹ impacting on the region's transport system; the work EEH is undertaking to qualify this impact; and a consideration of recommendations to Government to reform land value capture mechanisms to support forward-funding of infrastructure for New Towns.</p> <p>Cllr Steve Broadbent asked whether EEH's data-pack templates can be reused for other large settlements and whether the Lords' reports quantify enabling infrastructure and said fiscal powers should not be limited to mayors, given emerging local government reorganisation models.</p> <p>Fiona Foulkes said templates would be reusable using national datasets and could be applied to NSIPs. She said she would check Lords' reports for any financial quantification and agreed that powers should be available to locally led leaders beyond mayors.</p> <p>James Golding-Graham said EEH is engaging the National Wealth Fund and recommends broadening support beyond selected MCAs, given growth needs in the region.</p> <p>Cllr Paul Zukowskyi said the proposed new town at Crews Hill and Chase Park presents difficult east-west movement because local roads are rural lanes and east-west viability relies on the M25. He said the new towns should be designed to minimise travel through garden-city principles.</p> <p>Fiona Foulkes said EEH would examine east-west movement options, including rail operations on the East Coast Main Line and effects on adjacent centres and would bring social-infrastructure analysis.</p> <p>Cllr Katie Thornborough said a presumption for housing near stations is welcome but homes must be high quality and perform as designed with active travel and public transport links to accessible station hubs. She said some rural stations lack these links and accessibility, which should be addressed alongside housing.</p> <p>Fiona Foulkes said EEH would align integration work with station accessibility and active-travel links and reflect quality/performance expectations in advice to authorities and partners.</p>



5	<p>The board noted the proposed data support available to local authorities from EEH regarding New Towns</p> <p>The board discussed the implications of New Towns and what it considers will be crucial to their successful delivery within the region</p>
6	<p>NISTA</p> <p>Cllr Adam Zerny welcomed Margaret Read, director, National Infrastructure Strategy Transport Agency.</p> <p>Margaret Reid said the newly merged National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) is delivering a Ten-Year Infrastructure Strategy focused on institutional reform, certainty for investors/industry and removing barriers to delivery. She said integrated spatial planning aims to dock sector plans with local Spatial Development Strategies, surface hidden land-use trade-offs and support this with a spatial tool layering transport, energy, water, housing, waste and social infrastructure data. She said maintenance and renewal are now a strong focus, with support for structures funds and maintaining motorways/roads networks.</p> <p>Cllr Katie Thornborough asked how to future-proof projects and coordinate street works, proposing to specify such features for new places.</p> <p>Margaret Reid said early supply-chain involvement at DCO stage can embed these requirements. London's coordinated street-works approach offers models that save money,</p> <p>Cllr Steve Broadbent asked how agricultural land fits into the land-use tension hierarchy and where maintenance costs should be assigned for assets like reservoirs, to avoid unfunded liabilities.</p> <p>Margaret Reid said NISTA's spatial unit is integrating DEFRA land-use data to surface national-level tensions. She said whole-life cost approaches aim to include maintenance from the outset and explicit hierarchies are still being developed with departments and places.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett asked how Cambridgeshire's peat road subsidence can be treated as a major strategic maintenance project, given likely hundreds of millions in costs and the need to rebuild rather than patch.</p> <p>Margaret Reid said maintenance and renewal projects now appear in the Infrastructure Pipeline, and NISTA expects more support for non-new build projects of strategic importance.</p> <p>Cllr Chris Watts asked how NISTA will coordinate with utilities facing accelerated programmes (e.g., replacement of early UPVC water pipes, gas companies removing cast-iron mains by 2032).</p> <p>Margaret Reid said NISTA is developing its utility-sector engagement offer and would return to the Board with clearer arrangements and invited feedback on needs.</p>



6	<p>James Golding-Graham said EEH's EEHLUM land-use model is being aligned with NISTA's spatial tool so EEH's granular modelling remains consistent with national framing.</p> <p>Action: EEH to circulate NISTA's slides.</p>
7	<p>Progress on Priorities</p> <p>Suzanne Winkels introduced the agenda item and gave an update on EEH priorities.</p> <p>Cllr Katie Thornborough asked that Chiltern Railways services on the first EWR section start promptly, and said station works should be finished and opened as soon as practicable.</p> <p>Naomi Green said EEH would reinforce this request in its Secretary of State letter and continue pressing for early service commencement.</p> <p>Cllr Steve Broadbent said the A404 should be supported into RIS3 (given its RIS2 pipeline status and corridor importance from M4 to M40 and Heathrow). He asked about operator licence timing and potential GBR personnel implications and asked how cumulative NSIP impacts can be tracked regionally given multiple that are often assessed in isolation.</p> <p>Suzanne Winkels said industrial action is the principal constraint on early Chiltern services. She said electrification is a regional strategic ask, while battery-electric options are being explored where Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and power availability constrain overhead lines. She said operator timing depends on licence end-dates and EEH is engaging DfT and MHCLG to improve regional cumulative NSIP assessment, with National Highways sharing concerns where the SRN is affected.</p> <p>Naomi Green said the A404 is primarily a timing issue and EEH would draft a Board letter to support inclusion.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett said that following Margaret's comments about maintenance being back in focus, there may now be funding opportunities for essential upkeep. He suggested EEH should explore how to secure investment for maintenance projects.</p> <p>Cllr Chris Watts asked whether the A420 Acorn Bridge can be treated as a strategic constraint for HGVs between Swindon and Oxford, noting this is practical and impactful for freight.</p> <p>Suzanne Winkels said EEH's prior connectivity study identified corridor constraints, while Acorn Bridge is not currently an active EEH promotion, EEH can work with Swindon and Oxfordshire on options if the Board wishes.</p> <p>Actions: EEH to work with Swindon Borough Council to discuss options for the A420 Acorn Bridge constraint.</p> <p>Actions: Cllr Beckett to reach out to Margaret Read (NISTA) about opportunities for securing government funding for maintenance and renewal projects.</p> <p>Actions: EEH to draft the A404 letter to the Secretary of State.</p>



	<p>The board noted 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).</p> <p>The board noted 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).</p> <p>The board reviewed the regional priorities table (annex 4), which is updated ahead of each Board meeting to reflect EEH work.</p>
8	<p>Future Meeting Dates</p> <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)

