

England's Economic Heartland Board

29 January 2026

Item 3: Managing Director's Update

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Board:

- a) Notes the summary of EEH's work in the year ahead.**
- b) Notes the revised timing and location for the Regional Leaders Summit in February 2026.**
- c) Considers and agrees the proposal to further strengthen engagement amongst all regional partners, including MPs, through the creation of an Oxford to Cambridge Corridor APPG.**

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To update the Board on key priorities and areas of focus for EEH in 2026, a pivotal year for the partnership

2. Key points to note

- 2.1. 2026 marks a major milestone and new phase in 2026, coinciding with its 10-year anniversary and the transition to a revised remit. A Government funding settlement is expected shortly.
- 2.2. Significant regional developments will shape the year, including progress on East West Rail, the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet construction phase, clarity over RIS3 investment priorities, and key Government decisions around matters such as new towns—all requiring strong evidence and coordinated regional working.
- 2.3. EEH's work will focus on integration, evidence, and convening, including improving regional transport connectivity, strengthening data and analysis, progressing agreed infrastructure priorities, and continuing leadership through activities such as the Regional Leaders Summit and future parliamentary engagement (subject to Board agreement).

3. Context

- 3.1. As Board members gather for EEH's first meeting in 2026, it is worth noting that this marks ten years since the partnership's inaugural meeting on 12 February 2016. From its early vision and initial collaborations, EEH has expanded significantly in scale, scope, and capability. The Board will want to recognise this milestone and acknowledge the partnership's achievements, particularly given the many shifts in Government policy and priorities over the past decade.
- 3.2. This meeting also signals the start of a new phase for EEH. In December 2025, the Board agreed proposals to Government for a long-term work programme and a revised remit.

- 3.3. While confirmation of a funding settlement from the Department for Transport is still pending, it is expected imminently. Once received, the Managing Director will work with the Chair and our Accountable Body to develop an affordable 2026/27 work programme, with the intention of presenting it to the Board for approval in March 2026.
- 3.4. January 2026 also marks one year since the Government established the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor, led by Ministerial Champion Lord Patrick Vallance. EEH remains in regular dialogue with the Growth Corridor team— ensuring the team recognise the importance of supporting and investing in all parts of the EEH region, representing pan-regional infrastructure and policy needs, providing data and analytics, and facilitating engagement with stakeholders.

4. Looking Ahead – EEH in 2026

- 4.1. Through the milestones outlined above and looking ahead, EEH has consistently made the strongest possible case to Government for clarity on the investment needed to support housing and economic growth across all parts of the region. Four new towns have been identified within or near the area, alongside significant housing expansion across the wider region. To ensure this growth delivers real benefits for both new and existing communities, supporting infrastructure and services must be built in from the outset.
- 4.2. Alongside our work, the region can expect to reach several major milestones this year.
- 4.3. Most notably—and we hope as soon as possible—services are expected to begin running on East West Rail between Oxford and Milton Keynes. Road works on the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet will continue throughout the year, with the route scheduled to open in spring 2027. The Government’s publication of RIS3 should confirm the next phase of road investment, incorporating recommendations from the previous Oxford to Cambridge Road Study and addressing immediate priorities such as the A404 junctions and A14 Junction 10a. Government decisions on new town locations and the East West Rail Development Consent Order will each have significant implications for the evidence required and the collaboration needed across partners.
- 4.4. The Board has agreed three main areas for EEH’s future focus which will guide our work in 2026 and beyond.
- 4.5. This includes integration of the regional transport system: maximising the benefits of East West Rail and unlocking the opportunities for better connectivity right across the region arising from developments such as airport expansion, new towns and housing growth, Universal and Puy du Fou, and economic initiatives such as the Ellison Institute of Technology and Silverstone 2035. During 2026 we expect to see the publication of the government’s Integrated National Transport Strategy, which will provide a national framework to sit alongside the regional integration framework agreed by Board in December.
- 4.6. We also expect to see Great British Railways to come on stream and will be ensuring that the needs of this region are at the forefront of its future considerations. It will be crucial for the transport system to work in both urban and rural areas, with a major focus of EEH during 2026 being on seizing opportunities for an enhanced bus network.
- 4.7. During this year, EEH will also strengthen its data and analysis, including through an enhanced regional land-use model which is being designed with the needs of local authorities in mind, to support decision making. Our evidence base will inform our advocacy on the infrastructure priorities agreed by Board, including on Ely Junction, the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link, Oxford-Swindon-Bristol services, MRT proposals and several other rail, road, bus and active travel schemes.
- 4.8. EEH will also continue its key convening role, bringing local leaders together with Government minister, senior officials, national agencies, businesses and experts.
- 4.9. EEH is also supporting the region’s offer at UKREiiF in Leeds in May. You may also wish to consider attendance to the [Creating a Scientific Superpower](#) conference hosted by the Oxford-Cambridge Supercluster Board on 5 June in London.



- 4.10. 2026 is a year of opportunity—a year to shape the future of our region and demonstrate the power of collaboration to get things done. Together, we can ensure England’s Economic Heartland is working with you, as a partnership of local authorities, to lead the way in realising sustainable growth, world-class connectivity, and thriving communities for your residents, businesses and the wider UK.

5. Regional Leaders Summit and APPG

- 5.1. Board members will be aware that EEH is hosting a Regional Leaders Summit on 25 February 2026. The event is intended to be a significant moment for local authority Leaders to meet with Lord Vallance as well as other key regional partnerships – such as the Science Supercluster. The discussion will be a chance to reflect on “one year on” – what has been achieved and explore opportunities to go further – in terms of ambition, partnership and investment.
- 5.2. The event, initially planned to be at Shuttleworth House, Biggleswade has had to be moved again to reflect Ministerial diary commitments. It is expected to now be taking place, in London, on Tuesday 25 February but timings have also had to be amended.
- 5.3. Alongside our ongoing engagement with Government—which can often result in the scheduling challenges we have faced with this event—there is a clear need to continuing strengthening collaboration across regional partnerships.
- 5.4. To support this, including deeper engagement with the region’s parliamentarians, Board members are asked to endorse the creation of an Oxford to Cambridge All-Party Parliamentary Group.
- 5.5. The Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor Westminster Hall debate demonstrated the interest of MPs in the corridor, from across the region and different political parties. By establishing and maintaining an APPG on behalf of the region, EEH would be fulfilling a key regional convening function. While the APPG would of course be chaired by Parliamentarians, we would expect it to significantly involve input from local and combined authorities, alongside businesses and academia on a broad range of issues. In so doing it would be strengthen local and regional voices, build on existing partnerships and coalitions, and provide a focal point for regional engagement and advocacy.
- 5.6. A verbal briefing on the proposal will be provided during the meeting.

Naomi Green
Managing Director
January 2026