

Strategic Transport Leadership Board

Minutes

18 June 2026

11:00 – 13:00

In Person

Present:

Cllr Adam Zerny (Chair)
Cllr Tim Bearder
Cllr Bethia Thomas
Cllr Nick Gardiner
Cllr Tahmina Saleem
Mayor Tom Wootton
Cllr Thomas Broom
Cllr Richard Butler
Cllr Chris McGiffen
Cllr Javeria Hussain
Cllr Ruth Brown

Cllr Nicola Gribble

Phil Southall

Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council
Leader, Oxfordshire County Council
Leader, Vale of White Horse District Council
Cabinet Member for Transport, Swindon Borough Council
Leader, Luton Borough Council
Mayor, Bedford Borough Council
Cabinet Member, Buckinghamshire Council
Cabinet Member, West Northamptonshire Council
Executive Member, North Northants Council
Executive Member, Luton Council
Deputy Executive Member, Hertfordshire County Council
Portfolio Holder for Environment, Bedford Borough Council
Managing Director, Strategy and Performance at Go Ahead Group

Apologies:

Cllr Steven Broadbent (Vice Chair)
Cllr Lucy Nethsingha
Mayor Paul Bristow
Cllr Paul Zukowskyj
Cllr Kerrie Bradburn

Leader, Buckinghamshire Council
Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council
Mayor, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough
Executive Member, Hertfordshire County Council
Cabinet Member, Milton Keynes Council

1	Introductions Cllr Adam Zerny opened the meeting and welcomed members to Westcott Venture Park. Cllr Thomas Broom welcomed members on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council. He said that Westcott Venture Park was a key part of Buckinghamshire's growth strategy and said that Westcott was home to advanced satellite testing and simulation facilities and had contributed to major international space programmes, including the Artemis mission. He said that Westcott demonstrated how Buckinghamshire was contributing to innovation and economic growth both nationally and internationally. There are four ongoing actions, these are: 1. Oxford - Cambridge Growth Corridor - <i>Representatives from RESP have been invited to attend a future meeting.</i> 2. Managing Directors Update - <i>EEH to explore the development of an analytical pack on funding models.</i> 3. Rail - <i>Benjamin Feeney North to provide a map/list of planned stations and develop a tracker of station proposals, including funding and progress.</i> 4. Data Insights - <i>Mingfei is to share the Power BI mapping data with Cllr Tracey Wye.</i>
2	Public Questions No public questions had been received.
3	EEH Three-Year Business Plan and 2026/27 Work Programme Cllr Adam Zerny introduced the item and said that the proposed Business Plan reflected discussions previously held by the Board and the EEH Futures Subgroup. He said that the plan largely reflected previously agreed priorities, with the addition of annual Board Member priority-setting discussions and the proposed Quality of Life programme. Naomi Green introduced the report. She said that EEH had secured a three-year funding commitment from Government. She said that the original proposal had been for approximately £1 million per year, which would have required significant reductions in activity, but following discussions with the Department for Transport, funding for 2026/27 had increased to £1.35 million. Naomi Green said that local authority contributions remained an important part of the EEH funding model as they ensured EEH remained a locally-led partnership. She said that EEH's strength lay in its combination of local authority ownership, analytical capability and relationships across Government. Naomi Green referred to examples where local authorities had utilised EEH modelling and evidence to support planning and transport decisions, reducing the need for expensive external consultancy work.

3	Cllr Nick Gardiner said that Swindon continued to view EEH as a valuable partnership and referred to the benefits of EEH’s advocacy, evidence base and collaborative approach. Cllr Adam Zerny said that EEH remained the only Sub-national Transport Body to have secured a longer-term funding settlement and described this as a significant vote of confidence from Government. Cllr Bethia Thomas said that local government reorganisation would raise future governance questions and asked how successor authorities would engage with EEH. Naomi Green said that EEH’s current governance model was based around upper-tier authorities. She said that further consideration would be required as local government reorganisation progressed and noted that the model adopted in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, where both the Combined Authority and constituent authorities remained engaged, had worked effectively. Cllr Ruth Brown sought clarification regarding the proposed local authority contributions. Naomi Green explained that contributions had remained static for several years and that the Board had previously agreed that future contributions should be linked to inflation. The Board agreed the Three-Year Business Plan, set out in Annex 1. The Board agreed the final work programme for 2026/27, set out in Annex 2. The Board agreed the proposed annual contribution from partners to EEH for the financial year 2026/27, and notes that letters seeking contributions would be sent following the meeting.
4	Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor Vision Naomi Green introduced the item and provided an update on the recently published Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor Economic Vision. She said that the Science Supercluster had launched the Vision in June 2026 and that the event had been attended by Government Ministers, business representatives, universities and local leaders. She said that the Vision represented a significant shift away from previous discussions focused primarily on housing growth and instead concentrated on economic growth, innovation and productivity. Naomi Green said that discussions with leaders had identified the need for a complementary Quality of Life Vision to ensure that communities across the region benefitted from growth and investment. She said that EEH had been asked to lead development of this work. Cllr Adam Zerny said that previous versions of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc had often been associated with housing numbers rather than economic opportunity. He said that the current Vision felt more joined up and gave greater recognition to innovation, jobs and investment.

4	Mayor Tom Wootton thanked EEH for recognising the impacts of growth and infrastructure projects on local communities. He said that major schemes such as East West Rail had significant consequences for residents and that this needed to be reflected within future work. Cllr Javeria Hussain said that the Quality of Life work should consider education, skills and career pathways and ensure that local people were able to benefit from future economic growth. Cllr Thomas Broom said that Buckinghamshire supported the economic focus of the Vision but remained concerned that it should not be used to justify inappropriate development or housing growth. He said that the focus should remain on economic opportunity, quality of life and supporting businesses. Cllr Tim Bearder said that discussions around growth should be transparent about housing and infrastructure implications. He said that infrastructure planning required realistic assumptions and that communities expected clarity regarding future development. Naomi Green said that EEH only used housing figures contained within adopted or emerging local plans and did not undertake speculative planning assumptions. Cllr Ruth Brown asked how Hertfordshire would continue to be represented within the Growth Corridor geography and noted that the Vision document made limited reference to Hertfordshire. Naomi Green said that Hertfordshire remained an important part of the Growth Corridor and confirmed that EEH continued to work closely with Hertfordshire partners. Action: Board Members interested in joining the Quality of Life Vision Subgroup to notify Hanane Elmaarouf or Naomi Green. The Board noted the publication of the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor Economic Vision (Annex 1) The Board noted the preferred approach agreed by Leaders to develop a corresponding place-based vision for the corridor, ensuring the quality of life remains a priority for local communities, and agrees to the creation of a Board Subgroup to support the work. The Board welcomed the commitment from Lord Vallance to work with local leaders on the development and implementation of the Corridor Vision via planned Regional Leaders Summits.
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5 Rail

Ben Feeney-North introduced the item. He presented the report on East West Rail opportunities and HS2 released capacity. He said that the report considered the opportunities and risks arising from East West Rail and HS2 and had been developed with significant input from local authority and rail industry partners.

Ben Feeney-North also referred to the continued absence of passenger services between Oxford and Milton Keynes and outlined the proposed letter to the Secretary of State calling for action to resolve the issue.

Ben Feeney-North said that Oxford-Swindon-Bristol services had commenced and said that EEH had played an important role in supporting the business case and advocating for the service. He also provided an update on the Growth Intersection initiative relating to Ely Area Capacity Enhancement and outlined progress towards public ownership of the railway.

CLlr Thomas Broom raised concerns regarding continuing uncertainty around East West Rail and HS2 infrastructure requirements. He referred specifically to the East West Rail maintenance depot proposals and said that local authorities required greater transparency regarding future infrastructure plans.

Mayor Tom Wootton said that Bedford Borough Council remained concerned about East West Rail's approach to engagement and consultation. He said that information relating to significant proposals had not always been shared in a timely manner.

CLlr Ruth Brown asked whether there would be direct connectivity between East West Rail and HS2 and sought clarification regarding future rail capacity improvements.

Ben Feeney-North explained that there would not be direct connectivity between East West Rail and HS2 but that wider connectivity benefits would arise through improvements across the rail network.

CLlr Tim Bearder raised concerns regarding rail freight capacity and the implications of freight interchange proposals in Oxfordshire.

Ben Feeney-North confirmed that officers were already working with Oxfordshire colleagues regarding these concerns.

Actions: Ben Feeney-North to bring a future update on the Chiltern Main Line Strategic Advice work, including electrification proposals.

Board endorses the 'Maximising East West Rail opportunities and HS2 released capacity' report and approve its publication.

The Board noted the wider rail updates in this report.

6 Major Development Activity

Fiona Foulkes introduced the item and provided an update on major development activity across the region. She said that EEH was actively monitoring twenty-one major development schemes due to their potential impacts on the strategic transport network. She referred to the proposed EEH response to the East West Rail consultation, the New Towns Programme consultation response, Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange and updates relating to Universal United Kingdom Resort and Forest City 1.

Cllr Thomas Broom said that the proposed consultation response did not go far enough in expressing concerns regarding East West Rail's engagement and consultation processes. He said that engagement had not always been open, transparent or timely and that the response should reflect this more strongly.

Mayor Tom Wootton supported the concerns raised regarding East West Rail engagement.

Cllr Javeria Hussain said that the consultation response should include stronger references to London Luton Airport and its role within the wider transport network.

Cllr Nick Gardiner said that the recent introduction of Oxford–Swindon–Bristol services demonstrated the benefits that could be achieved through targeted rail investment. He said that improved connectivity to the south-west represented an important opportunity for the region and noted that some rail improvements could be delivered relatively quickly through timetable changes rather than major infrastructure projects. He said that it was important to continue pursuing long-term ambitions whilst also recognising opportunities that could deliver benefits within shorter timescales.

Action: EEH to review the wording in the East West Rail consultation response regarding engagement and consultation.

Action: EEH to consider strengthening references to London Luton Airport within the East West Rail consultation response.

The Board considered and approved the EEH consultation response to East West Rail 2026 consultation.

The Board noted the EEH consultation response to New Towns Draft Programme.

The Board agreed EEH should register as an interested party to the development of the OxSRFI NSIP and officers should provide technical insight.

The Board noted the remaining content of this paper on Universal United Kingdom Resort and Forest City 1.

7 Integration Programme Update

James West introduced the item and invited Professor Stephen Joseph to provide feedback from the first Integration Taskforce meeting.

Professor Stephen Joseph explained the purpose of the Integration Taskforce and said that it had been established to provide expertise and challenge to support EEH's integration work. He said that the Taskforce was considering issues including accessibility, quality of life, governance, funding, transport integration and delivery.

Professor Joseph said that the Taskforce would focus on ensuring that investment across the region delivered benefits greater than the sum of its individual parts.

James West provided an update on Transport Opportunity Plans and the work being undertaken in relation to Universal United Kingdom Resort, Silverstone and other strategic locations. He said that the Universal Transport Opportunity Plan was progressing rapidly and involved close collaboration between Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council and Milton Keynes City Council. He said that workstreams included integrated ticketing, transport planning, funding and governance arrangements.

Cllr Tim Bearder said that whilst he supported the aims of the Integration Taskforce, there needed to be a greater focus on delivery. He said that strategies alone would not achieve integration and that it was important to identify the organisations responsible for delivery, including transport operators, local transport authorities and Great British Railways. He referred to Project Coral and said that delivery would require organisations to work together on practical matters such as ticketing, commercial agreements and passenger experience.

James West said that EEH would consider how delivery organisations could be more directly involved in future Integration Taskforce discussions. He said that conversations were already taking place with East West Rail and Network Rail colleagues and that there was an opportunity to strengthen engagement with organisations responsible for delivery.

Cllr Thomas Broom said that whilst the proposals contained many positive ideas, it was important to ensure that transport integration continued to provide genuine travel choice. He said that personal transport remained an important part of the transport system and that integration work should recognise the role of all transport modes. He also referred to the condition of the highway network and the importance of maintaining investment in roads alongside public transport improvements.

Cllr Ruth Brown said that she supported the focus on integration and public transport. She said that public transport needed to become easier, cheaper and more convenient for passengers. She referred to examples from Switzerland and said that long-term planning, integrated ticketing and better coordination between modes demonstrated what could be achieved through a more joined-up approach.

Action: EEH to explore how delivery organisations and infrastructure operators can be involved in future Integration Taskforce discussions.

The Board noted the launch of the Integration Taskforce and receives a verbal update from the Chair of the Taskforce, Professor Stephen Joseph.

The Board received an update on the progress being made across the Transport Opportunity Plan programme and provides a steer on the proposed locations for TOPs.

	The Board supported the priority workstreams that are being progressed with the DfT Sustainable and Active Travel Group for the Universal United Kingdom Resort Site.
8	Bus Integration Activity Trevor Brennan introduced the item and provided updates on the Total Transport Toolkit, the Luton-Dunstable Busway Extension Study, the Buses in Bedfordshire Plan and actions arising from the Bus and Integration Symposium. He said that the Total Transport Toolkit was now being piloted with Cambridgeshire County Council, Swindon Borough Council and West Northamptonshire Council. He said that the toolkit would help authorities better understand transport demand and identify opportunities for integration across transport services. Trevor Brennan said that Phase One of the Luton-Dunstable Busway Extension Study had been completed and that Phase Two was now underway. He explained that the study had identified three priority corridors and would now consider route options, infrastructure requirements, costs and delivery approaches. He also provided an update on the development of the Buses in Bedfordshire Plan and wider bus integration work. Cllr Tim Bearder asked how progress towards delivery of the network was being monitored. He said that significant work had previously been undertaken to identify strategic bus corridors across the region and asked whether EEH was tracking implementation of those proposals. Trevor Brennan said that the Heartbeat Network had been updated to reflect service changes and improvements already delivered by local transport authorities and operators. He said that the network was now being used to inform Transport Opportunity Plans, particularly in relation to Universal United Kingdom Resort and wider regional connectivity proposals. Naomi Green said that the point regarding monitoring was helpful and suggested that EEH could consider how progress on the Heartbeat Network could be reported more formally to the Board in future. Cllr Ruth Brown welcomed the inclusion of the Luton-Hitchin-Stevenage corridor within the Busway Extension Study. She said that improved east-west public transport connections remained important, particularly in the context of London Luton Airport expansion, and asked about the timescales for delivery.

8	Trevor Brennan said that Phase Two of the study was now underway and would consider infrastructure requirements, costs, route options and delivery arrangements. He said that a further update would be brought to the Board in September, with the full study due later in the year. Action: EEH to consider how progress on the Heartbeat Network can be monitored and reported back to the Board. The Board received an update on EEH's 'Total Transport' Toolkit and receives a demonstration of the toolkit. The Board noted progress on the Luton Dunstable Busway Extension Study including the completion of phase one of and progress to phase two. The Board received an update on the Buses in Bedfordshire Plan. The Board noted progress on EEH's integrated bus programme, including the key priorities identified following the EEH Bus and Integration Symposium 2025.
9	Data Insights Rob Hale provided a demonstration of the Total Transport Toolkit. He explained how the platform brought together transport data from multiple service areas and allowed authorities to identify opportunities for more efficient service delivery. Cllr Tim Bearder said that safeguarding considerations would need to remain central to any future implementation. He said that there would also need to be political support for any changes arising from the work, particularly where existing transport arrangements might be altered. Naomi Green said that the technology and analytical capability had largely been developed through the pilot programme, but that the quality and availability of local authority data remained a key factor in determining how the toolkit could be applied. She encouraged Board Members interested in exploring the toolkit further to engage with EEH following the meeting. Rob Hale said that the toolkit had been designed to support collaboration across transport services and help local authorities identify opportunities for more efficient and integrated service delivery. He explained that the system aimed to simplify access to data and reduce the burden on officers when assessing transport demand and service provision.

10	Business Unit Update Suzanne Winkels introduced the item and provided an update on regional energy systems planning. She said that Regional Energy Strategic Plans represented a significant change in how energy infrastructure would be planned and that local authorities needed a coordinated approach to ensure their interests were represented. Naomi Green said that EEH were working with local authority partners to establish an appropriate regional coordination mechanism and identify suitable representation on Regional Energy Strategic Plan Boards. Cllr Tim Bearder referred to electricity supply constraints affecting wastewater treatment infrastructure in Oxfordshire and asked whether there was any indication of how these issues would be resolved. Suzanne Winkels said that EEH did not currently possess the detailed energy modelling capability required to answer the question directly but suggested that the issue could be raised through relevant energy planning discussions. Cllr Thomas Broom questioned the reliability of future energy demand forecasts and raised concerns regarding speculative connection requests and data centre development. Suzanne Winkels acknowledged the point and noted that wider reforms to the electricity connections process were underway. The Board noted the progress made on regional energy systems planning and the emerging approach to regional coordination. The Board agreed that EEH should provide a light-touch coordination role to support regional energy systems planning, subject to local authority agreement and the identification of an appropriate funding mechanism. The Board reviewed the regional priorities table (Annex 1), which is updated ahead of each Board meeting to reflect EEH work.
11	Future Meeting Dates 2026 proposed dates: - 24 September 2026 (virtual) - 03 December 2026 (in person)