

**Public
Key Decision - Yes**

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: England's Economic Heartlands Consultation Response

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 17th September 2020

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning

Report by: Clara Kerr - Service Manager Growth

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

England's Economic Heartlands was established to engage authorities impacted by the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge Arc. The Economic Heartland region covers Swindon, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire, Central Bedfordshire, Bedford, Luton, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The organisation is the sub-national transport body for this region and received financial backing from the Department for Transport to advance an ambitious programme of work, including the development of an overarching transport strategy and work to identify and define a major road network across the arc.

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) previously consulted on an 'Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement' in 2019, which Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) provided comments on (see Appendix 1). EEH is now consulting on its Draft Transport Strategy (DTS) and can be found on [England's Economic Heartland's website](#). Consultation is running from 14 July 2020 and closes 6 October 2020. Officers have reviewed the document and provide a draft response for the consideration of Cabinet (see Appendix 2).

The DTS sets out a vision that addresses decarbonising transport, digital infrastructure and connectivity, East West Rail's role as the catalyst for transforming strategic public transport networks, investment in active travel and shared transport solutions to improve local connectivity and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential, and ensure that our freight and logistic needs continue to be met whilst lowering the environmental impact of deliveries. It is supported by a number of technical studies. These include an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal and proposal to form a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body.

This report provides an outline of the Draft Transport Strategy's aims and objectives and a draft consultation response (Appendix 2) on issues that affect the Huntingdonshire District Area, its corporate priorities and objectives.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is recommended to provide comments on this consultation and delegate authority to submit the Council's final comments on this consultation to the Service Manager - Growth, in consultation with the Executive Leader and Deputy Executive Leader.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an outline of the Draft Transport Strategy (DTS), its aims and objectives and a draft consultation response on issues that affect the Huntingdonshire District Area, its corporate priorities and objectives for approval by the Council.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 England's Economic Heartlands (EEH) was established to engage authorities impacted by the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge Arc. The Economic Heartland region covers Swindon, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire, Central Bedfordshire, Bedford, Luton, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The organisation is the sub-national transport body for this region and received financial backing from the Department for Transport to advance an ambitious programme of work, including the development of an overarching transport strategy and work to identify and define a major road network across the arc.
- 2.2 Organisationally the aim of EEH is to 'address identified barriers to economic activity (both existing and planned growth) and raise productivity to match, and where possible exceed, that of our global competitors. To achieve this [they] need to
- Strip away duplication, remove inefficiencies, and enable faster, more agile decisions.
 - Simplify funding streams wherever possible so that the time (and cost) taken to develop proposals and get them delivered on the ground is reduced.
 - Provide greater certainty for private sector investors thereby encouraging them to commit sooner to investments with greater confidence.'
- 2.3 Another important goal for EEH is to submit a proposal to establish a statutory Sub-national Transport Body with powers and responsibilities devolved from Government in a way that enables delivery of a Regional Transport Strategy. Currently the only statutory transport body is Transport for the North.
- 2.4 EEH consulted on an Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement in 2019, which the Council responded to, having considered the consultation in October 2019. This set out the challenges and opportunities faced by the region to achieve growth and net zero carbon transport system by 2050. The views received and subsequent technical work have been used to develop a Draft Transport Strategy, now the subject of formal consultation. It provides a useful opportunity to highlight the Council's priorities for transport infrastructure on a regional level.

3. DRAFT TRANSPORT STRATEGY – AN OVERVIEW

Vision and principles

- 3.1 The consultation document sets out the Vision and principles for the Transport Plan. It is a strategic plan and so has high-level aspirations:

‘To realise sustainable growth opportunities and improve the quality of life and wellbeing for Heartland residents and businesses, by harnessing the Heartland’s globally renowned centres of innovation to unlock a world class, de-carbonised transport system.

Principles

- *Achieve net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050*
- *Improve quality of life and wellbeing through an inclusive transport system accessible to all, which emphasises sustainable and active travel*
- *Support the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities*
- *Ensure the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways.’*

(England’s Economic Heartland, 2020)

Integrated Sustainability Appraisal

- 3.2 The LGA advises that *‘The purpose of the sustainability appraisal process is to appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of a plan from the outset. In doing so it will help ensure that decisions are made that contribute to achieving sustainable development.’* (LGA, 2020). The document is supported by an Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (SA) prepared by WSP. This has also been reviewed by officers. The response to which can be found under question 8 of the Council’s proposed response to the Draft Transport Strategy.

Statutory Sub-national Transport Body

- 3.3 The power to establish statutory Sub-national Transport Bodies was enabled through the Cities and Local Devolution Act 2016, amending the Local Transport Act 2008. The report explains:

‘The primary legislation sets out that a statutory Sub-national Transport Body would have a range of general functions, including:

- a) To prepare a transport strategy for the area*
- b) To provide advice to the Secretary of State about the exercise of transport functions in relation to the area (whether exercisable by the Secretary of State or others)*
- c) To co-ordinate the carrying out of transport functions in relation to the area that are exercisable by different constituent authorities with a view to improving the effectiveness and efficiency in carrying out those functions.*

Once established as a statutory body the Secretary of State would have to have regard to the proposals contained in the Transport Strategy and the advice of the Sub-national Transport Body. In addition to the general functions explicitly identified in the legislative framework, the constituent members of the Sub national Transport Body have the ability to make other proposals as to the role and functions it has.'

(Proposal to Establish a Statutory Sub national Transport Body: For Consultation, 2020)

3.4 The document sets out what the powers are that it would be seeking, which encompass general functions set by the Local Transport Act 2008. As a statutory Sub-national Transport Body it would '*recognise that the Secretary of State remains the final-decision maker on national transport strategies...*', although the ...'*Secretary of State must have regard to the Sub-national Transport Body's Transport Strategy, and its advice in respect of its implementation*'. It lists several additional powers it would seek:

- a) *'The right to be consulted about new rail franchises – whereby EEH would have to be consulted before the Secretary of State issues any invitation to tender for a franchise agreement*
- b) *The right to have a role in setting the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) for rail – whereby EEH would be able to act jointly with the Secretary of State to set and vary the HLOS for the area*
- c) *The right to have a role in setting the Road Investment Strategy (RIS) for the Strategic Road Network – whereby EEH would be able to act jointly with the Secretary of State to set and vary the RIS in our area*
- d) *The ability to enter into agreements to undertake certain works on the Strategic Road Network, Major Road Network or local roads – this would enable EEH (working with partners) to promote and expedite delivery of regionally significant cross-boundary schemes*
- e) *The ability to make capital grants for the provision of public transport facilities – this would enable EEH to support the funding and delivery of joint projects with constituent authorities*
- f) *The ability to secure the provision of bus services – travel to work areas do not respect local authority boundaries and this would enable EEH (working with partners) to fill in identified gaps in bus service provision*
- g) *The ability to enter into Quality Bus Partnerships – this would enable EEH (working with partners) to expedite the introduction of partnership schemes covering more than one local transport authority area*
- h) *The ability to introduce integrated ticketing schemes – this would enable EEH (working with partners) to expedite the introduction of cost effective smart and integrated ticketing system on a regional level*
- i) *The right to promote or oppose Bills in Parliament – this would enable EEH to promote, co-ordinate and fund regionally*

significant infrastructure schemes, accelerating delivery of cross-boundary schemes.'
(*Proposal to Establish a Statutory Sub national Transport Body: For Consultation, 2020*)

3.5 The consultation seeks views on the proposals, which are set out in Appendix 2. In summary

The Council supports the principles of the strategy to:

- Achieve net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050
- Improve quality of life and wellbeing through an inclusive transport system accessible to all, which emphasises sustainable and active travel
- Support the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities
- Ensure the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways Concern is raised that there is limited information to ensure accessibility to public transport hubs, especially for rural communities and in terms of addressing income.
- Support for the prioritisation of East West Rail, CAM, improvements to the A14 and A1.
- We seek clarification of the inclusion of Godmanchester and Alconbury as Strategically Significant, although supports the inclusion of St Neots, Alconbury Weald and Huntingdon.
- Support for active modes of travel is supported but concerns are also raised that connectivity for active modes is a challenging, in rural areas.
- Measures to support rural connectivity are welcomed but more information is required in respect of delivery mechanisms.
- Support for increased rail connectivity for St Neots, including for rail freight.
- While the priorities listed and the approach to identifying infrastructure priorities through connectivity studies is supported in principle, concerns are raised that is unclear how Huntingdonshire fits within these from the descriptions and mapping included; and there is a lack of detail, for example, who will be responsible for delivery, timelines, and costs.

- The impact on rural communities generally is highlighted as a concern due to a lack of clarity around investment.
- The Integrated Sustainability Appraisal is welcomed. concerns are expressed relating to rural connectivity, public transport, digital infrastructure, and that the A141 has still not been included.
- Concerns are raised in relation to potential issues with an additional tier of Governance and the ability to deliver transport infrastructure without delay.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 5.1 There is a risk that an additional tier of policy making could delay delivery of key infrastructure if it does not operate well or partner organisations within the decision-making disagree. Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (including the Mayor) are the Local Highway Authority/ Local Transport Authority and represent the interests of the Cambridgeshire Authorities for strategic highway matters. HDC would continue to liaise with its partners to ensure key infrastructure is delivered locally but would want assurance in any future tiers of governance that the strategic growth ambitions of the district were met, and at pace. If a solid governance structure representing all Councils in the corridor is established from the outset the benefits of a combined approach, with greater ability to influence Government and deliver a strong vision could outweigh this risk.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 If the recommendations are supported, officers would submit a representation on behalf of HDC within the consultation period. A final version the Transport Strategy is expected to be published at the turn of the year.
- 6.2 In respect of setting up a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body, the consultation runs with that of the Draft Transport Strategy. No timeline is provided for the process of establishing this body at this stage.

7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 7.1 The EEH Draft Transport Strategy assists in the delivery of a number of objectives related to the Council's work programme and key actions including:

- Supporting new and growing businesses and promoting business success
- Supporting the delivery of the Alconbury Enterprise Zone
- Supporting economic growth in market towns and rural areas
- Promoting inward investment
- Influencing the development of the Highways and Transport Infrastructure Strategy
- Facilitating the delivery of infrastructure to support housing growth
- Improving the quality of the environment, by including infrastructure that supports people to walk and cycle
- Facilitate and provide opportunities for positive activities that support residents' health and wellbeing needs
- Prioritising accessible, high quality, well maintained open space, walking and cycling facilities on new housing developments
- Collaborating with partners, providers and stakeholders in an enterprising fashion to enhance community resilience and build sustainable opportunities for people

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None at this time as this is a consultation response.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Potential resource implications if additional capacity is required to input into further development of the Draft Transport Strategy. This is considered unlikely at this stage.

10. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Government has recognised the need to plan for and deliver substantial new infrastructure ahead of the arrival of new communities, including necessary transport infrastructure, utilities, digital connectivity, health and education. Projects identified in the Draft Transport Strategy, if implemented, will facilitate and provide opportunities for positive activities that support Huntingdonshire's residents' health and wellbeing needs including multi-modal transport options and an increased emphasis on connecting people by way of cycling opportunities.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

11.1 The Draft Transport Strategy provides opportunities to enhance and support opportunities for growth across the England's Heartland Region, Combined Authority Area and Huntingdonshire. The Council's response to this consultation will help to shape the Draft Transport Plan and provide a steer for future infrastructure projects influencing the district and enabling and supporting Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and the Council's Corporate Objectives.

- 11.2 Recommendations provided in the Council's consultation response will ensure that Huntingdonshire is adequately represented within the Regional Transport Strategy and that schemes support Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and ambitions for growth.
- 11.3 It is recommended that Cabinet provide comments on this consultation and delegate authority to submit the Council's final consultation comments on this consultation to the Service Manager - Growth, in consultation with the Executive Leader and Deputy Executive Leader.

12. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 - Huntingdonshire District Council's draft Consultation Response to the Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for Engagement
Appendix 2 - Huntingdonshire District Council's draft Consultation Response to the Draft Transport Strategy (Questionnaire)

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [England's Economic Heartland's Draft Transport Strategy](#)
- [Integrated Sustainability Appraisal](#)
- [Proposal to Establish a Statutory Subnational Transport Body](#)
- [EEH Cabinet Report 241019](#)

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