

Scrutiny Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny Board (OSB)
Date of Meeting:	21 September 2020
Subject:	England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy
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Purpose

1. The Government introduced the Power to establish statutory Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) through the Cities and Local Devolution Act 2016. Their subsequent White Paper “Transport Investment Strategy-moving Britain ahead” (Cmnd 9472), published in July 2017 recognises the important role of STB’s and Local Enterprise Partnerships in improving regional transport connectivity that it is vital to support sustainable economic growth. It also recognises the importance of ensuring the investment creates a more reliable, less congested and better connected transport network.
2. In summer 2019 England’s Economic Heartland (EEH), of which Luton Borough Council is a constituent Member, published its Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for consultation. Members were invited to attend a presentation on 2nd October 2019 prior to Full Council that evening. The feedback received from Members was used to inform the Councils response to the consultation at the end of that month, a copy of which is included at **Appendix 1** to this report.
3. Having taken account of the responses to the previous consultation, over the last 9 months the EEH Business Unit has been busy preparing a draft Transport Strategy, together with supporting documents. Feedback on drafts of those documents were provided by the Strategic Transport Forum (Luton represented by Councillor Paul Castleman), the Officer Working Group (chaired by Laura Church, Luton’s Corporate Director, Place and Infrastructure) and, in the case of some supporting documents, sub-groups from EEH’s constituent Transport Authorities.
4. A presentation on the draft Transport Strategy and supporting documents will be provided by Martin Tugwell. In addition Members attention is drawn to a draft proposal being consulted upon to formally establish EEH as an STB (see **Appendix 2**). The views of Overview and Scrutiny Board Members on the draft Transport Strategy will inform the Council’s response to the consultation being presented to Executive on 12th October 2020.

Recommendations

5. Overview and Scrutiny Board is requested to consider and :
 - i) Comment on the EEH draft Transport Strategy and supporting documents;
 - ii) Comment on the additional Powers that EEH is formally seeking in its role as an STB, setting out the rationale for these and, importantly on page 12, the Powers that it is not seeking
 - iii) Summarise their views in a report to Executive on 12th October 2020

Report

6. EEH (see plan on page 3 of **Appendix 2**) is one of seven emerging Sub-national Transport Body (STB's) covering the whole of England (see plan on Page 4 of **Appendix 2**). EEH has established a Strategic Transport Forum comprising its eleven constituent Highway/ Transport Authorities (which includes Luton) with the eventual aim of setting up a STB for the area. Their Strategic Transport proposition published in October 2016 set out a vision to build on the world-leading and globally competitive innovation- and knowledge-led industries in the area, underpinned by shared goals and strong collaboration between the private and public sectors and academic partners, to raise global competitiveness, grow the economy, and build economic resilience for the country. It also recognised the linkage between improving transport infrastructure and economic growth, stating that all localities in the growth corridor can and must benefit from sustained and inclusive growth in productivity and employment which will flow from greater connectivity.

The draft EEH Transport Strategy

7. The Vision and four key principles of the EEH draft Transport Strategy are set out on Page 5 of **Appendix 2**.
8. The background to de-carbonising transport is at the heart of the EEH policies, supporting proposals to de-carbonise the rail network (Policy1) and road transport (Policy 2) and ensuring other transport proposals prioritise active travel, public transport, and low/zero emissions vehicles over meeting the needs of other motor vehicles (Policy4).
9. The EEH draft Transport Strategy recognises that East West Rail will transform east west connectivity in the EEH area (Policies 7-12), but also states that priority will be given to infrastructure to support economic and housing growth in a north arc connecting Northampton/Corby and Peterborough/Cambridge and a south arc connecting central Buckinghamshire with Watford/southern Hertfordshire. Notwithstanding the transformative benefits of these east-west corridors, the strategy recognises that other interventions to improve north-south connectivity (Policies 15-19) and other intra and inter-regional journeys (Policies 20-23) will be required.
10. In addition to the opportunities provided by East West Rail, the consultation on the framework for the EEH transport strategy identified a number of sub-regional journey pairs that could require highway improvements in order to improve journey time reliability by road. Outside of Luton/ Dunstable/Houghton Regis, the main journeys to work from Luton are to the east of Milton Keynes and parts of Hertfordshire (particularly Hemel Hempstead), and trips to work in Luton are mainly from Barton-le-Clay to the north and Hitchin/Stevenage to the east.
11. Following a shortlisting of those corridors (including the combination of some corridors with adjacent ones), each corridor was independently assessed against the four key principles of the EEH draft Transport Strategy (see section 3.2.1) in order to prioritise a list of corridor studies that would form the basis of an investment pipeline for future investment by EEH. Of the aforementioned corridors important for travel to work to/from Luton, that prioritisation process has identified the Luton-Milton Keynes-Aylesbury corridor as a high priority (to be undertaken in 2020/21) and Luton-Bedford-Northampton corridor (to be undertaken in 2023/24).

Integrated Sustainability Appraisal of the EEH draft Transport Strategy

12. An Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA) of the EEH strategy has also been undertaken, to meet the Government requirement for all Strategic Plans to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and, where appropriate, a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). An ISA also incorporates a Health Impacts Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment, and a Community Safety Assessment. Luton's technical officers provided comments and advised that the assessment was robust overall.

Other supporting documents

13. A number of supporting documents accompany the EEH strategy, notably:
- a study into the pathways to decarbonising transport in order to achieve net zero emissions in the EEH area by 2050;
 - phase1 of a rail passenger study that assesses the existing rail passenger service connectivity between key centres in the EEH area, taking account of currently planned rail service and infrastructure improvements;
 - an extensive study of freight and logistics in the EEH area, which recognises the role that East West Rail and London Luton Airport could play from a freight perspective, as well as the opportunities for improving logistics in urban areas; and
 - a First Mile - Last Mile study to promote new forms of sustainable mobility as part of a longer distance trip to the main urban centres.

Proposal to establish England's Economic Heartland as Sub-national Transport Body

14. Alongside the draft Transport Strategy and supporting documents, a draft proposal to formally establish EEH as an STB is being consulted upon (see **Appendix 2**). Pages 8-12 of that document set out the additional Powers that EEH is formally seeking in its role as an STB, setting out the rationale for these on pages 10-11 and, importantly on page 12, the Powers that it is not seeking.
15. Luton benefits from being a Member of EEH including for example:
- policies that complement our draft Transport Strategy and could therefore potentially attract EEH funding
 - has commissioned some useful work on decarbonising transport, First Mile-Last Mile connectivity, and railway connectivity also useful in developing our draft Strategy
 - includes corridor studies in key journey to work corridors to/from the Luton-Dunstable area that could facilitate improved accessibility to nearby towns.
16. Members should note that this draft Proposal will be revised later this year to take account of any comments received. There will be a further opportunity for this Committee and Executive to comment on the final draft of the proposal before it is formally submitted to Government in Spring 2021.

Proposal/Option

17. The proposal is to consider and comment on the EEH Transport Strategy and supporting documents and to agree the terms of a Proposal to Government to formally establish England's Economic Heartland as a Sub-national Transport Body.
18. The option is not to comment on the EEH Transport Strategy/supporting documents and/or the Proposal to establish a statutory Sub-national Transport Body.

Appendices (if any)

19. Appendix 1- Luton's response to the Outline Transport Strategy: Framework for consultation published in July 2019
20. Appendix 2 – Proposal to establish England's Economic Heartland as a Sub-national Transport Body
21. Appendix 3 – Luton Local Transport Strategy Presentation

List of Background Papers - Local Government Act 1972, Section 100D

[Read the Draft Transport Strategy](#)