

**To:** Oxfordshire Growth Board  
**Title of Report:** England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy  
**Date:** 22 September 2020  
**Report of** Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director  
**Status:** Open

**Executive Summary and Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to seek support from the Oxfordshire Growth Board to submit comments to England's Economic Heartland on its consultation on the emerging Draft Transport Strategy. These comments reflect matters of a strategic nature and do not prejudice any specific comments made on the Strategy by any of our members.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) That the Growth Board discusses the draft comments provided in Annex 2 to this report and offers any suggested changes to these comments to be incorporated before submission; and,
- 2) That the Oxfordshire Growth Board agrees that Annex 2, noting any agreed changes to be made, is signed off and submitted by the Chair of the Growth Board.

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1: EEH Draft Transport Strategy Summary  
Appendix 2: Draft Growth Board submission to the consultation  
Appendix 3: Letter from Baroness Vere

**England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy**

1. England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is the 'emerging' Sub-national Transport Body (STB) for the area stretching from Swindon to Cambridgeshire. It includes the Oxford to Cambridge Arc area but extends to also include Swindon and Hertfordshire.
2. EEH is currently consulting on its Draft Transport Strategy. Preparing and agreeing such a Strategy is part of the process of becoming a formal STB. The deadline for any comment is 06 October. A summary of the Strategy is provided at Annex 1.

3. While typically, strategic transport matters are handled by Oxfordshire County Council, and we anticipate the County Council will be making its own response (not yet available to share at time of writing this report), the Executive Officers Group of the Growth Board feels there is merit in developing a strategic response from the Growth Board. Specifically, as the nature and extent of the Strategy impacts Growth Board programmes (Oxfordshire Plan 2050, Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, etc.), it is felt appropriate for the Oxfordshire Growth Board to submit a specific response to the consultation. This is meant to compliment but in no way prejudices comments made by any of our members.
4. The Oxfordshire Growth Board has a designated seat as a member of EEH as does the County Council and Cherwell District Council (as an invited District Council representative). We are anticipating separate responses to this one from the County and Cherwell Councils.

### **Areas of Comment**

5. In general, and as a strategic partnership response, there are two main areas of the consultation that we are focussing on in our proposed submission at Annex 2: the proposal to establish a statutory sub-national transport body; and, the Strategy itself.
6. On the former, Annex 1 sets out some concerns about the transition to a statutory body and the nature and language of the Strategy itself. Attached at Annex 3 is a letter from Baroness Vere setting out Government's view of the proposal for EEH to become a statutory body. In it she welcomes the work of EEH but makes clear Government are not looking to create any more statutory bodies at this time. This creates some confusion and lack of clarity as to what the status will be for EEH and therefore what the status of the Strategy will be going forward. This also raises a long-standing question about the relationship between EEH and the Arc, something the Growth Board may wish to seek more clarity on through its response.
7. On the latter, there are several areas of the Strategy which we are suggesting comments on:
  - The inconsistency between the summary and the main strategy with respect to the regard given to the Oxford to Cambridge Arc
  - The need to ensure this strategy is aligned with the emerging Government Arc Spatial Framework and our own emerging Oxfordshire Plan 2050
  - The language used in the Strategy is more akin to guidance and intent, rather than policy
  - Support for the evidence developed and principles underlying the Strategy, but a challenge to the vision to be bolder in its ambition for fundamental changes needed to the transport system in response to climate change and the impacts of COVID-19
  - Concerns around the delineation or non-delineation of some of our communities and major economic hubs and the way in which the Strategy characterises these places
  - Concern about the lack of recognition for most of the western flank of the county, about the relationship of this Strategy with areas on the edge of the Strategy boundary and concern about a lack of visible infrastructure priority given to major areas of concern such as the A34 and major rail investment beyond East-West Rail.

8. The Board is asked to consider the comments in Annex 2 and endorse these for submission by the Chair on behalf of the Board. Any agreed amendments to the proposed comments will be made and agreed with the Chair prior to submission.

### **Financial Implications**

9. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

### **Legal Implications**

10. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report albeit we do want clarity of the legal/statutory footing of EEH so that we can fully understand the nature of the Strategy and its relative weight and impact on Oxfordshire plans and strategies in the future.

### **Background Papers**

11. None.

Report Author:	Bev Hindle, Oxfordshire Growth Board Director
Contact information:	<a href="mailto:bev.hindle@oxfordshire.gov.uk">bev.hindle@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a>