

Planning

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Your reference:

Our reference: EEH Draft Transport Strategy

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Vale of White Horse District Council Response to 'England's Economic Heartland's Draft Transport Strategy' and Statutory Body status consultation.

Thank you for providing Vale of White Horse District Council (Vale) the opportunity to comment on the England's Economic Heartland's 'Draft Transport Strategy' and the proposal to establish a statutory sub-national transport body.

Overall, the Council is supportive of the strategy and the vision to realise sustainable growth harnessing the region's globally renowned centres of innovation to unlock a world class, de-carbonised transport system. This will support the Council's desire to address climate change. Recently the Council welcomed the aim of the Government's emerging Transport Decarbonisation Plan to end the UK's transport emissions and agreed that ambitious policies are required to ensure this aim is achieved. However, the Council believes the aim to achieve this by 2050 is not ambitious enough.

This Council has declared a Climate Change Emergency. We are aiming for a 75% reduction in carbon emissions in the district by 2030, and for a Carbon Neutral by 2045 district wide. The Council is working hard to reduce carbon emissions across the district and queries why the England's Economic Heartland's (EEH) Draft Transport Strategy is not being more ambitious or bold in its target date? We suggest it would also be beneficial to have a midway target to track progress.

The Council considers that in order to achieve net zero by 2050 UK wide, there will be the need for radical steps across the UK economy and wider society, and thus far reaching policies will be required by Government and the EEH Transport Strategy.

The Council acknowledges that there are challenges to be addressed to achieve the goal of developing a net-zero transport network across the EEH region, but believes that these need to be addressed and overcome to ensure that climate change targets are achieved.

The Council's wishes that the following points are considered when finalising the Transport Strategy, briefly these are:

- A request to change the ambition to achieve net-zero carbon emissions sooner.
- Coordination with local planning authorities – clarity on what planning powers local districts have set out in the Strategy.
- Clarity on the relationship between EEH and the Ox-Cam Arc and the future spatial framework for the Arc.
- We support rail travel and the electrification of the East-West Rail line.
- More emphasis on integrated rail and bus is important.
- More emphasis on connectivity of villages/rural communities with transport hubs.
- Greater recognition of the important role market towns have.

Comments on England's Economic Heartland's Draft Transport Strategy

The Council is pleased to expand on the above points in relation to the draft Transport Strategy:

1. The Council welcomes the reference to the ban on petrol, diesel and hybrid vehicles being brought forward to 2035, but understands the Government is actively considering bringing this forward sooner, to 2030, which the Council would welcome. Transport accounts for 40% of Oxfordshire's energy use, and therefore switching to electric or other ultra-low emission vehicles for private cars, commercial vehicle fleets and public transport, will not only be a key component in achieving carbon reduction targets but also in addressing air quality issues in our towns and villages.
2. The Council understands that the shift to zero emission vehicles will require appropriate charging infrastructure across the districts, in both domestic and public places. To address this the Council has adopted planning policy that supports low/zero emission vehicles and the expansion of charging infrastructure. The adopted Vale of the White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 requires in Policy 17 that Transport Assessments and Travel Plans consider opportunities to support the uptake of electric and/or low emission vehicles. This will help to support the transition to low/zero emission vehicles across the district. The Council is also considering rolling out electric vehicle charging points across Council car parks. The aim is to have these up and running by September 2021. The Strategy provides an opportunity to drive this agenda forward with even great emphasis and that would be supported by this Council.
3. The Council considers there needs to be a much greater focus on reducing the need for travel in the first instance. If paired with making public and active transport the easy and obvious choice for short, and eventually longer

journeys, creating a behavioural shift towards making fewer journeys overall will contribute significantly to reducing emissions from transport. The Council supports the aim of reducing the reliance on the private car.

4. In order to reduce the need for travel and facilitate modal shift, the Council supports the Strategy's recognition of the importance of investing in technology and infrastructure. In particular, the Council considers that digital infrastructure provides an important opportunity to reduce the need to travel. It allows businesses to be more flexible with their workplace arrangements, and thus allows greater numbers of employees to work from home (as have been the cases during the COVID-19 pandemic). As a result, the Council considers that the Transport Strategy should give prominence to the importance of investing in digital services and infrastructure (fixed and mobile), and the influence they have on reducing the need for travel. The strategy could make more emphasis on the opportunities the recent remote/home working practices have presented and how these can be seized upon to support the vision. It will be important in the more detailed work, such as the connectivity studies, to seek to understand the likely longer-term implications on travel behaviour and demand and how this should influence priorities on infrastructure investment.
5. An important way in which modal shift to public and active transport can be achieved is to design communities that encourage the use of public and active transport, and make those transport methods the most attractive option, which is recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework. Through delivering high quality design, active modes of transport can be prioritised over motorised traffic, which increases safety and encourages the use of these modes of travel over unsustainable transport methods. Delivering housing at higher densities can result in an increased concentration of people in an area, creating higher demand for public transport services, local services and commercial uses, which together reduce the need to travel longer distances and maximises options for walking or cycling. Building residential developments close to employment opportunities can further provide the opportunity to reduce the need for longer travel distances. The planning system plays an important role in creating communities that contribute towards modal shift, and therefore it should be better reflected in the Strategy. The relationship between the strategy and the planning powers of local authorities' should be articulated in the Strategy.
6. The Strategy should also be alert to different models of public service delivery, for example reversing the centralisation of healthcare services would bring about a change to people's movement patterns. This different approach to delivery could result in a reduction in vehicle movements and could therefore assist in achieving the principle of net-zero carbon emissions from transport.
7. The Council considers that the Transport Strategy should be clear on the need to work alongside the proposed spatial framework for the OxCam Arc. The Council believes that the Transport Strategy should more clearly articulate the on-going work at the OxCam Arc level, in particular the emerging spatial framework led by Government. (Overall and in Policies 12 and 13)

8. The Council considers that Science Vale, a world-renowned science, research and innovation hub that crosses the border of both Vale and South Oxfordshire districts, can play a key role in developing the UK a hub for green transport technology and innovation. The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy¹ sets out a shared ambition to become a low carbon county, and explains the need to harness and use Oxfordshire's strengths in innovative vehicle and transportation technologies to deliver the 'future of mobility'. The Council considers that the work undertaken in the Science Vale will play an important part in ensuring the UK is a world leader in green transport technology and innovation. The Council welcomes the reference to the Science Vale, but this could go much further to reflect the vital role the Science Vale already has in ensuring that the UK realises its commitment to the decarbonisation of transport. Thus, the Council considers it important the strategy acknowledges the importance of Science Vale and the need for Government's continued and increased support for science, research and innovation taking place at Science Vale - particularly the work that is contributing towards tackling climate change.
9. The Council supports the delivery and electrification of the East-West Rail as set out in the Strategy (Policies 1, 7 and 8). Following recent Government announcements, the Strategy now also needs to address the removal of franchises across the rail network to ensure services and planned improvements are not impacted.
10. The Council is keen to see the Strategy support all existing rail stations, including smaller stations and the re-opening of railway stations where an economic case is made, such as Grove. We strongly support the recommendations for increased rail capacity emerging from the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study.
11. The Council acknowledges that integrated rail and bus is important at the regional and sub-regional levels (Policy 19). Also, important given the rural nature of the Vale, is the connectivity the villages/rural communities have with transport hubs. The Council supports the recognition in the strategy (Policy 27) and hopes this can be developed further. Recognition of the role all market towns have to this strategy would be beneficial – the Council notes the Towns of Abingdon, Wantage, Faringdon have not been included in the table at pages 22-23.

Comments on the proposal to establish a statutory sub-national transport body

The Council broadly supports the principle of the EEH sub-national transport body obtaining statutory status, provided it is democratically accountable and has an appropriate governance structure in place.

It is welcomed that the 'general functions' set out under the 2008 Transport Act would give more weight to the final Transport Strategy and its delivery proposals in central government decision-making.

¹ <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/uploads/Oxfordshire%20Energy%20Strategy.pdf>

The Council is supportive of those additional powers sought from central government to increase localised strategic decisions. Clarity is sought on the links between district planning authorities and the statutory body. The Council wishes to see better integrated ticketing systems across services and would welcome greater clarity on the most appropriate approach to achieve this.

The Council notes from Baroness Vere's letter sent to EEH in August 2020, that the Government is not, at least at this time, looking to establish any further statutory bodies, including EEH. Clarification is therefore sought on whether you intend to pursue this further.

Yours faithfully,



Andrew Lane
Senior Planning Policy Officer