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*Campaigning for better services
over a bigger rail network*

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Dear Sir/Madam,

England's Economic Heartland – draft Transport Strategy

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in transport and development planning.

This response represents the shared view of our several regional branches across the Heartland and a number of affiliated rail user groups.

We address the questions in the on-line survey in turn.

Vision and Principles

1. To what extent do you support or oppose our vision? **Strongly support.**

2. To what extent do you support or oppose each of our principles?

\# Achieve net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050 **Strongly support.**

\# Improve quality of life and wellbeing through an inclusive transport system accessible to all, which emphasises sustainable and active travel **Strongly support.**

\# Support the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities **Strongly support.**

\# Ensure the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways **Strongly support.**

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3. Please provide any further comments you have about the vision and principles.

3.1 The 2050 zero carbon emissions target is a very long way off and lacks the necessary urgency. This date must in our view be brought forward. Mass transit offers the ability to achieve movement more efficiently than personalised transport (eg autonomous vehicles) through many travellers (or goods) sharing a single carbon footprint to achieve movement. A report by the International Energy Agency comments: "*The much lower carbon intensity of rail (per passenger- or tonne-km) compared with most other modes of transport, means the rail sector already plays a key role in containing global GHG emissions. Looking forward, efficient electric motors and increasingly low-carbon power mixes could enable rail to contribute substantially to achieving zero-emission mobility from a well-to-wheel (WTW) perspective.*" (https://www.iea.org/reports/the-future-of-rail)

3.2 The current railway 'network' cannot contribute fully to meeting all of the four key principles to any great extent; within the region covered by EEH it is hardly a network in any meaningful sense. The defined area of EEH has a population of c.5m to have - so far as can reasonably be achieved - rail as a viable travel choice. If the EEH area is to be properly inter-connected then a more dense railway network between the defined key nodes will be required. Currently some of those nodes, as far as the rail 'network' is concerned, are not nodes at all because there are just two links, one each side. Large centres such as Northampton, MIlton Keynes, Luton, and St. Albans have very poor connectivity by rail except to and from London. Only Oxford, Peterborough and Cambridge have something resembling adequate connectivity, yet as major economic hubs even they still need connectivity improvement.

The EEH study defines three east west corridors which together with the radial south - north rail links would make a proper network and create levels of connectivity across the EEH area appropriate to the needs of the 21st century.

A. Northern corridor Peterborough, Corby / Kettering, Northampton, Milton Keynes, Banbury are indicated as key objectives in the aim of improving connectivity. To these must be added key urban areas just outside the EEH boundary, such as Leicester. Linking these conurbations will need additional rail infrastructure, which could make use of routes which 19th century economics and geography bequeathed us but now lie under- or disused.

B. Central Corridor EWRL Oxford / Old Oak Common / Aylesbury - MK / Bedford - Cambridge - Newmarket - Ipswich / Ely - Norwich. The report outlines some deficiencies of this new route but with careful planning it can yet achieve improved connectivity as planned, as it crosses eight of the routes radiating from London. This alone will create an improved network with key nodes at Cambridge, Ely, St. Neots area, Bedford, MK / Bletchley, Oxford, Swindon. Although most nodes provide good connections (but the interchange with the Midland Main Line at Bedford must in particular be carefully planned), some through services can be developed eg Luton - Cambridge or Peterborough; Oxford - Northampton - Rugby and if a link is restored between Rugby and Wigston, Leicester - Nottingham.

C. Southern Corridor Aylesbury - Watford - St. Albans / Luton – Hatfield / Welwyn / Stevenage - Hertford - Harlow - Bishop's Stortford - Stansted Airport - A120 Corridor – Colchester. East-west transits across this southern part of the region are extremely poor, thus connectivity at all major employment hubs on this axis is extremely poor. This is one of the most densely-populated corridors in the region. Planning should be started to decarbonise and enable sustainable transits which interconnect the seven radial lines coming out of London northwards. This is prime territory for modal shift from road to rail if a fast and frequent passenger service was to be introduced linking Chiltern line / Metropolitan line - WCML - MML - ECML - Hertford Loop - WAML - GEML ie Chelmsford - Dunmow - Stansted - Bishop's Stortford - Harlow - Hertford - Welwyn - St. Albans - Watford - Aylesbury.

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We note past proposals for road-centred solutions to deliver improved public transport in this corridor. Our experience of other rail-based transport improvements shows that they frequently outperform expectations and do strongly encourage a modal shift from private car to public transport. The Stirling - Alloa line, for example, shows actual ridership three times higher than predicted. By contrast, many road vehicle based solutions have been shown to be less successful than predicted especially if an aim was to reduce congestion. For the Hertfordshire element, our submission to Hertfordshire County Council's Draft Rail Strategy develops this theme on pages 14-15; it is available at https://railfuture.org.uk/display2296.

The rail-based development of these three east-west corridors will create a railway network worthy of the description across the EEH area. This network when completed, together with interventions such as multimodal smart card zonal fares, would greatly assist in modal shift to rail and bus and help to reach decarbonisation, and pollution-reduction, targets.

3.3. Commentary on the eight major defined corridors of EEH. Services developed along these corridors would use the three East-West corridors above for parts of their routing.

All Corridors: The current Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that working from home is practical in many industries, yet there is a growing body of evidence that people need to interact in person for some - if not all - of the time for the most productive outcomes eg to improve collaboration and information flow. Where roles now only require intermittent attendance to the workplace, the distance between workplace and home can be increased without such a great impact on quality of life. These longer, less frequent, journeys are likely to substitute for more frequent shorter journeys for some workers, thus still requiring a very substantial capacity in mass transit. It is important to note that some workplaces (eg the life sciences & the NHS) require a high proportion of workplace attendance - a type of workplace which frequently exists within the EEH area. The benefits of agglomeration (having many companies in related industries in the same place, of which Cambridge is a particularly good example) also mean that more people need to travel to the same place at approximately the same time to achieve this benefit. To achieve this a mass transit infrastructure which has been invested in to have suitable capacity and delivery ability will be essential. It should go without saying that it is subsequently operated in an efficient and effective manner, including being priced so that it is seen as value for money to travellers (including those who go the workplace two or three days a week, not just those that travel every day).

Corridor 1 – Oxfordshire and Swindon: cross-Oxfordshire links and improvements to Swindon
Response: *aspiration for direct passenger train services avoiding Didcot Parkway to Swindon-Chippenham-Bath Spa-Bristol TM at 2tph, being extensions of the Ipswich / Norwich-Cambridge-Cambourne-Bedford-MK / Bletchley-Bicester-Oxford services.*

Corridor 2 – Chiltern Main Line: the area covered by the two routes from London Marylebone, improving connectivity between intermediate stations on the route and towards Oxford, Banbury and the West Midlands
Response: *aspiration for London Marylebone-Oxford services to call at High Wycombe to improve connectivity of High Wycombe.*

Corridor 3 – East Midlands – Thames Valley: Linking Old Oak Common through the Chilterns to Aylesbury, Milton Keynes, Northampton towards the East Midlands
Response:
*A. Aspiration for **Nottingham / Derby-Leicester-Wigston area-new line-Rugby** using a combination of the former Midland and GC solums plus some new land-take to enable a direct passenger train service to operate between Nottingham-Derby-Leicester and Northampton-MK-Oxford-Reading.*

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*B. An important function for this route would be the ability for intermodal freight trains to access **Lutterworth Magna Park Distribution Centre** from all parts of the UK, as well as giving DIRFT better connectivity particularly from Felixstowe via Leicester.*

*C. **Cross-London / WCML freight paths** should be reserved for services whose origin is London Gateway and via the Channel Tunnel.*

*D. In the **Lutterworth Magna Park Distribution Centre area,** a rail-based parcels ("express") base should be set up to enable development of a nationwide network of express parcels trains. Several companies are already developing plans for such a network.*

*E. The usefulness of the **Aylesbury EWR branch** is severely restrained by current planning for just one train an hour Aylesbury-MKCtrl. To achieve real value from the investment, services must run at half-hourly intervals, with speed-related improvements to the Aylesbury-Princes Risborough line enabling the two trains per hour to run semi-fast between Old Oak Common via High Wycombe-Princes Risborough-Aylesbury-Winslow-Bletchley-MKCtrl-Northampton. These services should be extended to Northampton not least as Northampton currently has very poor connectivity and Northampton station has more space for the development of turn-back platforms than MKCtrl. Such a semi-fast service and routing would improve connectivity for Aylesbury and resolve the issue of poor speeds and poor frequency which the EEH report highlights for the town.*

Corridor 4 – Milton Keynes - Peterborough. Two of the biggest economies and growth in the region are not linked by direct services.
Response:
A. Aspiration for a new north-to-east chord in the Bletchley area for MK-Bedford-Wellingborough-Kettering-Corby-new chord via Seaton to Luffenham-Stamford-Peterborough. At the Peterborough end of this route turn-back platforms are difficult to create so the service could be extended to Whittlesea-March-Wisbech. The latter is a major town with a population of 35,000 that is planned to double over the next few decades and is a priority of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority for connecting back to the national rail network.

B. Longer term, the route should be shortened by restoring a direct railway between Wellingborough / Bedford and Northampton mainly by new alignments.

C. Longer term, the MML - WCML links; Market Harborough - Northampton being a possible contender, to give direct access between Nottingham / Derby / Leicester and Northampton / MK / beyond.

Corridor 5 – East Hertfordshire - Cambridgeshire: Improving the connectivity between the towns on the West Anglia and East Coast Main Lines to Cambridge
Response:
A. The West Anglia route between Cheshunt / Broxbourne-Bishop's Stortford-Cambridge. Current off-peak services need to better reflect the population density of East Herts and its position within the Cambridge travel to work area. Service levels should be modified to operate 2tph all stations into Cambridge and 1tph fast service Broxbourne-Harlow-Bishop's Stortford-Audley End-Whittlesford Parkway-Cambridge stations. Capacity issues around the Stansted Airport and other services must be resolved with additional track capacity.

B. The Thameslink/GN Hatfield-Welwyn GC-Stevenage-Hitchin-Letchworth GC-Royston-Cambridge stations service levels are good but timetable adjustments needed to better connect Hertford / Enfield Chase trains at Stevenage with Cambridge trains. Good robust frequent connections must be planned at the St. Neots area station between EWR / GTR-TL services.

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Corridor 6 – Peterborough-Cambridge-Stansted Airport: Improving upon the hourly service that links these three key employment, leisure and housing centres
Response:
A. This route will be under even more severe capacity problems in the future, as bottlenecks are unblocked on the freight route from Felixstowe to Peterborough via Ely allowing the latent demand at the Port of Felixstowe to be met. It is vital that this route flows freely as it provides one of the three deep sea gateways to the EEH and through it to the rest of the UK.

B. The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority is committed to 2tph Wisbech all stations to Cambridge Central. It is hoped that this service will combine with the King's Lynn-Cambridge service at Ely to provide a 4tph stopping train service on to Cambridge. It is essential that there is a frequent sustainable commuter service into Cambridge to service its vital high tech and bio tech industries.

B. There is a need for additional fast direct Peterborough to Cambridge trains to provide a frequent 2tph fast service between these two fast growing economies.

C. There are, currently, also hourly fast services East Midlands-Peterborough-Ely-Norwich and a fast Peterborough-Ely-Ipswich service. Together, all these services will provide a frequent Peterborough-Cambridge service if including a change of train at March or Ely onto services going to / from Norwich, King's Lynn.

D. All the above demonstrates that this route already has capacity problems and to make it work as a vital freight and passenger line, there must be a series of dynamic loops, long sections of quadruple track or other interventions between Peterborough-March-Ely.

Corridor 7 – Peterborough - East Midlands - West Midlands: Improving upon the hourly service that links Peterborough with Leicester and Birmingham
Response:
A. Peterborough - Leicester enhancements including re-modelling from Syston to Leicester and on to Wigston (= MML Leicester area with grade-separation between the two routes at Wigston), to accommodate F2N freight, enhanced inter-regional and local passenger services including one additional (Cambridge)-Peterborough-Leicester-Birmingham service.

B. Stansted Airport-Cambridge / Norwich-Peterborough-Birmingham services are vital as they provide successful interurban connectivity but are relatively slow end to end owing to 'the long way round' via Melton Mowbray.

(Research is needed to develop a future-proof strategy to protect the more direct route Peterborough-Luffenham-Seaton-Market Harborough-Rugby-Coventry-Birmingham International / New Street post-HS2 completion when capacity is released west of Rugby for a new fast East West Mainline. For example the distance from Cambridge to Birmingham by the A14/M6 roads is c.100 miles. By rail via Leicester it is c.150 miles.)

Corridor 8: Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire to the East Midlands: Looking to strengthen the links between Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire to East Midlands cities
Response:
A. Luton-Bedford-Wellingborough-Kettering-Corby-Melton Mowbray – Nottingham via new construction between Plumtree and Nottingham.

B. Leicester area enhancements including re-modelling from Syston to Leicester and Wigston including grade separation at the latter, to accommodate F2N freight, enhanced inter-regional and local passenger services. A consequence of the imminent EMR electric services to Corby is the loss of direct connectivity between Luton, Bedford and

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Wellingborough to Leicester and stations beyond; we support the aspiration for their return. There is the complementary proposal by Midlands Connect for an hourly Bedford-MML stations-Leicester-Toton HS2 Hub-via HS2-Leeds service. EEH should work closely with Midlands Connect to ensure that there is sufficient capacity on the MML to accommodate it - or alternative options to restore through services.

C. Northampton-Rugby-Lutterworth-Wigston area-Leicester-Nottingham service. (Former Northampton-Market Harborough route also to be protected for future development.)

Step-change in approach

4. To what extent do you support or oppose investment in the following areas?

Digital infrastructure both fixed (e.g. broadband) and mobile (e.g. 4G/5G) to enable business growth, improve access for residents to services and opportunities, in ways that also reduce the need to travel (where appropriate) **Support.**

Our existing infrastructure assets to improve its resilience and connectivity, thereby improving business productivity and supporting our communities **Strongly support.**

Repurposing existing infrastructure and services, particularly within larger urban areas to actively encourage active travel modes and user-centred services, and reduce reliance on the private car **Strongly support.**

Greening travel routes to encourage walking or cycling and therefore improve both physical and mental health, whilst at the same time acting as green corridors for wildlife **Strongly support.**

New infrastructure capacity and capability to enable delivery of planned economic and housing growth **Strongly support.**

Improved connectivity for rural communities to enable small market towns to support their rural hinterlands **Strongly support.**

Policies

5. To what extent do you support or oppose the policies set out in the following themes?

A Transport System for the Future - policies targeted towards decarbonising the transport system and enable more people to travel using sustainable modes **Strongly support.**

Transforming Journeys - policies to transform the way people travel through the region, including east to west, and north to south **Strongly support.**

Connecting People with Opportunities - policies for improving local connectivity across the region **Strongly support.**

Making the Heartland Work for the UK - policies aimed at improving the way people and goods travel through the region, for example to airports, or as part of the freight and logistics sector **Strongly support.**

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6. Please provide any further comments you have about the Draft Transport Strategy's policies

6.1. All railway stations should be the focus of the region's new housing policies. All existing and new housing and employment sites must have quality connections to the stations in the form of a network of cycleways and foot paths. The promotion of "bike+train" as a unified message across the EEH area must be connected to the bike and footways. A long term task force must set up to create this vital ancillary to the railway and active travel more generally. Bike +train (and bike+bus) must be central to all EEH policies to decarbonise transport, make air breathable for people and animals and stop the destructive spraying out from the road network of lethal tyre and brake particulates.

6.2. Policy 15 - support new 'Daventry Parkway' station at Weedon where the A45 crosses the WCML, post-HS2 opening.

6.3 Policy 28 - supporting surface access to airports and the stated intention to improve travel opportunities via services on the MML but supplemented with a link to the WCML within the region, a route linking Luton Airport Parkway station with Milton Keynes should be protected along an indicative route parallel to the busway and Hatters Way west of Luton station to Leighton Buzzard. When developed it would enable through trains to operate between Luton and Milton Keynes / Northampton.

6.4. Support freight polices 30, 31, 32.

Implementation and delivery pipelines

7. To what extent do you support or oppose the implementation and delivery approach we've outlined? **Strongly support.**

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the investment pipeline reflects the region's connectivity priorities? **Support.**

9. Please provide any further comments you have about implementation and the investment pipeline.

A. We are concerned that a number of strategic projects, which are vital for sustainable economic growth, particularly in the west of the region, have not been included in the Investment Pipeline List.

The number one priority must be the delivery of East West Rail without delay. This must include full electrification and sufficient capacity (e.g. loops) for freight to provide not only for local needs but as a diversion route for north-south traffic and a full route for east-west traffic avoiding London. Platform lengths from day one should be sufficient to enable through running of trains typically operating on north-south main lines connecting with EWR. It should not be treated as an isolated "branch" line.
The necessary infrastructure should be provided in association with the build-out of EWR to enable the following through services:
- Oxford should not to be seen as the western end of EWR; trains to continue at least to Swindon (in the EEH area) or further.
- Some trains to / from Milton Keynes to start / terminate at Northampton to greatly improve connectivity from there westwards (there are currently not even buses to Oxford, and Northampton is also in EEH). This would also liberate platform capacity at MK.
- MK (not Bletchley)-Aylesbury service through via High Wycombe to Old Oak Common.
- Aylesbury to Watford Junction via a revived Croxley link project.
- Some additional stations on EWR provided in association with new housing developments.

![railfuture logo]

B. Other vital rail enhancement projects to the west of the region should be listed in the Strategy:
- *Cowley branch passenger services from Oxford*
- *Oxford corridor capacity enhancement including the "Oxford metro" (Cowley-Hanborough / Witney) and additional through platforms at Oxford*
- *North Cotswold Line re-doubling between Wolvercote Junction and Hanborough*
- *Implementation of North Cotswold Line Task Force proposals, including re-instatement via Long Marston to Stratford-upon-Avon.*
- *Doubling or loops to enable enhanced (EWR)-Oxford-Radley / Culham-Wantage / Grove Parkway-Swindon services linking Science centres*
- *Oxford-Witney / Carterton via Eynsham Garden Village to overcome A40 congestion and link major housing growth areas with centres of employment*
- *Re-opening High Wycombe-Maidenhead-(Heathrow via Western Link)*

C. Plan to identify and develop viable Parkway station sites to serve groups of communities / employment sites which otherwise will be remote from frequent rail services. Parkway stations should be travel hubs where cycleways (bike+train, bike+bus), quality footpaths, bus services as well as car parking all come together.

Overall view

10. Overall, to what extent do you support or oppose the Draft Transport Strategy? **Strongly support.**

11. Please provide any further comments you have about the Draft Transport Strategy

A. There is emerging interest in a Daventry Parkway station at Weedon on the WCML. This would be a good example of a HS2 'capacity dividend'. Daventry has a population of 25,000 and is an area poorly served by rail. (9C above also refers.)

B. Additional stations are sought along the MML at Kibworth (pop 6,500) in Leicestershire; in Northamptonshire at Desborough (pop 12,000) for Rothwell (pop 7,500); Burton Latimer (pop 7,500); Rushden / Higham Ferrers Parkway (pop 37,000) (at Irchester pop 5,000); Great Oakley (pop 2,500 south Corby where there is significant housing growth planned.)

We note that the current train service provision will make serving most of these station sites difficult. Electrification of the MML in its entirety will make a separate service easier to provide along this densely populated corridor with its fast-growing economy. Currently Bedford-Leicester has poor railway connectivity in spite of having the MML running through it. We recommend research into the feasibility and business cases for these and other new stations to establish the best sites for them.
C. There should be an ongoing open planning document to develop the existing network and service pattern to better serve and interconnect all of the EEH region ready for implementation once HS2 is opened.

Integrated Sustainability Appraisal

12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the independent Integrated Sustainability Appraisal is a robust assessment of the Draft Transport Strategy? **Support.**

13. Please provide any further comments you have about the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal.

No further comments.

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Statutory Status

14. To what extent do you support or oppose the approach set out in the Proposal to Establish a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body? **Strongly support.**

15. Please provide any further comments you have about the Proposal to Establish a Statutory Sub-national Transport Body

Establishing EEH as a statutory SNTB will give it greater powers and a stronger basis to implement a proper regional transport infrastructure, coordinating the plans of the constituent local authorities. It would complement the status of other SNTBs, especially Midlands Connect and Transport East, with whom there needs to be full and effective coordination of common interests such as Felixstowe to Nuneaton (referred to as F2N elsewhere in this document, and heard referred to elsewhere as Far East to the North) freight corridor, the intercity lines radiating out of London and other inter-urban / inter-regional routes.

16. I am responding to this consultation as an official representative of a business, local authority or **other organisation.**

17. n/a

18. In which area(s) of the Heartland region does your business / organisation operate? (In 2021, Northamptonshire will split into two unitary authorities – West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire) Please select all that apply. **Whole EEH region, national.**

19. What is your name? As signature below.

20. What is the name of your business/organisation? As signature below.

21. What is your role within the business/organisation? As signature below.

22. Which of the following categories best describes your organisation? **Campaign group.**

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS
Railfuture
Director for Infrastructure & Networks, national Board
Vice-Chair, London & South East regional branch