

Transport Action Network

Response to:

England's Economic Heartland Outline Transport Strategy Consultation

General comments:

- Mostly support the vision but it should go further on respecting environmental limits and it should focus more on improving accessibility rather than removing all barriers to travel, or increasing mobility by road, as demand management will be key to delivering much of the vision
- The ambition to have a zero-carbon transport system by 2050 is not sufficiently challenging as there is evidence that we will need to reach that target sooner. It also needs to relate to the region's carbon budget and how it can keep within it
- The strategy needs to prioritise investment in both carrots and sticks to move people to more sustainable transport choices. This includes greater focus and investment in walking, cycling, bus and rail alongside demand management measures
- The strategy should champion reducing the need to travel and road traffic reduction - research shows that to achieve zero net carbon by 2050 or earlier there will need to be a shift from car use to more sustainable means of travel.
- The strategy should set challenging (but achievable) modal split targets to drive change
- Investment in roads should focus on maintenance and renewal, or providing capacity for bus priority measures
- Strongly object to the inclusion of the Oxford-Cambridge expressway and other large new roads which will increase traffic and carbon emissions as well as causing wider environmental damage
- Investment in digital infrastructure is critical for increasing connectivity and productivity as well as helping reduce the need to travel and should be given a greater priority than road building

Responses to questions:

1. Does the draft vision ("connecting people and places with opportunities and services") provide sufficient focus for the Transport Strategy?

The draft vision sounds good at a high level, but the concern is that it could be used to steer a strategy in any number of different directions. That direction is not obvious other than it aims to improve connectivity.

2. Is the ambition to have a zero-carbon transport system by 2050 sufficiently challenging?

No, for two reasons. Firstly, there is no reference to the carbon budget for the region and how transport will help stay within that budget. Secondly, it is quite likely we will need to be a net-zero carbon before 2050 as the 2050 target is quite a conservative target and doesn't address population levels or historical responsibilities.

3. Do the three key principles (enabling economic growth; accessibility and inclusion; quality of life and environment) provide an appropriate framework within which to develop the Transport Strategy?

The headings are fine in themselves and cover what would be expected to be the main themes, but the wording underneath them leaves much to be desired.

Enabling economic growth

There is no mention of sustainability, even though it talks about innovation and making smarter use of existing assets which is welcome. Using the term of maximising productivity of commuters seems an odd phrase to use. Not all people who work do commute, so it would be better to use a more inclusive term such as people or workers. Commuters implies needing to improve transport links only, while workers or people allows consideration of digital connectivity as well as that enables remote or home working.

Accessibility and inclusion

There is no mention of equality within this section, nor is there any mention of reducing the need to travel to bring services and opportunities closer to people so that active travel and healthy lifestyles can be maximised. In terms of infrastructure provision, a model based on less and more locally based travel should cost less in the longer term as active travel infrastructure is a lot cheaper to provide and maintain than big roads and major public transport infrastructure. It also has many positive economic impacts arising from health benefits and attractiveness of place.

The other concern with the way that this section is worded is that it could be seen to continue to support the construction of lots of roads (reducing or addressing barriers to travel). It might be better worded to say: reducing or addressing barriers to sustainable travel.

Quality of Life and Environment

This section is ok but it should be more explicit about maximising active travel for health, social inclusivity, environment and economic reasons. Also, that reducing the need to travel and reducing traffic will be necessary to improve quality of life and to meet the carbon targets. The excessive use and numbers of motor vehicles not only causes congestion and pollution but dominate the public realm, undermining a sense of place and local economies.

Future growth must not just deliver environmental net gain but it must remain within environmental limits (particularly with regard to water and biodiversity). There also needs to be greater consideration of landscape and landscape character in new developments.

4. What are the key factors influencing people's choice of travel mode?

There are many factors that influence people's choice of travel, most of which are listed here:

- Closeness of service / opportunity
- Perceived safety
- Directness of route
- Attractiveness of route
- Continuity of route - particularly for cycling where constant interruptions (give ways, lack of priority, etc) undermine its use
- Reliability – predictability
- Comfort
- Cost
- Ease of access to (and onto) public transport
- Availability of off-peak services (early morning / late at night)
- Ease of route planning
- Ease of ticketing, particularly across modes
- Car owner
- Weather
- Health awareness / concerns
- Concerns about impact of travel choice (on environment)
- Whether combining journeys
- Disability
- Time
- Habit

Decisions on how to travel are based on all or some of the above and will vary from journey to journey unless the person has a particular habit in which case there may be little thought given to how they travel.

5. What are the key barriers that need to be addressed if we are to achieve frictionless travel?

The quality and perceived safety of local journeys by active travel modes needs to be vastly improved. This then allows people to easily link to public transport services (provided these are in place) which can often form a barrier to people using public transport. There needs to be better integration between buses and trains with links to taxi services for those that want or when bus services may no longer be running, such as late at night.

To facilitate this, better bus train services need to be prioritised for investment alongside active travel.

Some form of web/app-based integrated ticketing needs to be developed so that people don't have to think too much about where they are going and how much it is going to cost as services are capped or it is easy to understand how much you pay, such as a pay per distance rate.

An information campaign at various levels from general media campaigns to personalised travel planning along with working with larger employers will also be necessary to promote alternatives to the car. This will help people to better understand the implications of their choices and what options are available to them.

However, having said that we are strongly opposed to a general promotion of frictionless travel across all modes. That implies everyone's wants or desires can be accommodated which is not possible with car-based travel. Frictionless is a good aspiration between sustainable modes to help them better compete with the car. However, the degree of modal shift and reduction in road traffic will not be achieved without some form of demand management measures which can range from small-scale filtered permeability to parking controls and road pricing. The fact that we cannot build our way out of congestion with new roads needs to be more explicitly acknowledged.

6. What performance measures should be used to identify the levels of service users require of the transport system?

One of the key indicators should be modal split as this would show whether the strategy was successful in shifting behaviour. Another could be obesity levels.

Reliability of journeys is often far more important than the speed a journey takes, particularly for road and rail. However, where journeys can be ridiculously long, such as some of the east-west public transport movements, then investment in large time reductions is warranted.

Journey times are also important for active travel, particularly cycling. A journey may well be competing with a road-based alternative and time can be a key factor, particularly over longer distances. The stop-start provision with current cycle infrastructure, with little priority over side roads and driveways slows down movement by bike, wastes energy and undermines levels of cycling.

7. Should the strategy include and define appropriate ‘nudge principles’ (small changes which can influence user behaviour) to encourage more people to use public transport in the Heartland area?

Reliability, frequency, comfort and cost of journeys are critical to getting people to use public transport, so these really need to be got right before trying to ‘nudge’ people out of their cars. Otherwise any effort in this regard is likely to be wasted.

The best way of changing behaviour is when people move house and especially when people move into a new development. Therefore, new development needs to be based on high frequency, 7 day a week, at least 18 hours a day mass-transit services, with sufficient density to enable this and a transport network that can support it, whether it be active travel links or bus – rail connectivity. New development also needs to be designed so that buses can actually operate through the site and won’t get blocked by parking or narrow widths.

A high quality public realm with a good active travel network, including proper segregation between people walking and cycling is also essential for health, equality, economic and quality of life reasons.

8. What weight should be given to the changes in travel demand arising from the delivery of transformational infrastructure?

Unless transformational infrastructure is not changing travel demand it is clearly failing. There is an urgent need to rapidly decarbonise transport and not just through going electric, but also to get a shift to public transport and active travel.

That means investing in these modes and not in damaging new roads, which would otherwise increase traffic, congestion and pollution, undermining many of the objectives of this outline strategy.

Therefore, investment in transformational infrastructure needs to happen at all levels. East-west rail is an example of transformational infrastructure, but its potential benefits will be undermined if connecting services (bus and rail) don’t coordinate on timetabling, where they exist, and new services provided where they don’t. Active travel links also need to be significantly improved.

If all that is done is to provide large car parks adjacent to the new rail line, many opportunities will be lost to transform people’s overall travel behaviour and mindset. This is illustrated with the inclusion of the dualling of the A421 (page 40 of the consultation document). This road is being used to open up new employment land and to ease congestion but it is also being sold on the basis that it will open up sustainable travel with improved links to Ridgmont station and the inclusion of a new cycleway and path. However, these could probably have been achieved without the road and the cycleway will only be as good as to what it connects into and the efficiency of the crossings associated with it. Often these are given a lower priority to motor vehicle movements further undermining the attractiveness and usefulness of such facilities. This represents very much business as usual and needs to be challenged as a model to take forward.

Another road scheme mentioned in the document is the case study on page 93 of the A45 Daventry Development Link Road. It says that funding was an issue and that the road has relieved a number of villages, but no mention is made of any investment in the public realm to reclaim the relieved road for a more people orientated environment. The picture illustrates this as well. Without investment now in the public realm, the opportunity for repurposing this space to encourage more active travel will be lost.

9. What weight should be given to the potential of the rail network to accommodate a higher proportion of future travel demand?

Significant weight needs to be given to rail increasing its modal share as this will be important in reducing traffic and carbon emissions, while also accommodating some growth. However, as mentioned above, this needs to come alongside other improvements to sustainable transport.

10. Have we identified the key strategic transport corridors?

In terms of longer distance, yes.

11. Are there specific issues that should be taken into consideration as part of the connectivity studies?

Landscape protection, biodiversity gain and reducing the need to travel and road traffic and reducing carbon emissions in line with the region's carbon budget, all need to be defining the connectivity studies, not trailing them as detailed concerns to be addressed at a later date. A hierarchy of transport provision should be followed from active travel to public transport and only after all other avenues have been explored, including demand management, should new roads be contemplated.

12. To what extent should we look to the growth in digital services to change the nature and scale of future travel demand?

Digital services need to improve coverage along transport corridors, particularly sustainable transport corridors which are often not properly considered at present. Mobile phone coverage statistics are based on centres of population, ignoring transport corridors and less populated rural areas. Addressing this rural coverage would enable people to work better while travelling, and reduce the need to travel for people living in rural areas.

Digital services need to facilitate more app based information and ticketing services to enable a smoother transition away from private car ownership.

13. What are the core connectivity requirements for businesses operating from the region?

Improving public transport and active travel will increase access to markets and potential employees, while helping to maintain a high quality environment, attracting inward investment.

Reliability is important for many businesses, more so than saving a few minutes journey time. Reducing road traffic, which would help reduce carbon emissions would also help increase reliability on the roads.

14. What are the key performance measures for the Transport System from a business perspective?

Reliability is the most important measure.

15. What measures should the overarching Transport Strategy include in order to enable the potential that exists within the four Grand Challenges of the Industrial Strategy to be realised?

Greater digital connectivity will be central to many of the challenges, but so will creating safe and accessible environments for older people. This will mean avoiding conflict by providing separate facilities for people walking and cycling, rather than forcing these modes together on shared paths. In urban areas, shared paths cause discrimination against people with visual, aural and physical disabilities who can feel vulnerable or easily shocked by people cycling past. This will become more of an issue as electric bikes become more prevalent and with more mobility scooters and electric scooters, separating out the faster elements will become more important.

16. To what extent is investment in digital infrastructure more significant and/or urgent than physical infrastructure?

It is as important and urgent as investment in active travel and public transport.

17. How will the way we access goods and services continue to change, and what are the key issues that need to be addressed in the Transport Strategy?

It is likely more shopping will be done remotely and to reduce the impact of deliveries on local communities better ways of distributing goods within towns and cities will need to be developed. The larger lorries being allowed on the road, cause real problems for people walking and cycling, putting them in increased danger. They also compromise urban road layouts, forcing junctions to be made bigger to accommodate their larger size, squeezing pavements and increasing crossing distances for people walking. They also place people cycling at greater risk, not just from the lorries themselves, but the faster speeds that wider junctions allow other traffic to travel at.

Larger lorries need to be banned from most urban roads and less impactful ways of servicing city centres needs to be found. This might not be possible in all instances, but routes should be restricted and their use minimised.

18. What freight and logistics services are important for people and businesses? For example, accessing goods (via delivery or in person); a thriving high street; access to health, education and leisure facilities?

All need easy access, preferably close at hand so that they can access these goods and services without having to drive. Increasing centralisation at peripheral sites undermines local provision and active travel and places large demands on road infrastructure, while wasting vast swathes of land for car parking. These peripheral sites are also harder to serve by public transport and therefore create equality issues.

Thriving centres are important for people to access services and for social interaction. These will always be evolving but they need to be at a human scale, attractive and easily accessible by public transport and active travel.

19. Just in time and last minute operations are affecting the way people and businesses access goods and services. How should this growing trend affect the way we plan transport now, and in the future?

It becomes even more important to ensure that this does not swap one problem for another and that deliveries are done in the least impactful way that is also efficient. This means freight and freight systems need to be given greater focus and attention than they have to date.

20. Is the approach to investment the right one? If not, why not?

No because it is on the whole failing to show how the transport strategy will deliver net-zero carbon by 2050 and preferably sooner, let alone how the region stays within its carbon budget. Continuing to invest in roads except as the last resort, or unless using the additional road space for bus priority, just increases traffic and pollution and increases congestion into towns and cities across the region.

The approach to investment also states that it needs to evolve so that it becomes one that: improves connectivity in ways that reduce the need to travel. Yet improving connectivity (unless solely digital) doesn't reduce the need to travel, it potentially increases it, although depending on how the connectivity is improved it may impact on modal split. New development and planning policies, alongside corporate plans for the NHS and other providers, need to encourage more local provision to reduce the need to travel. Investment needs to enable that to happen as it has significant wider benefits. At the very least public sector bodies such as the NHS need to be considering the external costs of increasing centralisation, rather than what they can save on internal costs.

The investment priority needs to focus on enabling active travel and public transport for all the socio-economic and environmental reasons already mentioned. The strategy cannot provide endless choice or it would be overrun with cars and other modes would suffer loss of space, etc. There has to be a rationalisation of choice and the space allocated to different modes. As cars are the least efficient users of space, they should have space and choice rationed.

21. Is the approach to delivery the right one? If not, why not?

Delivery has to involve third sector partners and proper engagement if the strategy is to truly succeed. Delivery partners are indeed a source of knowledge and experience in the development and design of strategic infrastructure but the question is whether that knowledge and experience is up to date and relevant for the challenges we face in the future. Knowledge and experience can be variable, even within the same company, so it will be essential to ensure that the region is partnering with the right partners and that they are able to deliver the infrastructure and services needed for the 21st century.

Comments on Future Visions

The following are a few thoughts on some of the images shown in the Outline Transport Strategy document.

P32 – New Housing Development

1. The density of the near development looks low and therefore it is doubtful it would be able to commercially support a rapid transit service
2. There is no uplift in density along the rapid transit corridor – a wasted opportunity to create some focus and vibrancy to the development as well as helping support a more commercially viable public transport service – if this is an existing development, attention needs to be given to how planning can contribute to making public transport commercially viable, not just at peak times but at least 18 hours a day, 7 days a week.
3. A proper network of cycle infrastructure is required, not just urban quietways and greenway routes. Neither provides a coherent network and certainly on the busier roads and in the heart of the development, dedicated cycle facilities would be expected. Great connectivity would be expected to create safer, faster and more attractive routes than currently shown.

P76 – Business Park

1. A more people centred business park is a good idea and will create a more vibrant and pleasant place to work but it does need to integrate with surrounding communities and not exist as some sort of bubble outside of them.
2. The public realm needs far greater thought than shown. Mixing people walking and cycling in urban areas is a bad idea and discriminates against people with aural and visual impairments or physical mobility issues. Segregated facilities should be provided with sufficient width to accommodate future demand – especially true for cycle lanes / paths / tracks which in the future could take all sorts of electric scooters, mobility scooters, e-bikes as well as the standard bicycle if there is such a thing anymore. And with the rise of electric vehicles, this is likely to be accompanied with increased speeds, another reason for thinking about greater segregation.
3. For a business park, where you are trying to encourage more people to cycle, better cycle parking needs to be provided, preferably under shelter and secure in convenient locations
4. Greater imagination is required for providing public transport shelters. Certainly in the heart of a business park, a more enclosed, heated hub could be provided for people waiting. Real time information should be available, even with the rise of mobile technology as should some static info on routes, etc.

P86 – Rural setting

1. Not sure the rapid shuttle bus route would be viable without local authority support given the population it appears to be serving
2. Without, and possibly even with, frictionless interchange between bus and rail, a direct bus connection to the larger nearby settlement (top left of image) might be a more attractive proposition than to the (slightly) closer one.
3. While the greenways look nice, people won't be able to easily access them unless the surrounding road network feels safe and is attractive to use. Certainly the road used by the suggested rapid shuttle bus, as the main road connecting the settlement, needs to be attractive to cycle on

31 October 2019

Chris Todd

Director

Transport Action Network

Transport Action Network provides free support to people and groups pressing for more sustainable transport in their area and opposing cuts to bus services, damaging road schemes and large unsustainable developments

Not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales: 12100114