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Dear Sir/Madam,

England's Economic Heartland – Outline Transport Strategy

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established national independent voluntary organisation campaigning 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 planning.

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

We address the questions in the Outline Transport Strategy in turn.

Strategic Vision

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

We believe so. It is what transport and its related infrastructure, as the means, are all about in achieving those economic and social ends – as has been the case across the centuries and there is benefit in reaffirming an enduring and unifying truth.

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

We are concerned that a target three decades distant carries the risk that it might lull policy-makers and decision-takers into postponing urgency of thought and deed. While advancing the end-target to 2040 has its attractions and merits, quinquennial milestone targets are in our view essential for interim monitoring, transparency and accountability.

Complementary and challenging low-energy-consuming targets for the 'active modes' of walking and cycling, such as for proportions of 10/15-minute journeys on foot and 20/30-minute journeys by cycle – given that most travel is local and short-distance – would help to address realising attainable and desirable ambitions for mode shift and also for improved physical and mental health and well-being.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

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?*

We believe so. We would like to think that they are unarguable, and universal.

Strategic linkages: *Do you agree with our identification of these major corridors, gateways and regions?*

We do. The corridors may better be seen first as economic, rather than transport, corridors in order to differentiate between the transport means and the economic ends.

Key clusters and enterprise zones: *How important do you feel better connectivity is in supporting the growth of these clusters?*

Proximity is the antithesis of peripherality and for all our technological aids direct face-to-face transactions still tend to be the most economically productive and socially rewarding.

Future Vision – High Street: *Are the elements within this future vision: a) Ambitious b) Attainable c) Desirable?*

We cannot help but be reminded of Sir Humphrey Appleby. However ambitious and desirable they may be, their attainability will depend on whether the decisions of those charged with such responsibilities are just 'brave' (lose votes), or more 'courageous' (lose elections).

Connecting People

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

Availability, affordability, accessibility.
Convenience, comfort, capacity, connectivity.
Seamlessness, safety, security.

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

Inadequate informational and digital as well as physical connectivity and accessibility.
Inadequate capacity in the rail system – for attractive service frequency, for seated accommodation enabling productive/creative use of journey time, for parking vehicles (motor and cycle) at stations.
Inadequate interchange opportunities within and between modes including for the 'last mile'.
Inadequate retailing of 'permit to travel' ie single multi-modal pay-as-you-go fare-paying.

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

Reliability, frequency of 'opportunities to travel' in relation to demand, consistency (of journey time), comfort, value for money. Ability to be on the move and be doing something else productive economically or socially (the classic train journey – read, use device etc). Perhaps specifically call out and measure the unproductive portion.

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?*

Yes. Transport choices are often made on the basis of marginal differences in cost or convenience; most of these are not dependent on investment-heavy 'mega-projects'. Recognise that full delivery of small projects is essential to realise full benefits – avoid discontinuous accessible walking routes, incomplete cycleway and bus priority measures.

Future Vision – New Housing Development: *Are the elements within this future vision: a) Ambitious b) Attainable c) Desirable?*

Moving on from Sir Humphrey, ambition might be reflected in securing eg a Transport for New Homes Award: <http://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/> and/or a RIBA Stirling Prize.

Connecting Places

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

Very considerable, depending on the locality or the corridor in question. East-West Rail will be transformational, and therefore considerable weight should be given to the changes in travel demand which it will generate, including the connectivity it will bring to inter-regional as well as local journeys (e.g. Leicester to Oxford, or Nottingham to Cambridge).

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

Very considerable, as expansion of the rail network to meet the overall increase in travel demand from an increased population – the network's capacity and capability as well as its geographic coverage – is likely to be relatively less controversial with a more environmentally-demanding public than expansion of the road network, and also be more likely to meet the expectations of travellers in a 24/7 society who with digital communications expect and assume to be 'always on'.

With suitable investment, the rail network could and indeed should accommodate a far greater proportion, especially for journeys other than those on the radial routes to and from London. Orbital flows (especially via East-West Rail, but there are many other possibilities) offer huge potential and need to be developed. These do not necessarily need massive additional infrastructure and a scale of investment to match; any potential to enhance the capacity of existing routes in the shorter term needs to be fully exploited. However important journeys to and from the capital city may be, they tend to be the focus of national bodies and we would contend that sub-national bodies such as the Heartland are best-placed to exercise the required leadership to champion the needs and opportunities for enhancing the quantity and quality of 'intra-regional' connectivity between its own economic hubs.

We nevertheless endorse the Heartland's identification of a Northampton - Old Oak Common corridor as a North-South Strategic Transport Corridor, to add capacity and expand connectivity via a second London terminal for the Chiltern main line. This is consistent with the West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study published by Network Rail in August 2017.

A strongly-emerging segment of demand for travel by rail outside London is relatively short-distance to and from provincial centres. There are capacity implications from providing the higher-frequency local stopping services to attract this market, which may conflict with the priorities accorded to longer-distance fast services, yet the decongestion and environmental benefits to be captured would accrue disproportionately to densely-populated urban areas. This more localised 'intra-urban' dimension deserves no less attention than the intra-regional.

We appreciate that many of the Heartland's constituent bodies are statutory highway authorities and we have no issue with the statement on page 41: "*The long term investment pipeline associated with the Major Road Network will be developed in parallel with the work on the Transport Strategy.*" We mention it only to emphasise the need in parallel for England's Economic Heartland to be equally conversant and comfortable with, and party to, the long term investment pipeline associated with the rail network.

The DfT's recently-published Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline to 2024, updated just 10 days ago, has only three schemes in the Heartland proceeding from Design towards Delivery, the most welcome of which is East-West Rail Western Section phase 2; the other two however are no more than an additional footbridge at St. Albans station and an additional power supply feeder at Reading. Schemes at the earlier stage of proceeding from Development towards Design include Ely Area Capacity Enhancement, Oxford Corridor Capacity Phase 2, and Western Rail Access to Heathrow, while those Initiated towards Development include Chiltern and West Midlands train lengthening. Whilst moderately encouraging they together serve to illustrate the modest scale and pace of rail infrastructure development, and the need for sustained and broad-based engagement to support ambitions for continued progress.

We note on page 41 that "*England's Economic Heartland has identified the need to review the current pattern of rail services with a view to determining whether this is fit for purpose moving forward. The outcome of the review commissioned by the Heartland will be used to inform the development of the overarching Transport Strategy.*" We trust that this review will be open to wide stakeholder engagement, so that the review outcome has good prospects for commanding widespread support. We are aware for example that a particular concern is non-London-centred connectivity along radial routes, the 'intra-regional' dimension referred to previously; this has been highlighted recently with concerns about development of the new timetable for towns on the Midland main line's southern end yet well north of London.

10. Have we identified the key strategic transport corridors?

Accepting that 'strategic' can often more simply mean 'for longer-distance journeys', then broadly yes. We note that the Nuneaton - Leicester - Peterborough - Ely route is the next orbital east-west rail route linking the main lines out of London beyond the Oxford - Cambridge arc. The need for its capacity and capability to be enhanced vis-à-vis an intermediate route within the fast-growing Heartlands area would merit investigation.

While we have noted with approval the identification of the Northampton - Old Oak Common corridor, West Northamptonshire has recently put forward for consideration that the corridor be seen as in effect continuing northwards to the Midland Main Line; that too would in our view merit further investigation.

Mention is made of Cambridge Metro. Oxford also has very considerable growth pressures to accommodate and support with sustainable transport, and we would invite the final Transport Strategy to include reference to an Oxford cross-city rail corridor (Cowley being the likely south-east focus, growth areas being candidates for a focus to the north-west).

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

We would simply reiterate our previous comment concerning the review of the current pattern of rail services, namely to trust that the studies will be open to wide stakeholder engagement, so that they have good prospects for commanding widespread support.

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

The scale and pace of change in the digital age is nothing short of revolutionary. The 30-year look in the rear-view mirror is nothing compared with the 30-year gaze at possible routes ahead towards 2050! We would note for now that by providing good quality digital networks etc to public transport users, productivity of journeys substantially increases and commute times might even be extendable.

Future Vision – Swindon’s Bus Boulevard: *Are the elements within this future vision: a) Ambitious b) Attainable c) Desirable?*

Although this ‘*What do you think?*’ blue box is missing from the text here, this and the earlier ‘Future Vision – High Street’ which concludes ‘Strategic Vision’ draw a common response, namely that they demonstrate clear recognition of the vital importance of place-making and of quality public realm as key factors for success.

Connecting Opportunities

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

We would not presume to speak on behalf of businesses. We suspect that reliability and resilience are likely to rank high among their priorities. The logistics sector may well have concerns about rail network capacity.

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

Ditto.

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?*

We endorse the approach outlined. Agility and Adaptability in the face of change, increasingly unpredictable, will be watchwords.

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

If the benefits of investment in digital can be realised more quickly than with physical infrastructure then many will be attracted to that prospect. It is perhaps the case that existing public transport journeys whether as scheduled or disrupted are improved simply by being digitally connected.

Future Vision – Business Park: *Are the elements within this future vision: a) Ambitious b) Attainable c) Desirable?*

This draws the same comment as for Swindon’s Bus Boulevard and High Street, that there is a vital importance to be attached to the role of place-making and quality public realm in creating successful communities, be they residential, commercial or business.

Connecting Services

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?

Access to goods and services online may mean less personal physical travel to 'collect' them and more personalised 'delivery' of them. Labour shortages may literally 'drive' more freight onto rail, and innovation with less-than-trainload distribution may stimulate a need for more localised handling points and distribution networks.

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?

Throughout this there is an important consideration of social equity, as a not-insignificant proportion of the population are or consider themselves to be marginalised by geography and/or a wide range of personal circumstances. Thriving high streets and access to health, education and leisure facilities impact differentially on people's life-chances.

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?

If resulting rising demands on transport networks perpetuate congestion with all its inefficiencies, no matter how environmentally 'clean' the vehicles, then as with some other public services, such as peak-period rail travel, serious consideration will have to be given within the Transport Strategy's lifetime to managing demand by price and not just by space.

Future Vision – Rural Setting: *Are the elements within this future vision: a) Ambitious b) Attainable c) Desirable?*

Yes, but social equity considerations apply as marginalisation by geography is heavily rural.

Investment

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

Yes, and it must withstand the temptations of 'quick wins' which can subvert the long-term.

Delivery

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

Yes.

Yours faithfully,

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Vice-Chair London & South East regional branch