

Transport East – Written evidence (TTS0054)

Regional Context

Transport East is the Sub-national Transport Body for Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. The partnership provides a single voice for our councils, business leaders and partners on our region's transport strategy and strategic transport investment priorities, working in close collaboration with the government and the rest of the UK.

The East helps drive the UK economy. It is home to 3.5 million people and 1.7 million jobs. The region prides itself on providing a strong and diverse economy including manufacturing, agriculture, information and communications technology (ICT), clean energy production, financial services and tourism.

The region does not have a dominant metropolitan urban area but is made up of 73 smaller towns and cities, many of which are among the fastest growing in the country. The East also has notable movements linked to the urban centres of London and Cambridge. The region's population is forecast to increase by up to a half a million by 2041, with 566,000 new homes and 295,000 new jobs predicted by 2050. These towns and cities also serve wider populations with strong links to suburban, rural and coastal hinterlands.

Transport East has developed a draft Transport Strategy and draft Investment and Delivery Programme to improve the transport networks serving the Eastern region. This strategy is built on a detailed technical evidence base and wide engagement from across the region. Our strategic objectives are:

Decarbonisation to net-zero – working to achieve net zero carbon emissions from transport by 2040, building on our status as the UK's premier renewable energy region.

Connecting growing towns and cities – enhanced links between our fastest growing places and business clusters. Improving access for people to jobs, supplies, services, and learning; enabling the area to function as a coherent economy and improving productivity.

Energising coastal and rural communities – a reinvented sustainable coast for the 21st century which powers the UK through energy generation. Supporting our productive rural communities and attracting visitors all year round.

Unlocking international gateways – better connected ports and airports to help UK businesses thrive, boosting the nation's economy and helping to level up communities through better access to international markets and facilitating foreign direct investment.

Summary of top 5 points:

1. **Priority passenger transport projects:** In the short to medium term our priority rail improvements include schemes on the West Anglia Main Line, Greater Anglia Main Line, Thameside line and progressing the business case East-West Rail Eastern section. On bus service improvements we have secured additional funding from the DfT for this financial year, as a joint commission with neighbouring STBs to deliver regional level support to our LTA's Bus Service Improvement Plans.
2. **All regions IRP:** For the longer term we propose that all regions need an integrated rail plan, not just the North and Midlands. Sub-national Transport Bodies are the ideal partnerships to progress these, with the right level of resourcing. Transport East has committed to progress a Rail Plan for the East, which would consider wider issues of integration with other modes to create seamless end-to-end journeys.
3. **STBs as a guiding mind:** The seven Transport Strategies of the STBs across England (and the Mayor's Transport Strategy in London), have been developed in partnership with all regional partners and subject to widespread consultation, and should set the direction for public transport improvements across their geographies – embedded in NR/GBRTT, Bus and Active Travel policy and investment decisions.
4. **Decarbonisation, levelling-up and new models of funding:** Public transport is fundamental to the UK's decarbonisation goal, but to facilitate the mode shift required from road-based transport, we must tackle affordability, connectivity and convenience. Integration with other transport networks is fundamental to deliver end-to-end journeys for the customer that are competitive with the private car. New models of funding may be needed, and STBs are well placed to support DfT with this.
5. **Move beyond the focus on urban transport:** Links between urban, suburban & rural conurbations are essential to meet Government objectives on decarbonisation, sustainable economic growth and levelling-up.

Notes

1. The East region within this response relates to the geography covered by the Transport East STB.
2. All links and references relating to evidence for this response are provided at the end of the document.

The Inquiry

What are the current and anticipated levels of public transport demand and capacity in towns and cities in England? What influences public transport travel patterns? How does the choice of public transport vary across different demographic groups?

Within the Transport East region there is relatively high car-dependency with 67% of people travelling to work by car or van and only 12% travelling to work by public transport. While much of the region is rural or semi-rural, there remains high car usage within the region's urban areas with many of the East's urban centres (Southend, Ipswich, Norwich, Chelmsford, Colchester and Grays) among the most congested areas in the country outside London. This suggests there is significant opportunity for modal shift within the region's urban centre if the right public transport can be developed.

The region's rail network is largely orientated towards London, with better connections and service levels on the radial routes serving the Capital – but these still can be slow and unreliable. Connections and services are poorer East to West (especially in Suffolk and Norfolk), with South Essex seeing poor connections North to South. This can make it difficult for people to travel by public transport to local destinations despite being geographically close. We have a number of key improvements along existing routes outlined in our Investment and Delivery Programme, particularly to improve passenger services along West Anglia Main Line, Great Eastern Main Line, Ely Area Capacity Enhancements, Haughley Junction and progressing the business case for East-West Rail Eastern section. To develop the next generation of rail and mass rapid transit schemes Transport East has established a regional Rail Group to develop an Integrated Rail Plan for the East.

Buses form the core of the region's public transport network. We undertook a detailed study into the passenger transport network across the region to develop our Passenger Transport Strategy 2021. This looked at both long-term issues prior to COVID-19 and challenges emerging from the travel restrictions in place to manage the pandemic.

Long-term issues for bus travel within the region include:

- Passenger transport does not provide an attractive option for many end-to-end journeys. Passenger transport can never provide a direct, timely option for every journey choice in the region, but many potential users (including those in urban areas) perceive passenger transport options to be slow, unreliable, inconvenient and/or unattractive.
- Some people are excluded from the current transport network. Even for those people that have a passenger transport service near to their home, many are unable to use it for reasons of ability, cost and confidence in

service provision. This leads to exclusion, especially for disabled, older, and young people. Barriers arise because of a variety of issues including those related to infrastructure (including lack of safe walking routes to stops), high cost of use (especially for family groups), concerns related to personal security and lack of confidence in service reliability.

- Passenger transport information and integration between services can be poor. Despite the substantial technological advances of recent years, many potential users of passenger transport perceive it to be difficult to find accurate information for public transport journey planning, or to get updates during a journey.
- The complexity of the region's network (with multiple private operators) means passenger transport services are often not well integrated, with limited timetable or ticketing coordination between services and, in some instances, unattractive infrastructure making interchange unappealing.
- Some highway design and parking policies hinder passenger transport, by delaying bus services and making journeys by car more attractive. Measures to improve bus priority and/or to manage the demand for car parking could support efforts to encourage passenger transport use over that of car.

Post-COVID-19 issues:

- Longer-term viability of service provision with reduced patronage. Government support for bus operators has been confirmed until Sept 2022 which has enabled many services to keep running, but the longer-term sustainability of these services is doubted without additional subsidy.
- Some passengers' confidence to use passenger transport has fallen and may be difficult to rebuild.
- Changes to trip patterns could undermine core markets for passenger transport. Passenger transport services are most effective operating on high-demand corridors, especially peak-time journeys into/from urban centres. Density of development across the East, even within our more urban centres is lower than major metropolitan cities, reducing commercial viability of services. COVID-19 has significantly reduced demand for travel to these places both for employment and leisure/retail, and at peak times, whilst journeys to other places (notably edge-of-town retail and employment sites, which are harder to serve by passenger transport than town centres) have been less affected. If these altered trip patterns continue, the viability of the passenger transport network could be undermined.
- COVID-19 has affected travel habits of different parts of the population differently, with older people and those with underlying health conditions particularly affected by the desire for physical distancing, whilst people with low incomes typically have a smaller variety of transport choices available to them. Social exclusion problems risk being exacerbated as a

result. The passenger transport network has a role to help ensure that exclusion effects are not magnified as travel restrictions ease.

Our own [public travel behaviour survey](#) (undertaken during first COVID-19 lockdown) indicated the top five factors for deciding on journey choice were reliability, convenience, frequency, safety, and personal security. Affordability is another key factor. To support mode shift, the cost of passenger transport needs to come down relative to other modes, but this may require a different model of funding. A challenge for the industry is how to create an affordable public transport network, whether the wider societal gains justify increased public subsidy, and these issues need to be considered in the wider debate around paying for transport.

Frequency of service has been shown to be a significant factor in use of rail, for example providing an hourly service on the East Suffolk line, Norwich to Sheringham, Norwich to Cambridge and Ipswich to Cambridge; where passenger numbers increased between 100% and 260% following the provision of a core hourly frequency.

How might public transport travel patterns shift in the next 10 years? What impact could digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic have on travel patterns in the long term?

The Transport East [draft Transport Strategy](#) examines potential future scenarios and has been developed with this uncertainty in mind. The work to develop the Transport Strategy was also undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, so has been designed to be flexible to a range of future travel environments.

Whilst through the COVID-19 pandemic there was a dramatic change in travel behaviour due to government restrictions, there is still substantial uncertainty about the longer-term impact of the pandemic. There is evidence to suggest patterns of demand over distance and time shifts might evolve as follows:

- As more people work at home and consume in their local community, demand for very short-distance infrastructure (1-2km) particularly through active modes, may increase as people use local amenities more frequently.
- As less people commute daily into the office, short-distance (5-20km), rush-hour commuting trips may be noticeably reduced. This has implications for the design of transport infrastructure systems to service rush hours. Work-from-home culture may persist and even spill over back into a traditional office environment, in terms of more flexible working patterns.
- As more people live at greater distance from their place of work, demand for medium-distance (30-100km) transport may increase as they visit clients, colleagues and collaborators on a weekly basis.

- Transport for non-work purposes and goods movement becomes a higher relative priority
- Having good connections to friends and family, leisure and entertainment opportunities may become more of a factor in residential choice.

Within the East, given the relatively large numbers of commuters to London and Cambridge, it could see longer, less frequent commutes from the region's urban centres. This brings opportunities for increased active and sustainable travel within our towns and cities.

The East is expecting to see large numbers of homes and employment sites come forward for development over the next 10 years. Modal shift will be key to delivering net-zero this will require an integrated approach to public transport provision for residential and business developments from the outset. This will include integrated ticketing, multi-modal connectivity addressing end to end transport needs and an understanding of future local plans. Linking to future growth raises the challenge of affordability and timely delivery.

A long-term trend for the East region is the age profile of the population. The East's population is already older than the national average and the trend is for this to increase, alongside an aging workforce. Accessibility of public transport (especially rail) is an important factor, acknowledging that the need for accessibility is not restricted to the older population, but that it will increase because of the older population. Access to stations and bus-stops, within stations and onto trains/ buses should be a short-term objective. This includes access improvements for those with visual, aural and cognitive disabilities including neurodiversity and dementia. It is also linked to the quality and navigability of the local street environment. Accessibility is only as good as the weakest link in the whole journey. The station and train may be accessible, but if the paths on the route to the station have pavement parking, dropped kerbs in the wrong place, are badly maintained and have poor lighting then the journey is not accessible.

Linked to this is increased scrutiny of safety of protected groups within the Equalities Act in public spaces including the transport network, and improving safety and the perception of safety is important.

Good transport also attracts younger people to the region. The Cambridge Econometrics study, as part of the Transport East strategy work identified the role of rail in retaining and attracting skilled workers. Currently 50% of graduates leave the region. Future generations will demand high quality public transport connectivity.

An awareness and ability to be agile in response to changes in long-term trends will ensure that costly infrastructure is future-proofed supporting the financial sustainability.

What can be done to improve connectivity across public transport modes? How could better integration be delivered in urban areas outside London?

At a national level there is a need for a more integrated approach to infrastructure investment to deliver the Government's aims. At present national level transport infrastructure priorities tend to be identified on a network or modal basis with separate nationally significant infrastructure priorities identified for road and rail. This can lead to the development of specific schemes aimed at solving a particular modal problem to improve network performance. To help aid in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to stimulate sustainable economic growth it requires a more integrated, place based, programme approach to infrastructure investment that looks across different transport modes and delivery agencies holistically. There are movements in this direction for example with Great British Railways and the formation of Active Travel England – but funding levels and modal specific pots are still unbalanced.

At the regional level, Sub-national Transport Bodies are ideally placed to lead integration at a strategic level as they are grappling with many of the same issues, at a more manageable scale than nationally, with closer relationships to local delivery bodies. Together STBs can bring to Central Government a stronger voice to tackle collective issues and have a clear role in the selection, prioritisation and funding of major transport interventions which in turn assist Government's priorities.

- Strategic Direction: Working in an integrated way STBs can set a clear direction for improved connectivity both within the region and beyond. There is a great opportunity for the collective STBs to take on a greater role given their in-depth knowledge of the regions and collaborative approaches to joint issues assisting Government in delivering more efficient and effective transport interventions.
- Place Based Outcome Focus: Given that STBs Transport Strategies act as the 'bridge' between local and national transport policy through the strength of local partnerships it enables STBs to more effectively select, prioritise and monitor interventions which are relevant to a place-based context. A Regional Funding Allocation would enable more effective placed based prioritisation to ensure that there is greater certainty over the investment pipelines emerging from STB's Transport Strategies.
- Meeting key Government ambitions around decarbonisation and levelling-up: Working at a regional level for cross-departmental, macro policy areas is more likely to provide clarity of progress and monitoring at this level may also be more appropriate. Given the commonality of these issues across England, individual STBs can act as centres of excellence, sharing their expertise and lessons learned with other STBs experiencing similar issues. For example, Transport East is the lead STB for rural mobility issues.

- Accelerating Delivery: Local solutions could be prioritised and accelerated through STB investment pipelines, which will bring forward a 'new breed' of transport interventions delivering against common issues and goals. Key to this however is funding certainty, this note will go on to exploring maximising funding opportunities in subsequent sections.
- Procurement: Another key aspect to integration is the way in which projects are procured, and how these projects embody a reduction in carbon. By incorporating decarbonisation requirements into procurement processes will assist in delivery of more environmentally conscious interventions. Here STBs have an integrated role to provide consistency particularly in projects which cross regional boundaries.

At a local level there are several actions which would improve the integration of transport outside London – many of these could be led by Sub-national Transport Bodies, with the right level of funding and resourcing.

- Addressing end to end transport needs, requiring coordination between Local Transport Authorities (LTAs), bus, rail and shared transport operators and Community Transport Groups. Integrating rail service improvements with Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plans and Bus Service Improvement Plans.
- Integrated ticketing that is robust across modes and regions, acknowledging the high level of inter-region trips (especially by rail)
- Support Local Transport Authorities at a regional level on coordinating multi-modal transport improvements associated with local planned growth
- Accessible stations and stops, routes and vehicles/ trains.
- An integrated and coordinated approach to the rail / highway interface
- Secure cycle storage at transport interchanges and increasing opportunities to take cycles onto trains, including e-bikes.

What are the likely areas of innovation in urban public transport over the next 10 years? How should public policy be shaped considering both incremental and transformational innovations? How could data help transport services meet consumer demand?

Our regional evidence base has a summary of future mobility trends (section 9). Highlights include:

- Increased acceptance of sharing assets and services: In the East we are trialling shared e-scooters and e-bikes in several urban locations, with positive feedback and results so far. Liftshare, a Norfolk-based car-sharing platform works with large employers nationwide to coordinate car-sharing schemes – taking 25,000 off the road every day. Car clubs are also beginning to emerge across the region, although with much less density than larger urban conurbations.

- Increased digitalisation of services and information: There is an opportunity to combine data feeds to provide increased real-time service information across multiple providers to encourage sustainable travel behaviour. Knowing when your service will arrive, knowing how much it will cost compared to other options, knowing about delays – all help people make the most effective travel decision.
- Climate change: The East is at risk of climate impacts from heat, flooding and coastal erosion. The resilience of transport networks to extreme weather events will be increasingly important.
- Fuel change: As more private vehicles become electric, the cost of running said vehicle will reduce. The risk and implications of increased usage as cost restrictions are eased needs consideration by government at all levels. Linked to this is the diminishing income to Treasury from Vehicle Excise Duty and the implications for long-term transport funding. Any decisions around this, need to take into account all transport users and reflect the needs of all regions, not just urban drivers and STBs can facilitate the debate at a regional level on any future policy in this area, informed by regional evidence and relationships.

Transport East has received additional DfT funding to develop a regional Agent and Activity Based Model. This approach to modelling looks at how and why people travel rather than the traditional vehicle focussed modelling approach. It enables the complexity of peoples' lives to be considered. This modelling approach can test how people change their travel mode or behaviour in response to policy and network changes, it also enables analysis of the decisions made, to see how close a person would come to making a different choice, informing the development of a strategy and enabling more effective focus for investment.

Are local authorities well equipped with appropriate funding and powers to deliver high-quality public transport services? Would further devolution of transport policy contribute to better outcomes?

The Levelling-Up White Paper indicated an appetite in government for increased devolution of funding and powers to local authorities to manage their local transport networks. To what level these powers can be taken is yet to be made clear, but alongside powers needs to come a long-term, holistic financial settlement that allows authorities to be able to design and deliver integrated transport networks that meet local and regional needs and drive local and regional outcomes. Currently, the mechanism of siloed funding pots, with different objectives that require authorities to exert resource to submit bids with no guarantee of success, is undermining integrated delivery.

Due to funding constraints, LTAs are suffering a capacity and capability shortage and are struggling to up-skill to meet the new policy environment and challenges. STBs can be an efficient vehicle for improving this at a regional level,

through improved data and evidence, procurement frameworks, and developing regional level expertise in strategic transport development and delivery.

STBs are currently promoting decarbonisation through the development of carbon assessment tools, identifying regional level decarbonisation pathways, and developing holistic appraisal frameworks that assess carbon impacts. The 'Decarbon8' report⁶ on the role of STBs in carbon governance concludes that sub-national areas are the optimally sized geographic and administrative region to co-ordinate transport carbon-reduction strategies.

STBs can support the Government in bringing forward good ideas more quickly. For example, locally driven ideas in STB transport strategies will have the benefit of widespread partner support and momentum, could be accelerated through sub-national investment pipelines, accelerating business cases for the next generation of projects to deliver outcomes. This can only be achieved with longer term STB funding certainty that has recently been given to metro mayors.

Investing in the training needed to equip those involved in the planning, development and delivery of large-scale transport projects to enable them to deliver high-quality schemes as quickly as possible. Greater certainty on sustained long-term funding would support longer term planning, early contractor engagement and a programme level approach to decarbonisation, levelling-up and economic growth.

STBs can help develop capacity and the right skills within the UK to deliver the Government's transport infrastructure plans. For example, England's Economic Heartland, the STB for the Oxford to Cambridge area, are working with the Department for Transport to trial a regional centre of excellence: one that will host specialist skills and knowledge upon which their partner organisations including their local transport authorities will be able to draw on as they develop their proposals to the point of delivery.

In developing and assessing infrastructure improvement with passenger transport benefits, the appraisal process must take a rounded view of Wider Economic and Social Benefits to ensure a balanced solution is identified.

Could better policy coordination across government departments, and between central and local government, improve public transport outcomes? If so, how can this be achieved?

At a national level the need for better integration and co-ordination between Government departments (particularly MHCLG, Treasury and DfT), to unblock and accelerate infrastructure delivery is vital. Currently, funding arrangements for infrastructure are separated across Government Departments which makes the planning and delivery of major transport infrastructure more difficult. Being able to access funding that is less segregated would allow for more joined up

planning and the delivery of schemes, without the risk of delay or termination of one aspect of the scheme.

STB's transport strategies incorporate both local and national policy outcomes allowing their local partnerships to more effectively prioritise, manage and deliver a portfolio of infrastructure relevant to a place. By working with STBs, Government can operate within departments that exist and yet still be assured that at a regional level STBs will take a place-based approach to connectivity. However, a regional funding allocation would enable more effective prioritisation and ensure the investment pipelines that flow from the STB's transport strategies are affordable. STBs are already collaborating closely with each other to maximise value to the taxpayer. This is evidenced by several joint project submissions to the DfT for additional in-year funding for 2021-22.

What are the barriers to improving urban public transport, in terms of delivering the necessary infrastructure, increasing connectivity and improving the consumer experience?

- **Funding certainty:** A further way to maximise funding opportunities and give greater certainty to delivery agencies to plan more effectively their investment pipelines (including Transport East) is via the provision of multi-year funding. Currently National Highways and Network Rail benefit from five-year funding settlements. This multi-year approach avoids the resourcing issues resulting from the stop-start patterns of infrastructure investment but also allows more complex schemes to have greater certainty over future years to deliver necessary improvements to support key challenges. This approach could also be linked to other transport funding streams including any 'Integrated Transport' funding which should be consistent in terms of timeframes with other funding streams enabling a combination of funding sources which could include both capital and revenue sources.
- **Funding levels:** There needs to be a wider discussion about the future of funding for transport and how this needs to be aligned with the user being the source of funding for all forms of transport and also aligned to the wider benefits and impacts of different modes on society. Consideration needs to be given to short-term funding to "re-boot" passenger travel following Covid19, this would suggest that the aim should be to develop a funding strategy that will result in a financially sustainable model for the medium-term, 5 to 10 years. In considering the future funding strategy, consideration should be given to enabling lower income groups to use public transport to ensure levelling up of access to sustainable transport.
- **Recognition of the different challenges faced by urban/rural authorities:** Areas which need to balance provision across a wide and diverse geography have greater challenges around commercial viability, service management and integration than denser metropolitan centres.

- **Scheme development and delivery:** Currently the time taken to identify, develop and deliver a project is significant and costly, arguably more costly than equivalent road projects. A review of this process and the potential to reduce the cost and time of the whole process, whilst ensuring that measures form part of an integrated transport system, would be beneficial.

Are there other important changes, not covered elsewhere in these questions, which would improve matters?

No further comments.

EVIDENCE

1. TE draft Transport Strategy [TransportEastStrategy.v6.pdf](#)
2. TE Passenger Transport Strategy. <https://www.transporeast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Transport-East-Passenger-Transport-Strategy-Final.pdf>
3. TE Carbon Baseline Emissions Report https://www.transporeast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Carbon-Baseline-Emissions_Final_combined_issued-10-12-21.pdf
4. Draft Investment and Delivery Programme <https://www.transporeast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/202111-Final-IDP-1.pdf>
5. Role of Transport in Economic Growth [1b-Role-of-Transport-in-Economic-Growth.pdf](#) ([transporeast.org.uk](https://www.transporeast.org.uk))
6. Cambridge Econometrics study – future digital and spatial development scenarios [1c-Future-Scenarios.pdf](#) ([transporeast.org.uk](https://www.transporeast.org.uk))
7. [Transport-East-Regional-Evidence-Base-1.pdf](#) ([transporeast.org.uk](https://www.transporeast.org.uk))
8. Public travel behaviour survey - [Transport-East-Online-Public-Engagement-Report_FINAL.pdf](#) ([transporeast.org.uk](https://www.transporeast.org.uk))

March 2022