



Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation

ICE Public Consultation

Does England need a national transport strategy?

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Summary

CIHT is strongly in favour of a National Transport Strategy (NTS) for England.

Transport will have to play an integral role in addressing the great strategic challenges identified by the current government, notably achieving Net Zero and *Levelling-Up* the economy. This contribution needs to be secured whilst maintaining and, where necessary, enhancing the connectivity and access to services supported by the transport system.

Unlike Scotland and Wales, England lacks a coherent vision and practical strategy for how transport will contribute to these goals. We believe this puts England at greater risk of failing to achieve outcomes vital for national well-being – not least because it creates a barrier to the profession and industry investing to grow the necessary capacity and capability.

In this context, CIHT believes that England needs NTS that:

- **Is vision-led:** An NTS is an opportunity to make a decisive shift from the *predict and provide* paradigm that has dominated transport planning for many decades towards a *decide and provide* approach. England cannot meet its goals by attempting to accommodate projections of unchecked traffic growth. Government needs to define clearly the economic, social, and environmental outcomes to which transport will contribute and plan the provision of infrastructure and services accordingly.
- **Treats our networks as a *Systems of Systems*:** England's transport networks form an inter-connected system of systems (SoS) made up of the strategic and local highways networks, rail, aviation, and ports. In addition, digital technology is playing an increasing role in meeting the needs for connectivity and access. The strategy should establish a clear set of requirements at the SoS level over a 10–20-year period. We believe that a focus on the system of system level can also help rebalance the attention given to the existing networks and new infrastructure. There is a vital need to invest in our existing infrastructure to meet both broader policy goals and to ensure the network is safe, reliable, and resilient.
- **Integrates transport and land use planning:** Put simply, we can no longer afford to develop first and think about transport infrastructure and services later. This approach has left us with too much development where access and connectivity can only be achieved via the private car, an approach that is not consistent with any credible pathway to Net Zero.
- **Clarifies responsibilities:** An NTS is an opportunity to establish a framework that defines roles and co-ordination mechanisms for national and local government, sub-national transport bodies, regulatory and monitoring bodies, arms lengths agencies, private transport providers, and other stakeholders. A strategy for England should also clarify how the four nations of the UK will collaborate on shared challenges.
- **Is accompanied by a pipeline of projects and policy:** The 10–20-year requirements identified in the strategy should be accompanied by a consolidated pipeline of projects and programmes, including maintenance and enhancements (see above). This can draw on information in the existing National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline. In addition, the government should indicate the policy, funding, and other interventions it plans to introduce over a 5-year period to support the objectives of the NTS. This should

include policy and investment aimed at supporting the creation of the skills and capacity needed to deliver the objectives.

CIHT has expanded on these points in a series of reports in recent years that ICE may find useful in developing its detailed proposals. These include [Better Planning, Better Transport](#), [Better Places](#), [Fixing a failing planning and transport system](#) and [Uncertainty ahead, which way forward for transport](#).

Understanding the challenge

- **Question 1: What are the key gaps and challenges within the existing approach to transport planning in England?**
 - **What are the long-term drivers of transport demand in England?**

CIHT encourages ICE to consider the drivers of both the size and shape of transport demand as it develops its proposals. These drivers are well-rehearsed and include the following:

Population Growth and Demographics: The Office for National Statistics predicts that England's current population of approximately 56 million will increase by 5% in the period up to 2028. We note that England is expected to experience the fastest population growth of the four home nations. The population is also ageing with consequences for the size and shape of demand. At the other end of the age range, there is some evidence that younger cohorts are taking up their first driving licences at a later age with implications for levels of car ownership which is a key driver of the overall car-use (DVLA, 2021).

Economic geography: The government's *Levelling-Up* ambitions are at least in part an effort to reshape the economic geography of England, which, if successful, will impact the size and shape of transport demand. Urbanisation may increase demand for public transport, but high fares and limited spatial coverage remain major barriers. In England, 94% of individual trips are currently made by private car (DfT, 2021).

Increasing demand for sustainable transport: Overall, it seems reasonable to assume that policy action such as congestion charging, and investment in active travel infrastructure, combined with persistently high fuel prices, will increase demand for both electric vehicles and active travel (with their associated infrastructures).

Technology: The rapid improvements in the performance of electric vehicles and the expected price reduction will clearly have a significant impact, which will, in turn, be amplified by policy measures such as the Zero Emission Vehicle mandate. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by a significant increase in both home working and the digital delivery of services such as health and education. These changes are clearly here to stay, and the growth of *digital as a mode* will impact the size and shape of transport demand.

Uncertainty is the common thread in all these drivers and many others that we are sure will be made to other contributors to this consultation. There is a high risk that any NTS does not engage sufficiently with uncertainty about the future and will therefore lack robustness in the face of changed circumstances (for example, the nature and extent and severity of climate change effects, some of the anticipated developments listed above failing to materialise or unexpected impacts of change on different social groups). The strategy therefore needs to be tested against a range of plausible scenarios for transport growth and other important

variables. The government will need to be willing to extend this discipline to individual investment decisions flowing from the strategy.

The importance of building in processes to deal with increased uncertainty is explored in more detail in CIHT's [Uncertainty ahead, which way forward for transport](#) mentioned above.

- **Question 2: Should a new national transport strategy be developed for England or the UK as a whole?**
 - **How would an overarching strategy strengthen decision-making, help meet the UK's long-term objectives, improve infrastructure delivery and better the lives of the public?**
 - **What specific issues and challenges should it address?**
 - **How should a national transport strategy address connectivity between the UK's nations?**
 - **How would a strategy for England be integrated with those of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland?**

There is a solid logic to establishing a single UK national transport strategy. In practice, however, many key transport powers are devolved to the governments of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, with each of them has already some form of established strategy. In our view, this means that it would be advisable for ICE to take a pragmatic line and focus on making a case for a strategy for England and exploring how existing co-operation between the four home nations can be built on to create a shared set of high-level objectives at the UK level and improve the co-ordination of their delivery.

Overall, the value of the NTS, like any strategy, will be to provide a clear roadmap to the achievement of a defined set of outcomes and objectives alongside a guiding set of principles that can help all parties align their decision-making, creating more consistency in what is prioritised (or not) and how resources are allocated to achieve the outcomes. As we argue above, England has suffered from a lack of vision, with transport planning defaulting to *predict and provide*, and this has been accompanied by disjointed decision-making across the various component parts of the network and between transport and land-use decision-making. The scale of the challenges we face, not least transport decarbonisation (which, according to the government's own Net Zero, requires an enormous reduction of emissions from domestic transport 65-76% by 2035 against 2019 levels), means this cannot be allowed to continue.

Therefore, the Transport Strategy for England should define critical objectives and the broad direction of transport development in England on a 10–20-year perspective. It should function as the main reference document for all transport authorities, planners, constructors, and other stakeholders involved in transport and related sectors, and be the guiding framework for investment decisions.

The list of issues that need to be addressed in the strategy has largely already been captured by the government but are currently scattered across a range of documents, including DfT's *Transport Decarbonisation Plan* and National Highways' *Gearing up for the Roads Investment Strategy*. These issues include: enhancing connectivity and access to services, *levelling-up*, achieving Net Zero, improving safety, well-being, and air quality, reducing car dependency, advancing the public transport network, promoting active travel, delivering biodiversity net-gain, integrating different modes of transport and facilitating seamless door to door journeys, reducing social and economic inequalities, and supporting wider equality, diversity and inclusion outcomes.

- **Question 3: What role should different stakeholders play in delivering better transport outcomes in England (e.g., central government, subnational transport bodies, the National Infrastructure Commission)?**

Successful transport strategy depends on the interplay of transport stakeholders on different levels of decision-making. Establishing a transport strategy is beneficial, but identifying key responsibilities and assigning roles to stakeholders is therefore critical to ensuring its delivery.

The central government has a leading role in establishing a vision that can define the course of the transport system for England. It is primarily responsible for identifying key priorities and targets – that is to establish a set of high-level requirements for the overall system.

Central government should also take the lead in engaging with other players, including Strategic Transport Bodies, Local Authorities, Network Owners and Operators, Regulators, and others to establish a clear division of responsibilities and accountabilities. This should be a genuine negotiation based on the principle of devolution of responsibility to the organisation best placed to make decisions, deliver actions, and manage the associated risks. Where responsibilities are placed on an organisation, they must be given the resources to discharge their role. In practice, this will likely mean increasing the resources available to Local Authorities.

Developing an effective strategy

- **Question 4: What timeframe should a strategy cover and how often should it be reviewed?**

CIHT has previously argued that NTS should have a 10-year timeframe. We do, however, note that Wales and Scotland have 20-year strategies, and there would be an obvious logic in a strategy for England operating on the same time frame.

We believe that the strategy should be reviewed at least once a parliament, including testing its robustness against a range of plausible scenarios (see above).

- **Question 5: How can a strategy be made resilient to political change?**

We acknowledge that this is challenging. Nevertheless, we believe that some of the points above should help to improve the resilience of any strategy.

A vision - led approach to developing strategy is an opportunity to generate consensus on outcomes, if not on every detail of implementation. As we argue above, this can be achieved by shifting the focus from methodologies based on the traditional idea of 'predict and provide' to an outcome-oriented approach of 'decide and provide'.

Similarly, introducing a review at least once a parliament will provide any incoming government with an opportunity to make changes in an orderly manner while establishing the principle that the strategy should be tested against a range of scenarios, to increase transparency and highlight the risk of increased costs to Ministers of arbitrary or overly politicised decision-making.

- **Question 6: How can existing data be best used to improve transport outcomes – and what data gaps exist?**

We do not have a view on this question.

- **Question 7: What existing mechanisms and approaches could be used to achieve the desired integration if it proves impossible to get an integrated transport strategy off the ground?**

One alternative approach could be to build out from the work of England's Strategic Transport Bodies (STBs). All STBs have produced or are in the process of producing outcome-led Regional Transport Strategies. The STBs have reasonable co-ordination arrangements, and their work could form the basis of a bottom-up national strategy that could help bring coherence to decision-making and act as a powerful statement of need. The weakness of this approach is, of course, that it would not necessarily shape central government funding and appraisal regimes.

- **Question 8: What lessons can be learnt from other countries with national transport strategies?**

We do not have a view on this question.