

Strategic Economic Plans review

A brief review of LEP proposals by Sustrans and Campaign for Better Transport

10 June 2014

Introduction

This brief report seeks to give a 'first outside look' at Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs) submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in England outside London. In this document we seek to identify the balance in transport schemes proposed by the LEPs between big roads, public transport, cycling and walking.

We also wanted to look for commitment to sustainable travel as part of wider plans that bid for a share of the Single Local Growth Fund (LGF). Following on from five years of dedicated funding from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF), the Growth Fund removes the requirement for money to be spent by local authorities on local sustainable transport projects and we wanted to see if LEPs were likely to continue supporting such schemes.

Executive summary

We were pleased to observe that there are some definite improvements in the coverage of sustainable transport from the priorities previously identified by Local Transport Bodies (LTBs),¹ and from what was in the draft SEPs in late 2013, and we welcome this. In particular, there is a clear increase in the attention given to cycling and buses.

There is also a difference between LEP spending plans and proposals for the competitive Local Growth Funding, and the campaigning some LEPs are doing to influence the Highways Agency's spending plans. If some of these plans went ahead they would swamp the effects of LSTF-style sustainable travel schemes by adding new road infrastructure and stimulating new traffic on local roads.

In the report we look at six themes outlined below and add further information and case studies later in the report and in the appendix. We analysed projects in eight SEPs in detail to see what had happened since the review of LTB priorities last year. We found a varied picture.

- 1. Reference to sustainable travel is high but substance and detail is low**
There has been a marked increase since the release of the drafts in mention of sustainable travel in the submitted SEPs. However less than half of plans submitted feature sustainable travel in a strong way.
- 2. Cycling features strongly by way of mention but projects are often bolt-ons to large-scale road based schemes.** Despite 97% of the LEPs having indicated the value of investing in sustainable travel, only 49% of LEPs have gone on to request capital funding for dedicated walking & cycling schemes
- 3. Only 41% of LEPs have put forward any strong consideration of public transport within their SEPs.**
- 4. Only 49% of SEPs make any indication of LSTF requests.** However, many SEPs that have considered sustainable transport schemes within their strategies have not separated their LSTF asks out from their broader LGF ask
- 5. The transparency of the SEP process was poor.** Only 66% of LEPs made their draft SEPs open to public scrutiny prior to final SEP submittal to government, and only 54% ran a form of public consultation either via an online survey, email or event
- 6. There are some definite improvements in the coverage of sustainable transport from the LTB position.** In this report we look at spending proposals of eight SEPs with narrative below and data in the appendix

¹ Where the money's going. CPRE and Campaign for Better Transport, September 2013
http://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/LTB_report_250913_web_FINAL_0.pdf

Measure/Aim	Proportion of plans in which measure is mentioned	Proportion of plans in which measure is strongly featured
Reference to sustainable transport in general narrative	97%	46%
Cycling and walking as part of wider schemes	86%	49%
Public transport as part of wider schemes	97%	41%
LSTF Funding	49% (specify LSTF ask)	

1. Reference to sustainable travel

There has been a marked increase since the release of the drafts in mention of sustainable travel in the submitted SEPs. Whilst 97% of submitted SEPs do make mention of sustainable travel, the degree to which it is appreciated as a means to support the delivery of LEP objectives varies widely. In many cases LEPS, such as Worcestershire and Tees Valley, highlight the value of investing in sustainable transport infrastructure to support access to employment and promote local economic growth but then don't go onto provide any real indication or details of investment within this area. Stoke & Staffordshire highlight the health benefits of investing in sustainable transport infrastructure but then give no indication of any cycling or walking schemes within their investment priorities.

CASE STUDY 1: Lancashire LEP

Lancashire's SEP contains a number of references to sustainable transport under its priority of releasing local growth potential by building upon its current £20m Growing Places Fund. Under this priority there a number of rail, bus, urban renewal, & cycle infrastructure programmes being promoted to address local barriers to growth.

There is clear recognition of the value of Active travel as a means to address road capacity:

"Local travel and short journeys are a vital component of any transport network. Cycling in particular has the potential to offer options for short journeys but also for longer journeys to work and for education and leisure. As a result of key employment sites being located along the M65 Growth Corridor they are, in the main, easily accessible from many residential areas. Therefore, Active Travel opportunities, in particular cycling, present an opportunity for employees to use alternative travel modes. In so doing this supports the wider capacity on the road network."

Recognition of need to provide sustainable travel alternatives in certain areas:

"Whilst Skelmersdale has excellent connections to the strategic road network, the local road network no longer serves the purpose for which it was built, and does not support current economic growth aspirations. Worse still, for a town with low levels of car ownership, Skelmersdale has inadequate public transport and sustainable travel opportunities with no direct rail link, poor bus services in terms of frequency, journey times and wider connectivity, lack of provision for pedestrians and cyclists and an inhospitable public realm."

"...Growth Deal provides for the first time a once in a generation opportunity to reshape Skelmersdale through a single programme of works spread over a number of years and ensure that the town has a sustainable, integrated transport network that will allow it to grow and prosper in the future."

Recognition of the barriers to people taking up cycling in the region due to dedicated safe cycle provision:

"In urban areas such as Preston and Lancaster, congestion has reached a point where it is reducing the reliability and therefore attractiveness of the local bus networks. Whilst such networks are comprehensive and supported by developing cycle networks and improving pedestrian facilities, the majority of commuters still choose to use their cars. High levels of traffic have road safety, environmental and social impacts which extend beyond those that vehicle occupants may experience. Buses suffer from the same delays as other road users unless there are dedicated bus lanes or other bus priority measures. Likewise, cyclists also have to share this road space unless there is dedicated cycle provision. People are less likely to want to walk or cycle any distance if they have concerns about safety and pollution."

2. Cycling and walking as part of wider schemes

Again, there has been a marked increase since the draft SEPs in the consideration of investing in walking and cycling, with 86% making some mention of this intention within the submitted SEPs. However, on the whole, there is still a strong bias towards large-scale road based schemes with many cycling and walking infrastructure proposals often being bolt-ons to these.

Despite 97% of the LEPs having indicated the value of investing in sustainable travel, only 49% of LEPs have gone on to request capital funding for dedicated walking and cycling schemes. Unfortunately, not all LEPs have provided in details of the individual schemes and it is difficult at this point to fully comment on the proposed interventions. Some LEPs such as West of England, Black Country and Leeds City Region have gone on to outline substantial sustainable transport packages that contain a range of interventions to support local modal shift.

CASE STUDY 2: Coventry and Warwickshire LEP

The Coventry and Warwickshire SEP includes an ambitious bid to support the development of a new network of cycle routes totalling 133km and supporting 18 employment sites. The North-South Sustainable Transport Corridor aims to build upon the current LSTF-funded 'Cycle Coventry' initiative by complementing proposed investment in rail and highway decongestion.

It is intended to: *“roll these [Cycle Coventry] benefits out to the SEP’s major employment site locations, connecting Nuneaton in the north and Leamington Spa in the south into an established network of physical routes and business support. The scheme will also directly provide new apprenticeships through a scheme to support construction industry skills and training. The investment is directly linked to a joint Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council and Centro bid for DfT LSTF revenue support.”*

Proposed Interventions for 2015/16 include:

Opening up a new cycle route between the residential areas of Bedworth and the Bermuda Park employment site (connecting more people to jobs)

Opening up a new cycle route between Coventry City Centre and Coventry Station / Friargate to Jaguar Land Rover at Whitley Business Park (connecting more people to jobs)

First phase of improved cycle links between Kenilworth and Leamington

3. Public transport as part of wider schemes

With a high proportion of LTBs having prioritised road-based schemes over public transport in their shortlisting of major schemes last year, it perhaps comes as no big surprise that only 41% of LEPs have put forward any strong consideration of public transport within their SEPs. That said there are some improvements. A number of SEPs include bus measures and a few even mention possible coach services – a Cinderella in transport planning but potentially important in many areas. It is also worth saying that the LEPs that have prioritised public transport are ones covering the major urban areas where most people live, so in population terms the bias against public transport isn't as large as it might appear.

However, the fact that a majority of LEPs aren't giving serious attention to public transport suggests that some are being ruled by a 'view through the windscreen', in which only roads matter. The problem with this is that development entirely round the car generates congestion and pollution and excludes those who don't drive from labour markets. More enlightened LEPs have recognised the importance of upgrading public transport in order to give people choices in how they get about and to tackle road congestion.

The best public transport projects are the ones being justified in wider economic terms - for example projects that upgrade existing rail lines or bus networks or reopen connections to places not on the rail network, such as Wisbech and Portishead, as a means of regeneration and giving areas with high unemployment better connections to areas where the jobs are.

As with roads, it is important to distinguish between LEPs proposing to commit their own funds to public transport from those that are merely trying to get more money out of Network Rail or Government franchising budgets for their area.

4. LSTF Funding

Due to the competitive nature of bidding for the SLGF, many LEPS have opted to not make public any detailed information about specific funding asks. Furthermore, many SEPs that have considered sustainable transport schemes within their strategies have not separated their LSTF asks out from their broader LGF ask. So whilst it may be worrying that only 49% of submitted SEPs make any indication of LSTF requests, the final result could very much be influenced by these factors.

Of those that have indicated their LSTF capital ask, the size of the request varies considerably with, for example, Dorset at one end of the scale requesting £1,010,000 and West of England at the other end requesting £20,000,000.

CASE STUDY 4: Cumbria LEP

Cumbria LEP has identified the importance of investing in sustainable travel to support their objective of creating a “vibrant rural and visitor economy” through building upon the success of their LSTF Go Lakes Travel pilot, requesting £2,250,000 of LSTF capital funding for 2015/16.

"Delivering sustainable transport infrastructure and interventions, making it easier for visitors to arrive and move between destinations and making innovative, integrated travel options an attraction in their own right. Cycling and walking routes are an important part of the overall visitor offer. There will be a particular focus on increasing the momentum and impact of the Local Sustainable Transport Funded Go Lakes Travel pilot."

"The current four year LSTF Go Lakes Travel programme is already having significant success in changing the travel behaviour of visitors, both travelling into and around the southern and central Lake District, through the implementation of a range of sustainable transport measures. These include: new bus services including the bike bus; new jetties and boat services on Lake Windermere; new cycle networks; electric car and bicycle hire networks and various other measures to encourage car drivers to leave their car for the day and explore by sustainable means."

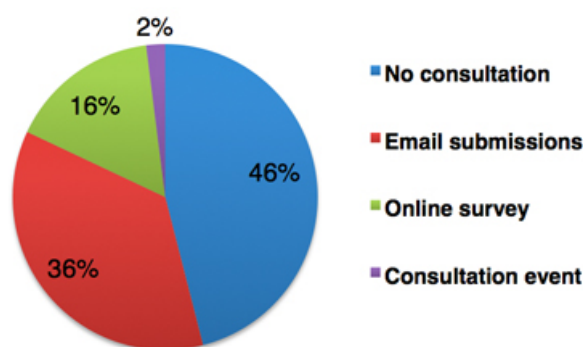
There is recognition that a lack of sustainable transport connectivity is hindering growth in international and domestic visitor markets and resulting in congestion as visitors access the region by car:

"The lack of sustainable transport connectivity between public transport hubs and key visitor destinations is a key issue which needs resolved in order to attract more international and domestic visitors, through offering a high quality product and more choice. This would in turn help unlock sustainable economic growth in the County. There is significant opportunity for influencing how visitors approach the key attractions to enhance the quality of the visit, to reduce congestion at hotspots and bottlenecks, but also spread the benefit of tourism wider than the main destination locations"

5. Transparency

Whilst there was a Government expectation that LEPs should adopt a consultative process in the development of their SEPs, this were less prescriptive on the nature of that process. It is therefore hardly surprising that only 66% of LEPs made their draft SEPs open to public scrutiny. Furthermore, only 54% ran a form of public consultation either via an online survey, email or event. Despite there being a period of 101 days from the expected release of the draft SEPs on 20 December to final submission on 31 March, of those that ran a consultation process the average length was 45 days (shortest 17 days – longest 80 days).

Draft SEP made publicly available	66%
Average consultation period	45 days
Shortest consultation period	17 days
Longest consultation period	80 days



6. Spending profiles of eight SEPs.

We analysed eight of the SEPs in detail to see what had happened since the review of LTB priorities last year. We found a varied picture and have made comments below and provided further information in the appendix.

We are keen to celebrate that there are some definite improvements in the funding of sustainable transport from the LTB position, and from what was in the draft SEPs, and we welcome this. In particular, there is a clear increase in the attention given to cycling and bus or coach travel.

There is also a difference between LEP spending plans and proposals for the competitive LGF funding, and the campaigning some LEPs are doing to influence the Highways Agency's spending plans - for example on the A417 in Gloucestershire. If some of these plans went ahead they would swamp the effects of LSTF-style spending by stimulating new traffic on local roads.

Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire was the third lowest rated LTB when we rated their spending plans last year, and the LEP's programme of transport plans in its finished SEP is not a great improvement. Half the transport funding is for schemes that appear to be solely aimed at increasing capacity for car travel, with around a quarter each allocated to public transport and mixed/mixed sustainable schemes.

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Coventry and Warwickshire Black Country

We have looked at the three West Midlands LEPs together, to get a view across a whole conurbation. A rich mixture of different schemes and the inclusion of public realm and cycling projects means we are impressed with Greater Birmingham and Solihull's programme, and this area's LTB also rated highly in our previous assessment, choosing a range of schemes all of which supported sustainable transport. Coventry and Warwickshire had previously chosen a good mix of schemes as well, including a large public realm scheme around Coventry station. These LTB schemes all remain in the SEP programme, and there is a whole additional scheme dedicated to cycle commuting routes, which should be praised. However, the other new schemes are slightly too focused on road capacity for cars. Black Country LEP is the least well-balanced programme of the three West Midlands LEPs, with only a small proportion of spending (4%) being dedicated to sustainable transport schemes, although a fifth is for rail.

Tees Valley Unlimited

Having prioritised only road projects when allocating LTB devolved funding, it is good to see some focus on sustainable transport from Tees Valley Unlimited's SEP. Outside the 'Evergreen' fund (which is also intended to support 'business accommodation') the 'Sustainable Access to Employment' project is largest single project listed under Infrastructure among the SEP's 'priority projects' at £18 million. Outside major schemes, there is also a commitment to address road maintenance backlogs with £2.5 million allocated annually, totalling £15 million over six years. However, five out of 12 projects are still focused only on new road capacity and it is unclear whether the various pinch point and junction schemes will do anything to improve access to public transport or reduce severance for people on foot or bikes.

Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire's LTB was highly rated by our previous analysis and all the priority projects on the LTB programme make it through to the SEP, including several aimed solely at providing bus priority. An innovative public health-focused active travel programme in Lydney from the LTB longlist has been added (although only with £1 million of the originally requested £4.9 million in funding). Because the Cheltenham Spa Station LTB project has immediate deliverability issues, the original ~£3.5 million for this scheme will now be spent developing the station project and two others for future delivery. The LTB is also putting funding directly into a new bus station for Gloucester.

New funding within the SEP is going mainly to a range of road and mixed schemes. The most worrying new development, however, is the very strident request for several large Highways Agency schemes to be funded (outside the LGF) in the area, including a £255 million dual carriageway bypass of the A417 in the Cotswolds AONB, for which the County Council is funding a very large public campaign. These schemes don't fit within the current LGF budget but have the potential to require large LEP contributions in future at the cost of more sustainable transport.

Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

Buckinghamshire's LTB was not highly rated when we looked at its original spending plans in 2013, which were split between road capacity, road maintenance schemes and rail. The road schemes associated with extensions of Aylesbury and Beaconsfield remain in these proposals, but the newer schemes in the SEP are all sustainable transport packages aimed at aiding door-to-door journeys without new car trips when new Crossrail and East West Rail services open. This is a huge improvement in approach, although it is notable that these three new schemes only make up around 9% of the total LGF spend in this area.

Sheffield

We were very disappointed to see the Waverley Link road in Sheffield City Region's Lower Don Valley infrastructure plan. This was only recently rejected from the DfT's Local Major Schemes funding programme in May 2012 because of deliverability issues, including a strong campaign defending local playing fields and the opposition of local authorities to the previous scheme.² The Department for Transport has specifically warned LEPs and LTBs against reviving previously rejected schemes.

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/9252/investment-local-major-update-dec2011.pdf

Appendix – Analysis of schemes chosen for investment by selected LEPs

Table 1: Types of scheme by mode (proportion of schemes)

	ROAD	RAIL	BUS	METRO/ TRAM	CYCLING	MIXED	MIXED SUSTAINABLE	ROAD MAINTENANCE	PUBLIC REALM
Swindon and Wiltshire	48%	13%	9%	0%	0%	17%	4%	0%	0%
Oxfordshire	29%	7%	4%	0%	0%	21%	11%	0%	0%
Greater Birmingham and Solihull	37%	11%	15%	11%	4%	11%	0%	4%	7%
Coventry and Warwickshire	45%	18%	9%	0%	9%	9%	0%	0%	9%
Black Country	44%	33%	0%	0%	0%	11%	11%	0%	0%
Tees Valley Unlimited	42%	8%	0%	0%	0%	8%	8%	8%	0%
Gloucestershire	61%	6%	17%	0%	0%	6%	6%	0%	0%
Buckinghamshire Thames Valley	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	38%	0%	0%

Scheme definitions:

Road - schemes that add capacity to the road network for private motor traffic

Rail - schemes that add to or improve rail facilities

Bus - schemes that add to or improve bus facilities

Cycling - schemes that add to or improve cycling facilities

Metro/tram - schemes that add to or improve metro/tram facilities

Public realm - schemes that improve public spaces and/or facilities for walking

Road maintenance - schemes that only repair or replace existing structures or traffic management systems, with no new capacity added

Mixed - schemes with multiple modes that also include some new road capacity

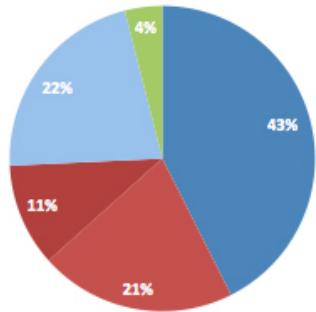
Mixed sustainable - schemes with multiple modes that only include improvements to sustainable transport

Table 2: Types of scheme by proportion of proposed LEP spending

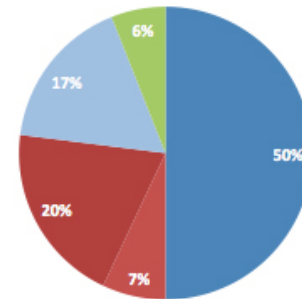
	ROAD	RAIL	BUS	METRO/ TRAM	CYCLING	MIXED	MIXED SUSTAINABLE	ROAD MAINTENANCE	PUBLIC REALM
Swindon and Wiltshire	43%	21%	11%	0%	0%	22%	4%	0%	0%
Oxfordshire	50%	7%	20%	0%	0%	17%	6%	0%	0%
Greater Birmingham and Solihull	11%	5%	28%	30%	2%	3%	0%	20%	3%
Coventry and Warwickshire	66%	17%	0%	0%	7%	10%	0%	0%	0%
Black Country	58%	21%	0%	0%	0%	17%	4%	0%	0%
Tees Valley Unlimited	28%	1%	0%	0%	0%	37%	6%	28%	0%
Gloucestershire	40%	3%	24%	0%	0%	31%	2%	0%	0%
Buckinghamshire Thames Valley	39%	0%	0%	0%	0%	52%	9%	0%	0%

Figure A: Charts showing proportion of spending plans from each LEP

Swindon and Wiltshire

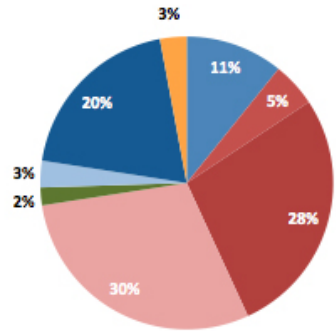


Oxfordshire

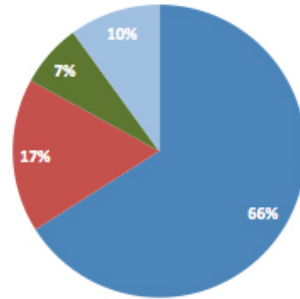


- % of ROAD schemes (LEP spend)
- % of RAIL schemes (LEP spend)
- % of BUS schemes (LEP spend)
- % of METRO/TRAM schemes (LEP spend)
- % of CYCLING schemes (LEP spend)
- % of MIXED schemes (LEP spend)
- % of MIXED SUSTAINABLE schemes (LEP spend)
- % of ROAD MAINTENANCE schemes (LEP spend)
- % of PUBLIC REALM schemes (LEP spend)

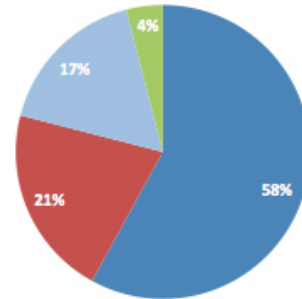
Greater Birmingham and Solihull



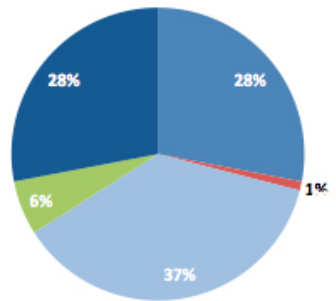
Coventry and Warwickshire



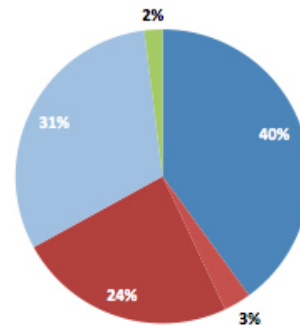
Black Country



Tees Valley Unlimited



Gloucestershire (GFirst)



Buckinghamshire Thames Valley

