

Roads: driving forward economic growth in the East of England

Information briefing for the East of England APPG

As a world-leading area for innovation in science, engineering, agri-tech and energy production, the East of England is a major contributor to the national economy.

Industries and international gateways within the region are key to UK's global trade operations. With 13 ports, including two Freeports, and four international airports, the region has more gateways into the UK than any other in England. These gateways are critical for the movements of goods that support the national economy, providing international supply chains to thousands of businesses across the UK but particularly in the Midlands and North.

The region is one of the fastest growing in the UK, with dynamic towns and cities including Cambridge, Norwich, Bedford, Ipswich, Colchester, Stevenage, Peterborough, Luton, Chelmsford and Southend, many of which are undergoing significant planned homes and jobs growth. Yet it is also notable for its large, dispersed rural and coastal areas which are home to a significant proportion of the population alongside important economic assets.

Roads are critically important to unlocking the East of England's economic potential. They remain the primary (and, particularly in rural areas, often the only) means of connecting businesses with markets, materials and labour, and people with jobs, services and goods.

Role of sub-national transport bodies

The Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs) covering the East of England, Transport East and England's Economic Heartland, play a key role in advising government on their region's road infrastructure priorities. Our strength lies in our ability to offer truly multimodal, joined-up and strategic advice which has agreement from local political leaders.

We advise National Highways on the development of its road investment strategy; a role that arguably could be strengthened. The Transport Select Committee recently recommended that National Highways' licence should be updated to include a formalised engagement process with STBs. STBs are also responsible for preparing the region's advice in respect of investment priorities for the major road network of local authority-maintained strategically important roads.

Both STBs have built-up a body of data and evidence regarding roads in the region which we are happy to share with MPs. We also lead work to support rail, bus services, freight and active travel. Transport East and England's Economic Heartland recently collaborated on a tool which identifies the most suitable locations for public electric vehicle charging infrastructure.



Role of Roads

Roads will continue to play a crucial role in the East of England's transport system:

Economic

Road infrastructure is key to the delivery of the region's incredible economic potential as a science and technology superpower, essential to the nation's food, energy and health security, while also supporting planned homes growth and connecting people and places across our polycentric region.

Logistics

Roads provide key links between our region and the rest of the UK with a vital role in supporting the freight and logistics sector. Half the UK's containers move through eastern ports, the vast majority by road. Stansted, Luton, Norwich & Southend airports carry 17% of the UK's air passengers, 37 million per year (2022) and the region's air freight sector is worth £8.1 billion in GVA.

Levelling-up

The region has many rural areas (alongside poorly connected urban centres) for which road-based modes of transportation are the only realistic means of travel. Improvements to and maintenance of the East of England's road network is crucial to levelling-up, not only in our own region but also the Midlands and North whose businesses are reliant on goods travelling efficiently through from ports in the East.

Multimodal

Roads support the delivery of several transport modes including: bus, taxi, micromobility, and active travel, providing most walking, cycling and wheeling infrastructure.

Decarbonisation

The accelerated uptake of electric vehicles and other alternative fuels offers the opportunity to significantly cut emissions from road-based transport. It is critical that EV charging infrastructure keeps pace with demand and progress is accelerated on alternative fuels for freight.

Equally, there is an opportunity for technological solutions, including for example, smart junctions, which squeeze maximum efficiencies from existing highways assets.

Roads Management

Improvements and maintenance to the main road network are undertaken by different authorities based on who oversees the management of that stretch of road.

- National Highways manage the Strategic Road Network (SRN) which includes any motorways and three-lane sections of 'A' roads, but also some strategic dual-carriageway 'A' roads.
- Local transport authorities manage the Major Road Network (MRN) – mostly 'A' roads, including some dual carriageways.
- Local transport authorities also manage local roads, including 'A', 'B' and 'C' class roads.

Improvements on the SRN and MRN network are delivered through the National Roads Fund via two separate funding programmes:

- the Road Investment Strategy (RIS) for the Strategic Road Network; and
- the MRN / Large Local Major (LLM) programme for the Major Road Network.
- Funding for maintaining and improving local roads is complex, with money coming from multiple DfT-managed pots.

Improvements identified on the network need to have government compliant business cases developed for assessment by the Department for Transport. It can be a challenge to secure a pipeline of investment for the East of England through this process. There are also several MRN schemes awaiting government funding decisions.

National Highways and the Department for Transport have recently consulted on the third Roads Investment Strategy (RIS3). This saw all SRN schemes in the region previously proposed for delivery within RIS3 (2025-2030) moved back into RIS4 (2030-2035)

While this was a national decision with implications across all regions, given historic challenges in securing investment, it has significant implications for regional growth, and the capacity, safety and resilience of the East of England's strategic road network.

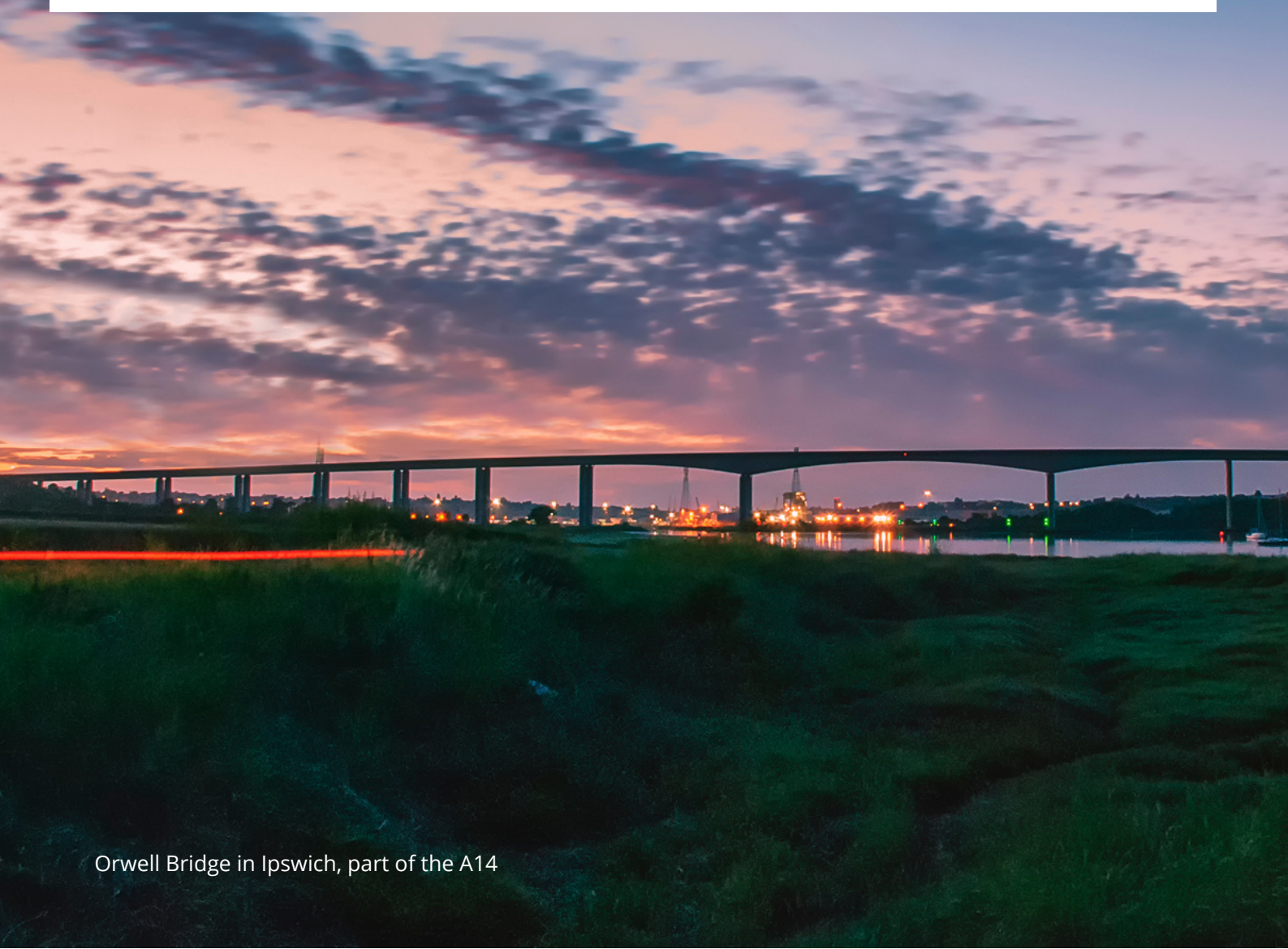


Funding

Given the interconnected nature of the SRN and MRN with all SRN journeys starting and ending on local authority-managed roads, and changes to the SRN leading to knock-on impact to the MRN, we believe funding for roads should recognise the wider network impacts.

More integrated funding allocations based on STB geographies could offer significant opportunities to take a truly strategic, multimodal and realistic approach to investment. For example, increasing capacity for rail freight by investing in Ely junction would relieve congestion from HGVs on roads along the Felixstowe to Midlands and North corridor – it should be regarded as a ‘rail solution for a roads problem’.

Our Boards have consistently identified the disadvantages of multiple competitive funding pots as a strain on their limited capacities which risks unequal service levels across the region. They have highlighted the crucial importance of funding to maintain existing road assets, particularly in the context of the increasing occurrence of extreme weather events.



Orwell Bridge in Ipswich, part of the A14

Locations of SRN and RIS Schemes



Major Projects
in the east

Completed

Image of map from National Highways

The Region's Strategic Road Network (SRN)

National Highways manage four strategic corridors within the region that have been identified and recently consulted on as part of their third Road investment Strategy (RIS3) programme.

There is poor east-west connectivity across the region's SRN. Journeys are reliant on a mix of single and dual carriageway A roads that interconnect with the motorway network, serving London, accommodating both local traffic movements and high volumes of strategic freight traffic. In the far east of the region the network is sparse with few alternatives creating challenges in resilience and journey time reliability.

Following the cancellation of the Oxford to Cambridge expressway ECH has been working with DfT and National Highways to identify where investment in the existing highway network is needed. The work from this is expected to form part of the future RIS3 Programme.

Corridor 12 - East of England (A11, A12, A120, A47)

The East of England Route provides strategic movements across Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire connecting the ports in the east to the Midlands. The corridor supports the movement of local, regional and national travel between the region's cities, towns and villages, along with international freight and tourist traffic.

The corridor is made up of four 'A roads':

A47 provides a strategically important northern east – west route connecting Norfolk to Cambridgeshire and the Midlands. Linking off-shore energy at Great Yarmouth, through innovation in Norwich, to food, construction and logistics in King's Lynn and Peterborough and onwards. It connects with other parts of the SRN and MRN namely: A10, A1 and M1. Many sections of this route remain single carriageway creating capacity and safety issues.

A12 provides the East with a north-south corridor, connecting important and fast-growing towns and cities and serves some of the East's major gateway ports. Around 100,000 vehicles per day travel on the A12 through Essex. Connectivity on this corridor is essential to support the projected £4bn growth and delivery of 10,000 jobs in the region. North of Ipswich it becomes a largely single carriage country road running through villages. It is also the main route for construction traffic for Sizewell C.

A120 is used by freight, commuters and tourists and is one of the main roads between the port of Harwich and the M11 and provides access to Stansted Airport. A section of the A120 is single carriage which links the rapidly growing town of Braintree to the A12.

A11 connects Norwich and Norfolk to the M11, forming a major part of the Norwich-Cambridge Tech Corridor – with growth focussed on advanced manufacturing & engineering and agri-tech alongside substantial numbers of new homes.



Corridor 6 - London to Leeds (East) **(M11 and A1(M) and A1)**

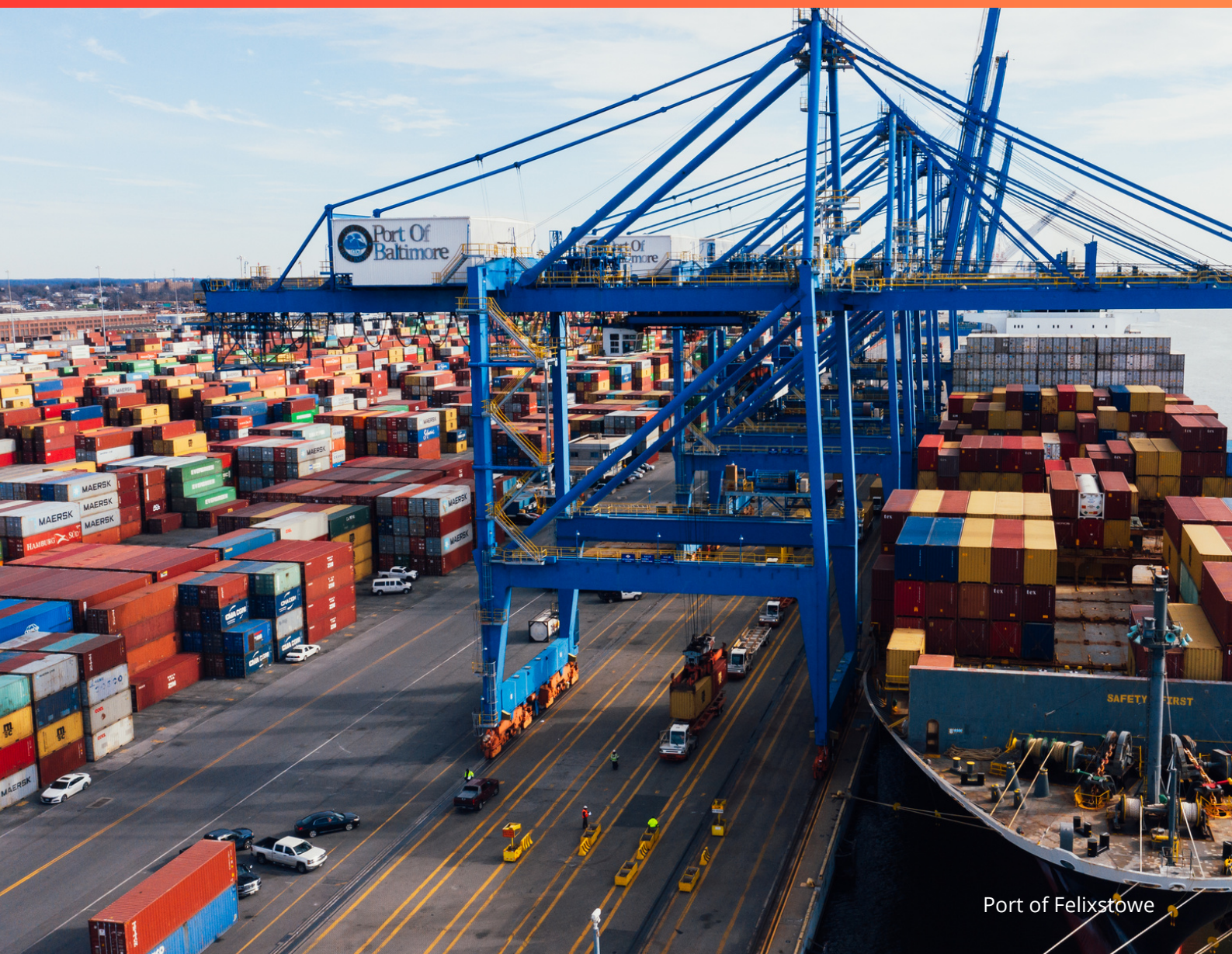
The M11 between Cambridge and London connects the UK's 'Innovation Corridor' – a dynamic ecosystem of international businesses, universities and start-ups.

The M11 provides access to Stansted Airport, the third busiest passenger and freight airport in the UK. and the first to return to pre-pandemic levels with the number of passengers in July 2023 exceeding July 2019. Plans to increase flights to leading tech and global powerhouse regions in the world such as Boston and Singapore have also been discussed.

The A1 and A1(M) is a key connector between M25 at Hertfordshire with Bedford, Peterborough and on to Doncaster and the North. It is one of the most challenging parts of the SRN in the East of England, changing from motorway standard on the A1(M) to single carriageway A1 on a central section through Bedfordshire, passing in front of residential properties creating noise, air quality and public realm challenges.

A solution to the A1 is key to supporting existing growth and addressing road safety and congestion issues in this corridor.





Port of Felixstowe

Corridor 13 - Felixstowe to Midlands (A14, A421, A428, A45, A141, A1307)

The A14 is the principal east-west strategic road network route, connecting the Port of Felixstowe and Ipswich in Suffolk, across Cambridgeshire to Coventry and Birmingham in the Midlands. It also provides access to Northampton, Bedford, and Milton Keynes.

17 shipping lines operate from the port of Felixstowe, offering 33 services to and from over 700 ports around the world. The route also provides access to the city of Cambridge with its world-renowned university and life-science facilities.

It facilitates thousands of HGVs carrying international goods coming in through Felixstowe and Freeport East across the UK. Made up of a mix of dual carriageway and single carriageway roads, the core challenge is accommodating the future planned increase in freight at the eastern ports and large levels of planned growth on the already constrained corridor.

Corridor 16 - London Orbital (M25)

The M25 runs through Thurrock, Essex and Hertfordshire all expecting high levels of homes growth and connects parts of the SRN serving London including: A13, A12, M11, A1(M) and M1.

The M25 is unique in supporting local traffic movements around London as well as interfacing and connecting the various motorways and the MRN that connect to London. It is the only motorway that caters for east-west movement in the region.

It connects Thurrock to the rest of the UK via the A13, providing access to the port of Tilbury and DP World London Gateway, which has the capacity for 2.4 million standard shipping containers and includes extensive warehousing and the largest logistics park in Europe.

It is noted for high levels of HGV traffic especially in the north-eastern and eastern section. There are concerns over the route's ability to support growth, especially in areas of Hertfordshire that border the M25.

The proposed Lower Thames Crossing would also connect the A13 and Thurrock and Essex to the M25 providing additional capacity alongside the Dartford crossing, a notable pinch point on the national network.



Current SRN Improvement Scheme

National Highway's RIS programme develops and delivers schemes on the Strategic Road Network. There are five schemes which until recently were proposed for delivery in the RIS3 programme (2025-2030). These have now earmarked for consideration as part of RIS4 (2030-2035).

A12/A14 Copdock Interchange (Junction 55)

This is one of the key SRN junctions linking the A14 and the A12, 14 miles to the west of the Port of Felixstowe and south of Ipswich. The current junction design is an existing capacity constraint and will come under increasing pressure from local growth across four districts and increased freight movement.

A120 Braintree to the A12

This route would create a modern dual carriageway connecting Braintree and the A12. This single-carriage section creates reliability, safety and capacity concerns. There is no rail alternative along the A120 corridor.

A11 Fiveways

Currently a high-risk area for collisions, improvements have been suggested to reduce these and improve journeys along the A11. The area has also been identified for significant growth in local plans.

M11 Junction 13

Suffers from congestion and safety issues as a key connection between traffic on the M11 and A10 accommodating traffic serving both Cambridge and strategic through traffic from the east and west.

A47 Wisbech

Supports growth and address safety and capacity concerns at a key junction serving the town.

In addition it is expected that the locations identified as part of the OxCam Road Study and A47 improvement schemes in Norfolk will be taken forward to be delivered as part of RIS3, as well as those projects committed in RIS1 and RIS2 for the East of England that have not yet been completed.



Major Road Network (MRN) Upgrades

Several Major Road Network projects which are led by our partner Local Transport Authorities are identified below. These schemes will reduce congestion and support economic growth and new homes, creating a more resilient road network.

Many also support sustainable transport improvements alongside road upgrades. These all require government funding to progress to construction.

MRN schemes in the East include:

- Ely to Cambridge A10 Junction and Corridor Improvements CPCA
- A1139 University Centre Access Road Peterborough
- A10 Corridor Scheme, Broxbourne, Hertfordshire
- Vauxhall Way Improvements, Luton
- Business Park Access Road, Luton
- A12 East of Ipswich (A14-A1152), Suffolk
- Norwich Western Link, Norfolk
- A10 West Winch Housing Access Relief Road, Norfolk
- Long Stratton Bypass, Norfolk
- Army & Navy Sustainable Transport Package, Chelmsford, Essex

For more detailed information on the schemes noted within this document, please refer to the transport strategies from:

Transport East, www.transporteast.gov.uk and
England's Economic Heartland, www.englandseconomicheartland.com