



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

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4 August 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RESPONSE TO CALL FOR EVIDENCE: Cambridge – Milton Keynes - Oxford
'growth corridor'.**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above call for evidence. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe, representing some 23,000 spatial planners. The Institute seeks to advance the science and art of spatial planning for the benefit of the public. As well as promoting spatial planning, the RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, training and development.

Please see our evidence below.

Yours faithfully,

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Many places across the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford corridor have very successful local economies and are perceived as highly desirable places to live.

What have been the key drivers of that success?

1. High levels of public investment in universities and leading health care institutions maintained over several decades (Oxford, Cambridge); a full range of new town infrastructure investments¹ (MK 1970s-1980s, now rather limited); excellent locations close to London and well connected to other places too; strong desire to use university as the basis of economic growth including real estate investments and a special relaxed attitude to the use of intellectual property (Cambridge).

What is holding back further growth and greater productivity?

2. Lack of strong governance at city region scale; low levels of public investment in all types of infrastructure especially at local level, and especially concerning local public transport; policy of public land disposal – slow speed, limited volume and at too high a price to achieve good housing outcomes (e.g. Northstowe, Cambridge); poor east-west connectivity (although this is a supposition and it is probably rather less a consideration than the others)

In particular, what planned or new infrastructure improvements would best support sustainable growth and promote innovation over the long-term?

3. Improvements to local public transport in the cities including Milton Keynes; very substantial increase in housing supply, especially housing which is affordable and which is in all tenure types.
4. We appreciate these are not necessarily the remit of the NIC, although our more general consultation responses to the Commission have stressed that treatment of housing needs careful consideration.
5. As regards the more prominent responsibilities of the NIC, we would draw attention to the work of the East-West Rail Consortium which would seek to put E/W rail connectivity on a more level playing field with E/W road connectivity, possibly achieving a modal shift in transport and possibly some small diversion of traffic out of central London (although we are not experts on that kind of assessment).

¹ Our observation is that there is a strong correlation between levels of **public** investment in infrastructure and levels of **private** housing completions. Both peaked in 1960s for example

6. It is not otherwise the role of a professional body to identify specific transport investments, but we are strongly of the opinion that investments in road and rail should be considered very much in terms of the housing capacity they unlock. Such investments should be part funded by increases in land value they bring about.

Active Travel

7. As well as improved rail and highway links, opportunities for methods of active transport between towns should be explored here too. Cambridge and London are good intra city/town based examples but tech clusters interconnected by cycle routes could have a dramatic impact on tackling climate change, health and obesity. There are lessons to be learned from the vast network of inter-city cycle routes in [the Netherlands](#).

Does the corridor require better connectivity to other major centres of growth?

8. No comment

Does the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford area, including Northampton, form a recognizable economic corridor?

9. We would agree the Cambridge – Mk – Oxford forms an economic corridor. The inclusion of Northampton is a little strange as it is not in line with the other cities. There are other places on either side of the corridor of economic importance such as Stevenage which are not included. There are other places such as Aylesbury whose connectivity into the corridor will be improved. So it would probably be simpler to concentrate on the main corridor.

What factors unite the area?

10. The following:
 - Tech and Advanced Manufacturing industries
 - Higher education and other research Institutions
 - Close to but not attached to the London economic powerhouse.

Would greater emphasis on corridor-wide planning and decision making benefit local communities and local economies?

11. Yes especially on housing supply and infrastructure investment.

Would that same emphasis on coordinated planning and decision making provide wider benefits for the UK economy?

12. If this corridor is planned better the UK economy would benefit. If coordinated planning and decision making took place in other parts of England that would also benefit the UK economy. The RTPI and IPPR North have been working

over the last year on ideas for how the city regions and counties of Northern England could work together on matters such as corridors which concern more than a single city region².

Should adjacent towns and cities be incorporated into the corridor in terms of growth and infrastructure planning?

13. There are various places adjacent such as Stevenage, which has a high level of tech clustering³, but the incorporation of adjacent towns and cities could dilute the focus and effort of the initiative. Indeed we would question the inclusion of Northampton.
14. On the other hand consideration should be given to what happens *at either end* of the corridor. Transport planning in the corridor needs to take account of places beyond the end of it, notably Bristol/Bath (which have a large tech industry), Swindon (education, research and advanced manufacturing), Norwich and Ipswich. The East-West Rail study has included routes across Suffolk and Norfolk for some time.
15. Consideration of passenger flows in the Bristol-Norwich/Ipswich corridor needs to take into account future demand for freight going to and coming from Felixstowe.

Describe your vision to maximise growth, maintain a high quality environment, and deliver more jobs and homes across the corridor over the next 30 years:

Effective cooperation within and between city regions

16. We published work on strategic planning in 2015, which shows that the key challenge for all of England's cities and counties is to establish strong cooperative governance structures for each, driven by effective incentives from central government. Having identified housing and transport problems within the city regions of the corridor as probably the highest priority to solve, increasing the strength and authority of the structures in Oxford, MK and Cambridge is critical.
17. We would expect government to be forthcoming with further devolution offers and spending commitments, but quite reasonably only in return for a firm commitment to substantial increases in housing supply. However we also

² RTPI and Northern Powerhouse Blueprint for next 35 years unveiled <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/briefing-room/news-releases/2016/june/northern-powerhouse-blueprint-for-the-next-35-years-unveiled/>

³ Nathan, M., & Rosso, A. (2014). Mapping the UK's Digital Economy with Big Data. London: National Institute of Economic Research

recognise in our research that there is also a need for such city and county regions also to cooperate with each other⁴.

18. Our work on the Great North Plan has shown that cooperation between city and county regions can deliver benefits and has an emerging level of support in various business sectors.

Scenario building

19. As a consequence of effective forward planning over the long term and a sustained, high level of public investment, Milton Keynes has been able to grow rapidly both in economic output and in terms of population and housing over a long period. Oxford itself grew rapidly after the First World War, however in a much less well planned manner, which is now leaving a difficult legacy. The Wolfson Economic Prize was awarded in 2014 to the URBED consultancy for a proposal to double the size of Oxford sustainably.
20. Given the potential identified in all three cities in the corridor for further economic growth, it would be worth while the Commission testing a range of different scenarios for the future population and output of the corridor, and then identifying the levels of expenditure on transport education and health infrastructure which would be necessary to support each. This would also need to cover innovative ways in which funds could be raised within the corridor (e.g. through the capture of land value rises) to pay for them.
21. There is no “one” level of growth which would be appropriate – there would need to be a political choice made. The critical issue is that the level of economic growth chosen must be commensurate with the level of infrastructure spending made. This has in the recent past in England often been overlooked. Failing to make these connections will mean that growth will not materialise and/or labour will be drawn in over extensive distances, depriving other areas of skills.

Planning for Tech

22. As regards the specific strengths of the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, the RTPI published a study of the Tech and Advanced Manufacturing industries early in 2016. A common thread running through the narrative of the recent economic resurgence of many cities is a burgeoning technology sector. Indeed the Information Technology (tech) sector and the advanced manufacturing (AM) sectors are among the main drivers of growth in metropolitan areas today.

⁴ [RTPI Strategic Planning 2015](#)

- Digital job growth is predicted to outperform all other occupation categories by 2026,
- Britain's technology sector is set to grow four times faster than GDP this year.
- There are over 47,000 digital technology companies across the UK⁵.
- The literature surrounding tech and the UK shows the highest levels of tech clustering in areas identified in the corridor such as Cambridge and Milton Keynes⁶.

23. Our paper identified two interactions between planning and tech. Firstly that well planned cities and regions work better at attracting and generating tech jobs. Whilst the Cambridge-Oxford corridor currently performs well, failure to plan the cities more effectively does put future investment at risk.

24. Secondly, we observe that tech and AM economies tend to be economically insular and profits are highly spatially and socially concentrated. Effective urban planning can work to ameliorate this. We set out how.

25. Infrastructure is not simply meeting needs but unlocking new possibilities. The planning of new transport infrastructure should not only cater for expansion of and connectivity between tech clusters (although it would be reasonable for these to be the starting point), but also for housing and access to community assets such as schools, hospitals and amenity assets (such as green corridors and existing waterways). In order to realise this vision, it is imperative that the opportunity should be taken to have infrastructure strategically placed to unlock sites for the above. Therefore any plan for rail or road routes should take into consideration what would otherwise be good locations for housing were it not for poor connections. Such calculations should also take into consideration the potential for releasing public sector land.

What does that mean for growth and infrastructure investment in your area?

26. No comment

What steps are currently being taken to realise that vision, and what more needs to be done?

27. No comment

⁵ [RTPI Planning and Tech](#)

⁶ Nathan, M., & Rosso, A. (2014). Mapping the UK's Digital Economy with Big Data. London: National Institute of Economic Research

What value could new cross-corridor intercity road and rail links bring? How do these compare to other transport initiatives e.g. intra-city links, or wider infrastructure, priorities?

28. We consider that public transport within the cities is the most urgent priority for transport investment.

Are there lessons to be learnt from previous initiatives to maximise the potential of the corridor?

29. There has been a long and honourable practice of assessing the infrastructure requirements for the expansion of Cambridge undertaken as a result of the Cambridge Structure Plan 2003. Later work on Cambridge in particular was undertaken by the Cambridge Horizons organisation.

Are you aware of any examples of UK or international good practice, for example in respect of new technology, local frameworks or the built environment, that are relevant to this review?

30. There are some good examples to be found close by. The Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone, a 120 hectares brownfield site which SEMLEP launched in order to attract £152million of private sector investment. SEMLEP invested £5m towards a new railway station, £3m to improve road infrastructure and secured borrowing of £46m for the new university campus.

31. Temple Quarter in Bristol is another example, an enterprise zone which is home to rapidly growing clusters of start-up businesses in the creative, digital and High-Tech sectors. It has benefitted from significant investment in its infrastructure including £21 million to improve vehicle, cycling and pedestrian access for the area, £11 million for superfast broadband and £200 million for the citywide metro bus scheme. Delivery has required a range of stakeholders; The Council, land owner (HCS), infrastructure providers (Network Rail) the LEP⁷.

32. As an international example from Chicago, 'the City Technology Plan' has provided a roadmap for the sector and the city to work together to deal with challenges facing the city. The public-private technology plan lays out a roadmap to realize Chicago's potential as a city where technology fuels opportunity, inclusion, engagement, and innovation for all. The plan has accelerated job creation, improved the quality of life for Chicagoans, generated cost savings in government operations, provided increased digital access and skills, and encouraged civic engagement⁸.

⁷ [Planning and Tech RTPi p16](#)

⁸ [RTPi planning and Tech p6](#)

33. Finally see the URBED prize winning entry on Oxford⁹.

⁹ <http://urbed.coop/wolfson-economic-prize>