

Draft response to the ETP 2035 launch and public engagement exercise

The Council welcomes the progress to date on the Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) 2035 and its recent launch on the 4th September 2023. As a key stakeholder the Council is keen to continue to make a positive contribution to the ongoing preparation and development of this significant document for the city and wider city region. Given that the current, initial [Engagement Survey](#) is primarily and understandably targeted at individuals the Council wishes to provide some comments on the proposed approach and various aspects of the Plan including the draft Vision, Objectives and General Principles. The comments set out below are in addition to the issues raised in the Council's letter to the Department of 21st September 2023 (see attached) to which a separate response is anticipated.

- The Council is broadly supportive of the shift away from a 'predict and provide' approach towards a more proactive 'vision and validate' approach which seeks to establish an agreed vision for the Plan and tests whether future transport networks can help deliver on this vision. The shift in focus to creating places for people is welcome as it clearly aligns with the Council's vision for the city as set out in a range of documents including the Belfast Agenda and the Bolder Vision.
- The context set out by the Department, both in terms of wider societal challenges and specific shortcomings of the transport network appears to be sufficiently comprehensive, identifying the range of challenges facing society today. Again these issues and the need to address them are reflected in various plans and strategies that are being taken forward by the Council. It should be clarified if the Department intends to revisit the findings of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Study (May 2020) to assess the impact of COVID-19 and any other relevant factors which may have subsequently influenced travel patterns and behaviours.
- The Council whilst generally supportive of the Vision for the ETP 2035 considers that the extent to which the Plan will successfully deliver and integrate will be dependent on the specific policies, proposals and initiatives that emerge as the Plan develops. It is anticipated that there will be further opportunity for participation in the development of these detailed policies. The Council would welcome the opportunity for early engagement in respect of the emerging proposals and policies.
- To ensure coherence it is suggested that there is a minor revision to the draft Vision with "*...an attractive, inclusive and safe economic region for all...*" being amended to read "*...an attractive, inclusive, safe and economically prosperous city region for all...*".
- The proposed draft Objectives, associated Guiding Principles and categories of transport network appear consistent and should assist in delivering on the Plan Vision. The Council appreciates that there is no 'one size fits all' approach for the varied areas covered by the ETP and supports the anticipated flexibility that will be necessary in the application of the guiding

principles across different geographies. For example, Belfast City Centre is a unique space within the Plan Area where the needs of public transport and people should be addressed proportionately and weighted to the movement of people with alignment to the civic spine.

- In terms of the timetabling for the ETP 2035 the Council still has concerns as to the practicalities of how the Transport Plan can be developed in a phased approach which supports and is aligned with the publication of Belfast's LDP Local Policies Plan (LPP) and the LDPs of the other four councils which results in a single coherent and consistent statutory Transport Plan for the region. The Council needs assurance from the Department that the preparation and publication of the Belfast LPP will not be delayed or hindered by the ETP and that the outputs of the ETP are phased in line with the LDP/LPP. Similarly, it will be crucial to ensure that projects can still progress whilst the Transport Plan is being developed and that schemes such as Bankmore Link, Frederick Street Junction and Belfast Streets Ahead will not be adversely impacted. We support the overall approach but stress that this must be followed up with the policy and resource to implement the transformation change that is required to deliver on our Climate commitments.

As already outlined the Council is broadly supportive of the Department's proposed approach to the preparation of the ETP and welcomes that progress is being made. Although the Council encourages the Department to ensure key decisions are taken at an early stage to allow adequate design and planning time to unlock major capital investment in the city - in advance of waiting for the entirety of the Plan. The Council looks forward to continued engagement and involvement in the development of this key document for the city. I thank you in anticipation for your response to the queries and suggestions included in this correspondence and should you wish to discuss any of these matters or need clarification please do not hesitate to contact Kate Bentley (bentleyk@belfastcity.gov.uk) as our officer representative on the Project Board for ETP 2035.