

HERTFORDSHIRE | ESSEX RAPID TRANSIT



Our transport system **re-imagined**

HERT

A CLEANER, GREENER, HEALTHIER FUTURE



Public Engagement Summary, 2023

Foreword

Hertfordshire County Council is working to improve the quality of life for all residents. We want our county to be a place where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential in thriving communities and our precious environment is protected for the future.

Creating a sustainable transport network across Hertfordshire and connecting into west Essex is central to this vision, with the Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit (HERT) presenting one of our biggest opportunities to reduce our carbon emissions, support our counties' growth and connect our communities like never before.

This summary provides the findings from our first public engagement period for the HERT, where we set out our vision for the scheme and asked the public and stakeholders for their feedback. Almost 75,000 visited the HERT webpage during the public engagement period to find out more about the project. Well over 1,500 members of the public and stakeholders shared their views through our online survey and by emailing feedback, and many more commented on the proposals through social media.

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to share your views on the HERT. The public engagement period has provided valuable insight into people's views on the project. We are pleased to see a high level of support for the vision and objectives of the scheme, with overwhelming support from 18–24-year-olds and encouragingly, 68% of respondents to the survey suggested that they would be likely to use the HERT.

This feedback is being used to shape the continued development of this hugely exciting, pioneering project that provides the opportunity to reset people's perception of transport and their behaviours in the future.



RICHARD ROBERTS

Leader of the Council
Hertfordshire County Council



PHIL BIBBY

Executive Member for
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Hertfordshire County Council

Introduction

The Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit (HERT) will be a new, sustainable passenger transport network. Last year Hertfordshire County Council held a 10-week public engagement period about the HERT, sharing information about the vision, route and aims of the HERT and giving local people the opportunity to share their thoughts on the proposals. In this summary we will outline the feedback we received during the public engagement period and the next steps for the project.

The HERT will deliver a step-change in the passenger transport network through an accessible, reliable and affordable east-west transit system which connects people easily to where they live, work and visit. The HERT will support economic growth, improve the environment and positively impact our existing and new communities. It will also connect with north-south rail lines to create new sustainable journey options across the whole of Hertfordshire and beyond.



The HERT corridor

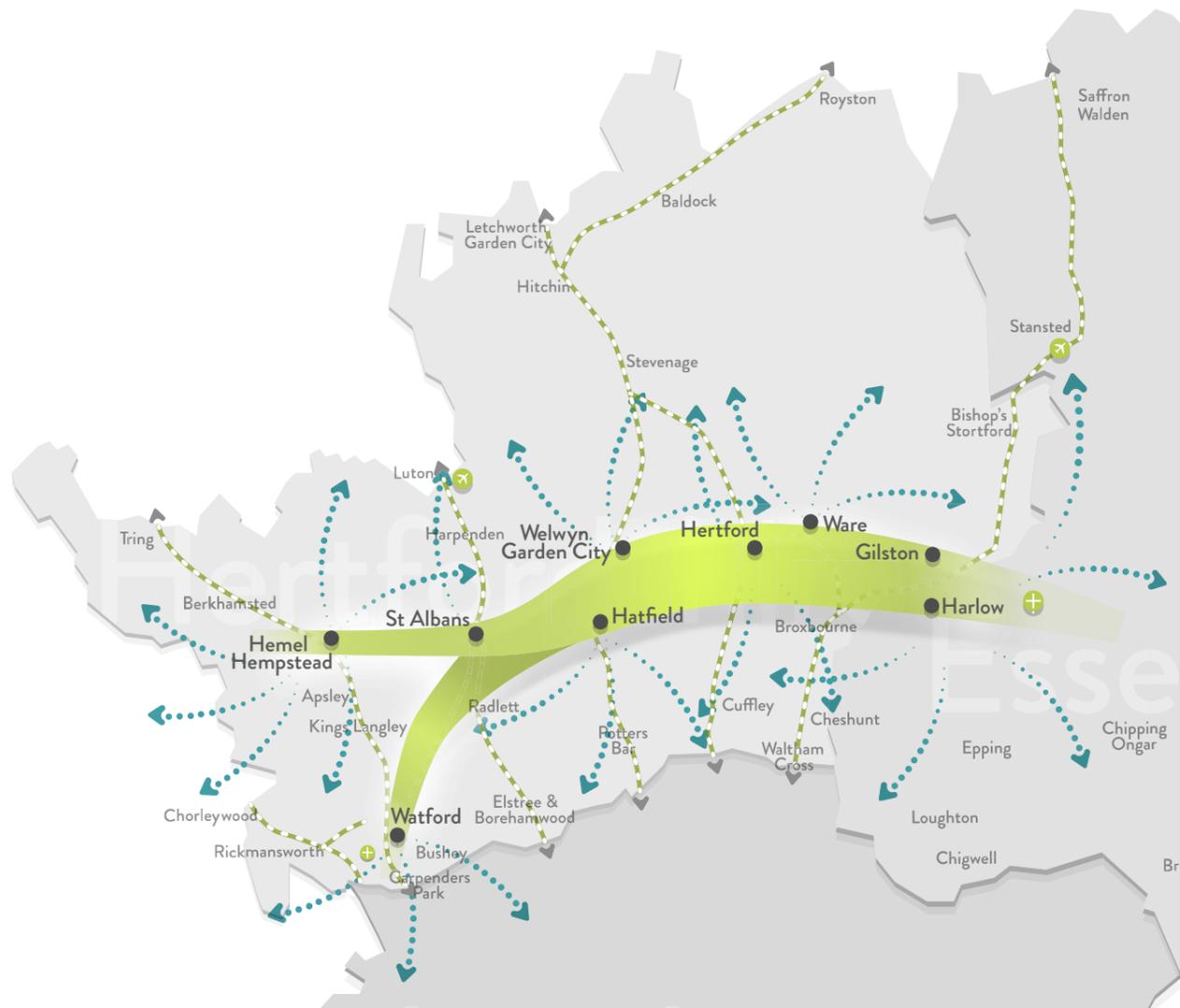
The HERT will form an east-west transport corridor that runs from Watford and Hemel Hempstead in the west to Harlow (Essex) in the east. The proposed HERT corridor will be split into three sections:

➔ **Hemel Hempstead – Gilston:** This is the main east-west section that will serve the main settlements between Hemel Hempstead and the new Gilston Garden Town. It will also improve connections to Luton Airport via interchange in St Albans.

➔ **St Albans – Watford:** This north-south section will operate between St Albans and Watford. This corridor is currently served by the Abbey Line with potential for onward connections to west Watford.

➔ **Gilston – Harlow (and onward connections to Stansted Airport):** This section will provide links from Gilston Garden Town and into Harlow, providing improved onward connections to Stansted Airport.

It is likely that these sections will be delivered in phases as funding becomes available and in line with planned development.



The HERT solution

The vision for the HERT is to provide zero-emission vehicles with a modern, comfortable and spacious design that is easy and accessible for all passengers to use. The details around how the HERT will operate, the exact route it will take, and the type of vehicles it will use will be explored through detailed technical studies and further public engagement at a later stage.

Over the next 15 years, Hertfordshire County Council will be supporting the District and Borough Councils' plan for more than 100,000 new homes and 100,000 new jobs across the county to meet our needs. A significant number of these homes will be built along the HERT corridor.

Why the HERT?

The HERT is being developed to improve Hertfordshire's transport network in a sustainable way. To do this we need to strike the balance between looking after our environment, our people, and our economy to deliver positive outcomes for our communities.

The HERT will create attractive travel choices, offer an alternative to the car and will make it easier to access current and future job opportunities, providing businesses with greater access to skilled people.

Creating a cleaner, greener transport system, reducing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions, providing a sustainable alternative, and improving walking, cycling and passenger transport integration.

Providing a convenient and competitively priced system, enabling people to access a wide range of services, improving quality of life in our communities by creating links to walking and cycling routes, connecting communities and delivering an accessible transport system.



The HERT public engagement period



The HERT public engagement period took place between 18 November 2021 and 28 January 2022.



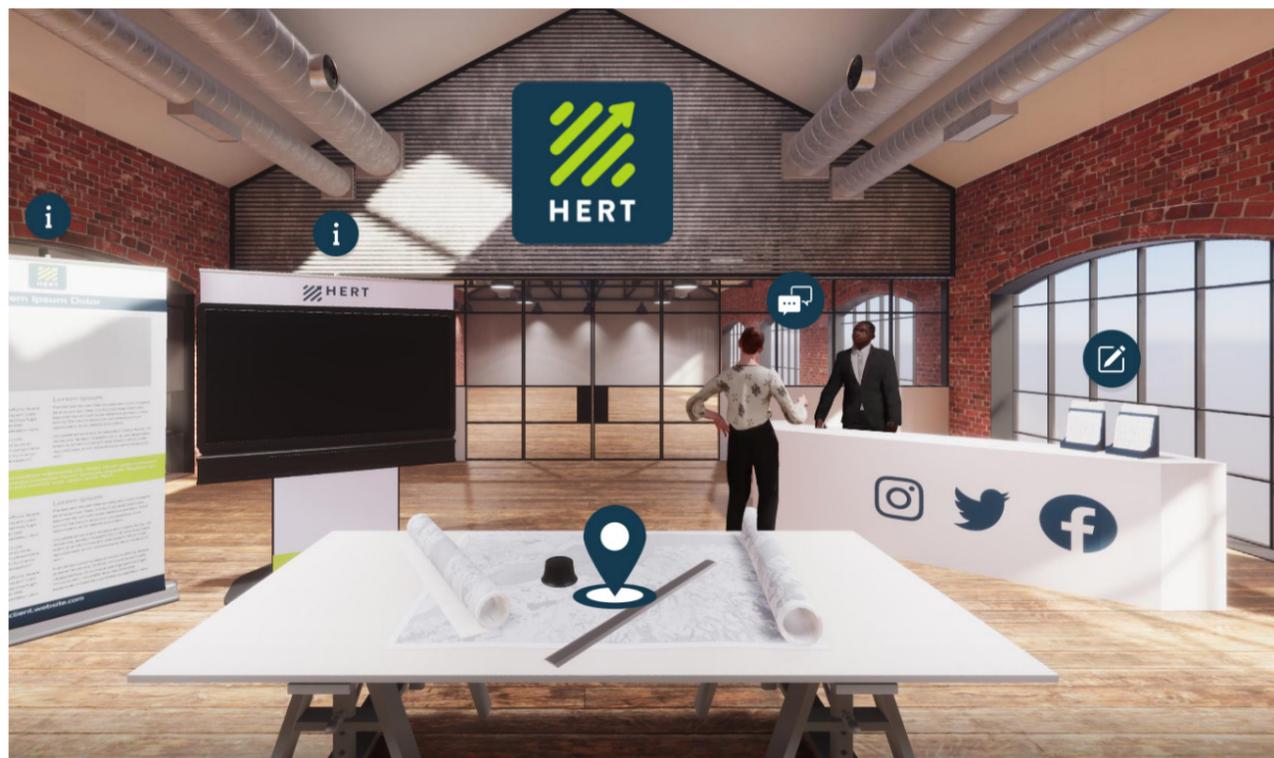
We raised awareness of the vision and potential benefits of the HERT and gathered feedback.



We created a brochure, virtual exhibition space, webpage, animated film and held online events to share information about the proposals.



We promoted the public engagement period through social media posts and adverts, press coverage, emails to stakeholders and councillors, Update Me bulletins, posters in libraries and at bus stops and a radio advertisement.



The HERT public engagement in numbers

916

respondents fully completed the survey, with a further 817 respondents partially completing it

55

written responses from stakeholders

1,700

visitors to the HERT virtual exhibition, and 900 views of HERT animated film on YouTube

74,647

people viewed information about the HERT on the project webpage

75%

of survey respondents stated that they either 'strongly support' or 'support' the HERT vision

648

comments on Facebook and Instagram advertisements

55

pieces of press coverage with 111,000 estimated coverage views

Approximately **128,000**

people heard about the HERT through a radio advert

Online survey

An online survey was the main mechanism through which respondents could submit their feedback to the public engagement. It was hosted on SmartSurvey, a web-based survey tool, and accessible through the HERT webpage and virtual exhibition room.

Participants were also able to access a printed copy of the questionnaire on request and to submit that through email or by post to the council.

The survey aimed to get feedback on whether local residents and stakeholders support the vision and ambitions for the HERT and how it can meet their aspirations for a high-quality transport system in the future.

The first section sought information on existing travel habits. The second section was specific to the HERT scheme and sought views on vision, route, future usage and benefits.

We asked 21 questions, which were a mixture of multiple choice and free text. This document provides an overview of the public engagement findings and as such does not outline the results of every question. 916 respondents completed and submitted the full survey and 817 respondents input information but did not reach the end of the survey. All responses were included in the analysis for completeness.

The vast majority (97%) of participants provided their own response to the survey, whilst the remaining 3% responses were completed on behalf of a business, community organisation, statutory body, or elected representative.



Respondents

Age

Respondents to the survey were asked to indicate their age bracket. Population data estimates that 42.2% of Hertfordshire's population is 34 or under, 40.7% of the population are between 35 and 64 and 19.4% of the population is over 64 (Census 2021, Office for National Statistics).

Most survey respondents indicated that they are in the middle age ranges, with 55% of respondents aged between 35 and 64. 25% of respondents were aged 34 or below. This suggests an above average proportion of middle-aged people responded to the public engagement.

Younger age groups were under-represented, with only 10% of respondents aged 24 or under. While not unusual for a survey of this kind, further work will need to be carried out to engage younger age groups with the HERT, especially as this group will be the potential HERT users of the future.

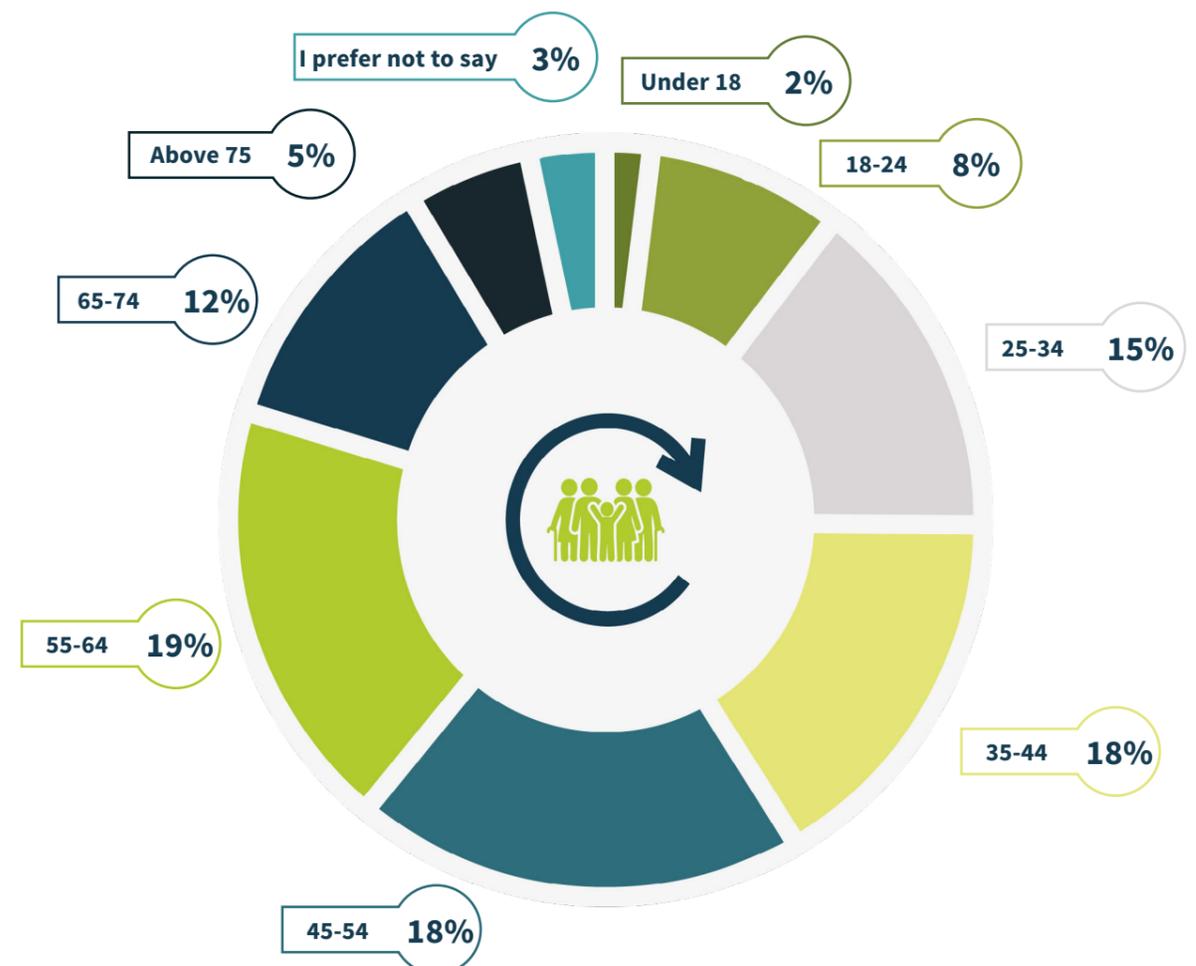


Figure 1- Age groups of respondents

Base: all who provided a response (1,201)

Where respondents live

Respondents were asked to provide the first four digits of their postcode. The highest volume of respondents came from the SG14 area, which contains the town of Hertford, as well as the nearby settlements of Bengoe, Watton at Stone, Hertingfordbury, Waterford and Bramfield. The top ten postcodes submitted are shown in the Figure 2 below:

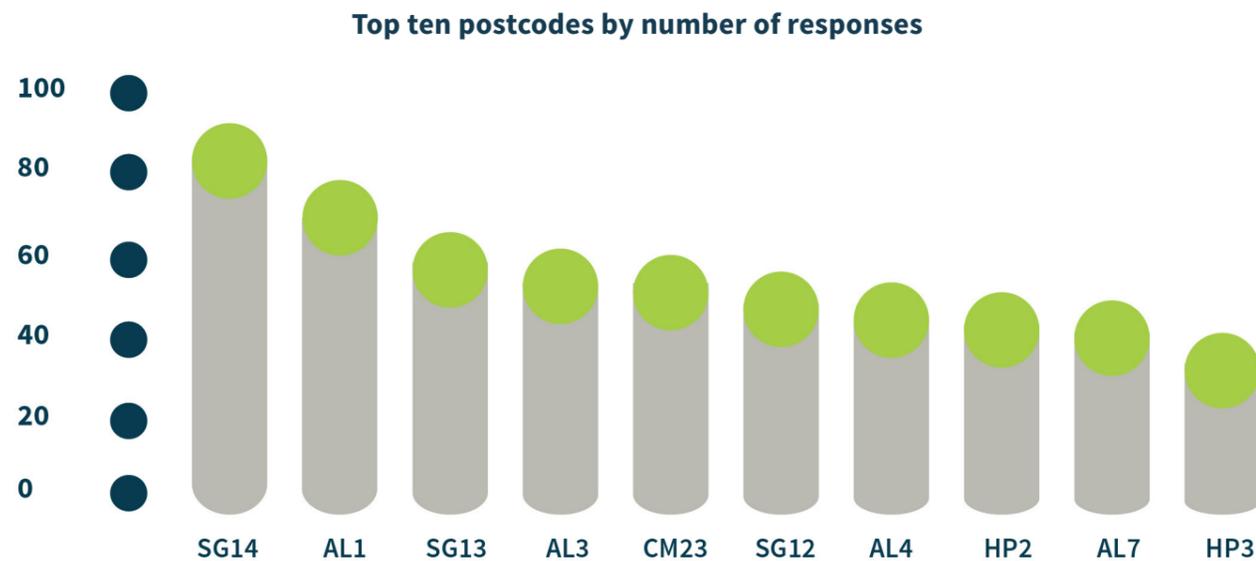


Figure 2 – Top ten postcodes
Base: all who provided a response (1,189)

Illnesses and disabilities

Respondents were asked whether they had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more. 1178 people responded to this question, with 78% answering no, and 15% answering yes. This is in line with the 14.4% of Hertfordshire residents who stated that they have a disability under the Equality Act in the Census 2021 (2021 Census, Office for National Statistics).

Travel habits

Methods of transport

Respondents were asked about methods of transport they used pre-pandemic. They were asked to respond using a six-point scale ranging from 'more than once a day' through to 'never use'.

Figure 3 below shows that the most popular form of transport pre-pandemic was walking, with 57% of respondents stating they walked every day or more than once a day. 36% of respondents drove a car every day or more than once a day. Use of public transport was less frequent, with 11% of respondents indicating that they caught a train every day or more than once a day and 6% the bus.

Respondents were also asked whether their transport methods had changed since the pandemic. 59% (599 respondents) stated that their transport methods had changed. When asked what the change is, the proportion of respondents walking at least once a day is broadly similar at 51%, but the proportion of respondents driving at least once a day decreased from 36% to 20%.

Thinking about your typical weekly travel (pre-coronavirus), on average, how often did you use the following methods of transport? Please select all modes that are relevant to you

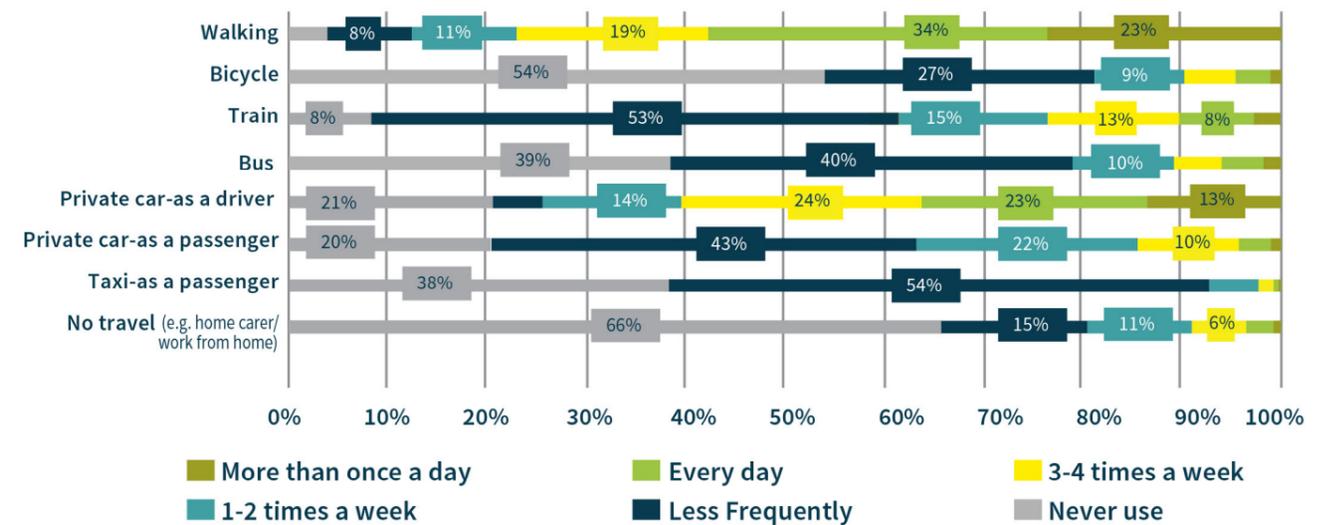


Figure 3– methods of transport

Base: all who provided a response (n:1017). Please note that percentages of 5% and below have not been labelled. Modes of transport used by 5% or less of respondents (motorbike, electric scooter, wheeling, van or lorry, taxi - as a driver and 'other') have not been included in the graph. 'Wheeling' refers to the use of walking aids like wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

Main issues with public transport

Respondents were asked what they felt the main issues with the current local public transport system are. The results of this are shown in Figure 4. The most frequent choice was infrequent services, with 20% of responses selecting this option, followed by unreliable journey times with 16% of respondents selecting this.

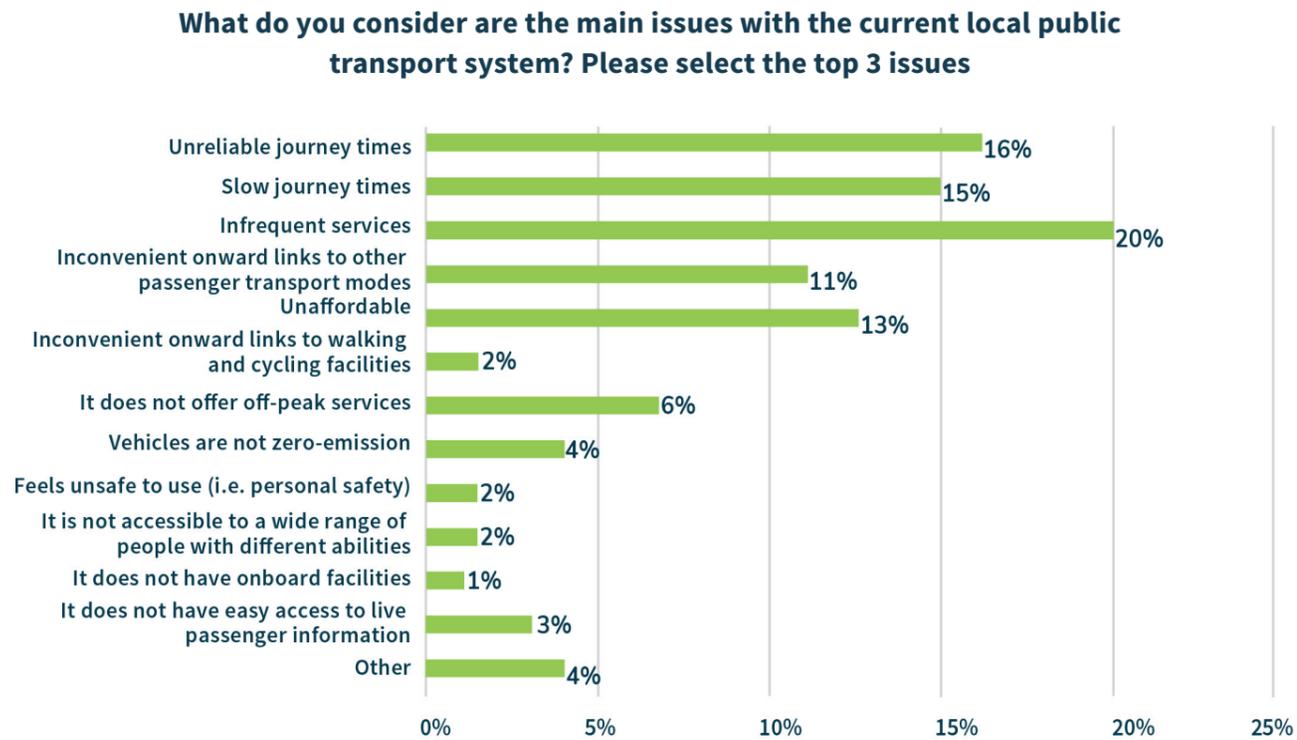


Figure 4- Main issues with current public transport

Base: all who provided a response (n: 2795 multiple choice options selected)

Respondents were given the opportunity to give additional detail on this question. The most frequent comment was that public transport is too London-focussed and that east-west, cross-county journeys are poor. 14% of respondents noted that, for many cross-county journeys, they would have to travel into London and back out again in order to use public transport, adding a significant amount of time to the journey.

The second most frequent comment was that the service frequency is poor, particularly for buses and that evening and weekend services are non-existent for many bus routes.

Journey purpose

We asked respondents what their journey purposes were when using public transport pre-pandemic. They were able to select multiple answers and the results are shown in Figure 5 below. The most popular journey purpose for public transport pre-pandemic was leisure and entertainment, with 42% of responses selecting this option. Commuting to school or university received the fewest responses with 6% selecting this option, although figure is likely impacted by the limited number of people in younger age brackets who responded to the survey.

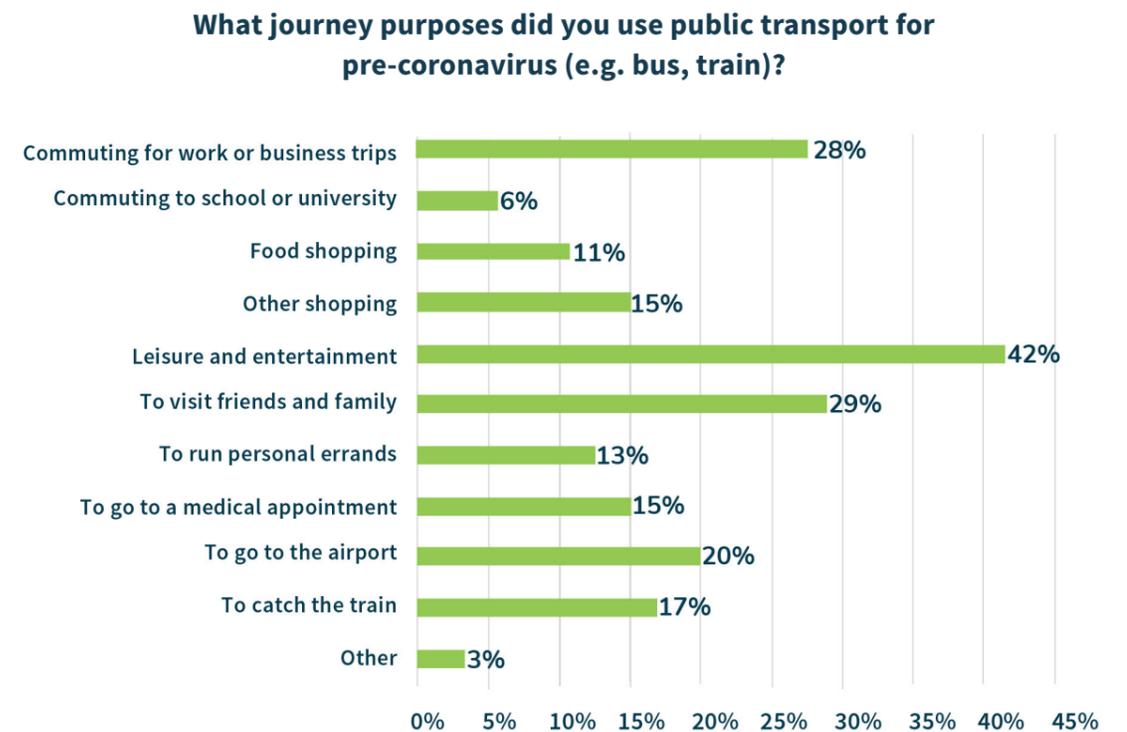


Figure 5- Reasons for using public transport pre-pandemic

Base: all who provided a response (n: 3414 multiple choice responses)

Journey planning tools

We asked respondents about their favourite journey planning tool. The first part of the question asked whether their favoured journey planning tool is app/online based, and 73% (747 respondents) stated that it is. The second part of the question asked respondents to specify their favoured online journey planning tools. 26% commented that Google Maps was their preferred choice when planning a journey, followed by National Rail (15%) and Trainline (12%).

The HERT proposals

The next section of the survey aimed to get feedback from respondents on aspects of the HERT proposals, including the types of features that they would like the HERT to have and types of trips they will use the HERT for.

Features of the HERT

Reliable journey time was the highest priority for respondents, with 73% selecting this as their first choice. Service frequency was the second most important feature, with 71% of respondents selecting this. Onboard facilities were seen as the least important feature, with only 24% of respondents seeing it as important.

Types of trip

We asked respondents what kind of journeys they would be most likely to use the HERT for. The most popular choice was to visit friends and family (18%), followed by leisure and entertainment (13%) and to run personal errands (13%). Respondents also expressed a desire for the HERT to link with other transport modes, with 13% saying they would use the HERT to catch a train and 8% to go to the airport.

What types of trips could you see yourself using the HERT for?

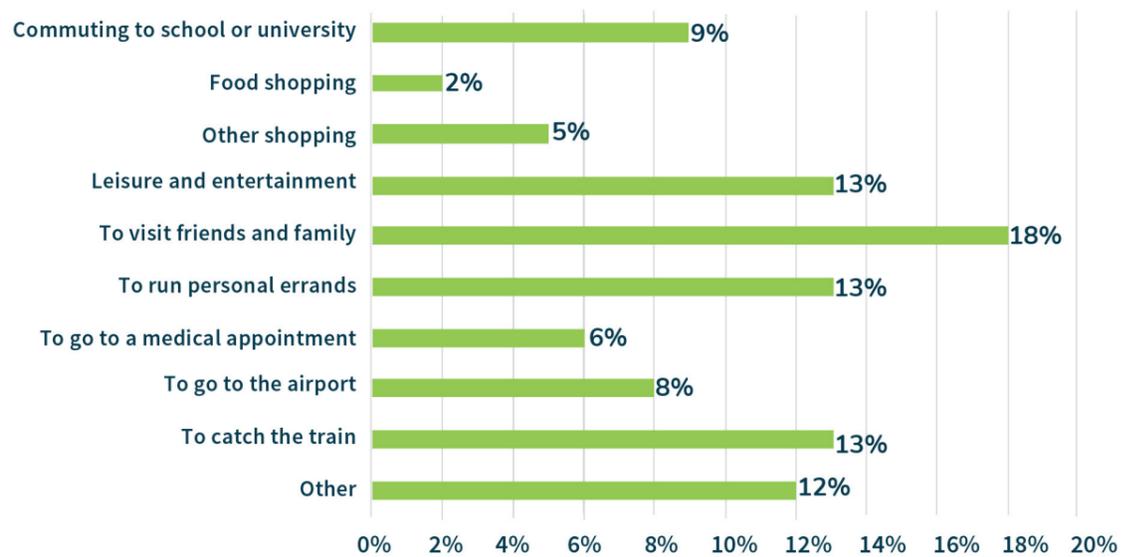


Figure 6- Types of trip respondents will use the HERT for

Base: all who provided a response (n: 3509 multiple choice options selected)

Likelihood of using the HERT

Respondents were also asked how likely they were to use the HERT when it is built. The most popular response was 'certainly will use the HERT' with 27% of respondents selecting this. A combined 68% of respondents selected that they would be likely to, almost certain to, or certain to use the HERT.

Potential benefits of the HERT

Respondents were asked about the potential benefits of the HERT. The question consisted of three statements about the environment, the economy, and people. Respondents agreed or disagreed with each statement, with the results are shown below in Figure 7.

Most respondents agreed with each of the statements, with 59% supporting or strongly supporting the people statement, 69% supporting or strongly supporting the economy statement, and 74% supporting or strongly supporting the environment statement.

In general, thinking about the benefits the HERT could bring to our environment, our people and our economy how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: (905 responses)

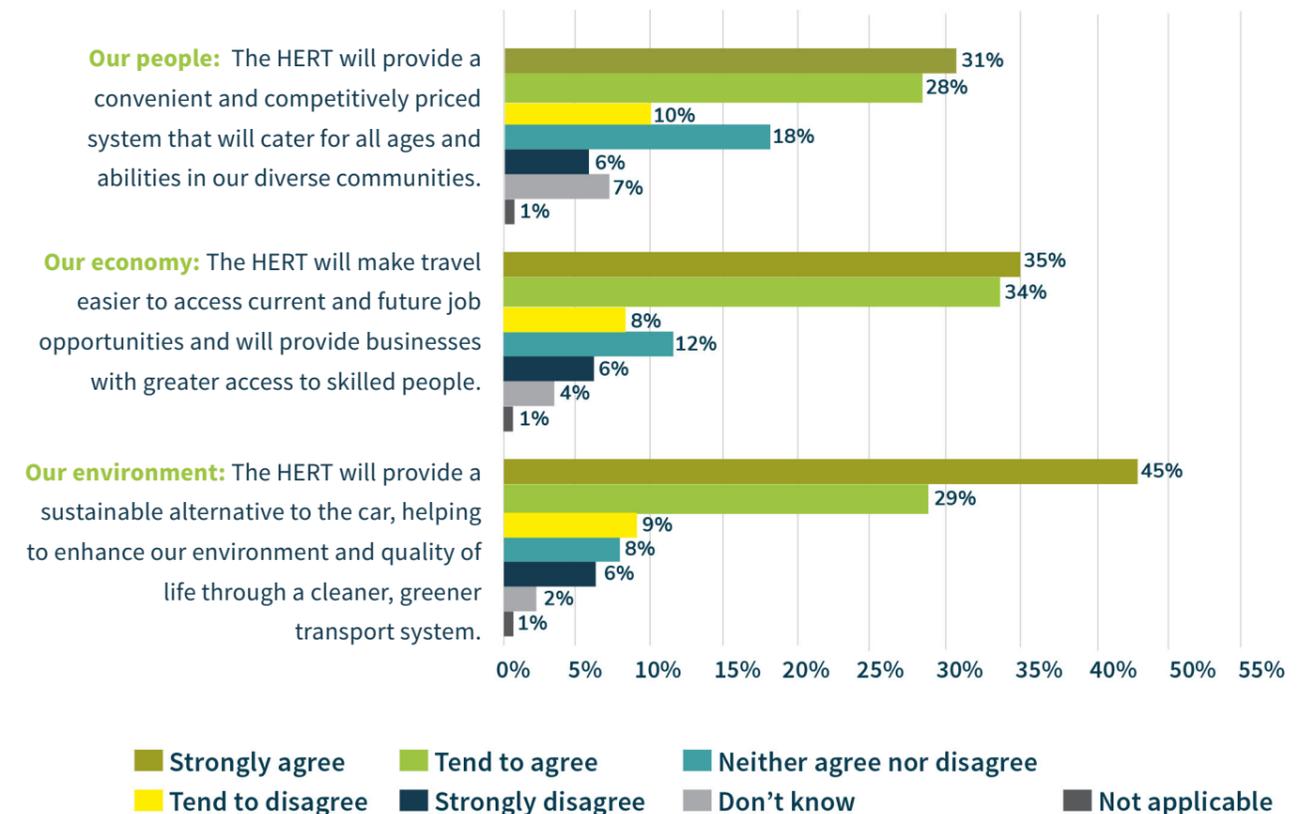


Figure 7- Benefits of the HERT

Base: all who provided a response (n: 905)

Respondents were given the opportunity to add more detail to their answers on the potential benefits of the HERT. The most frequent response given, which accounted for 16% of the comments received, related to a feeling among respondents that as the plans for the HERT are still in the early stages, they didn't have enough information to offer feedback on the potential benefits of the HERT. The next most frequent comment theme was that the HERT would improve accessibility across the county and allow easy travel to destinations in Hertfordshire and Essex, with 12% of comments mentioning this.

Levels of support

Respondents were asked about their level of support for the vision for the HERT.

Figure 8 below shows that respondents were overwhelmingly positive, with 75% supporting or strongly supporting the vision.

Respondents were given the opportunity to add more detail in their responses to this question. The most frequently response with 13% of comments mentioning this was support for the vision for the HERT because it will improve accessibility across Hertfordshire and in to Essex, particularly for east-west journeys.

The next two most mentioned comment themes were that the respondent's support for the vision for the HERT would depend on the chosen vehicle and the locations served in the final iteration of the project, with 10% and 9% of responses mentioning these respectively.

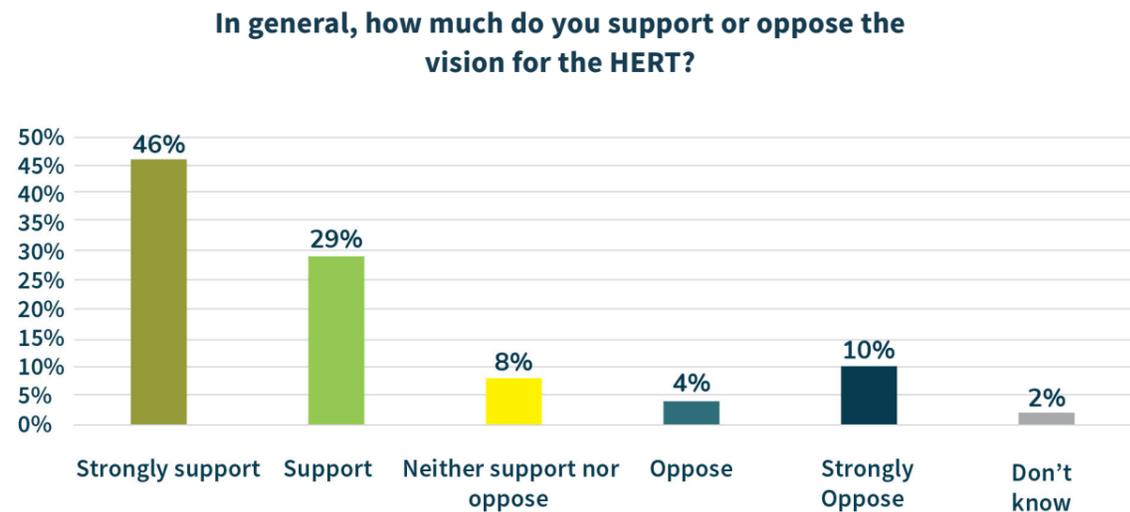


Figure 8- Support for the vision for the HERT

Base: all who provided a response (n: 987 responses)

Levels of support by age range

Figure 9 shows the levels of support for the HERT by age group. Support was strongest among younger age groups, with 90% of 18–24-year-olds supporting or strongly supporting the vision. Although the extent of support was lowest in the 55–64 age range, there was still a relatively high level of support with more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents in this age group indicating that they supported or strongly supported the vision for the HERT.

Please indicate your age and in general, how much do you support or oppose the vision for the HERT?

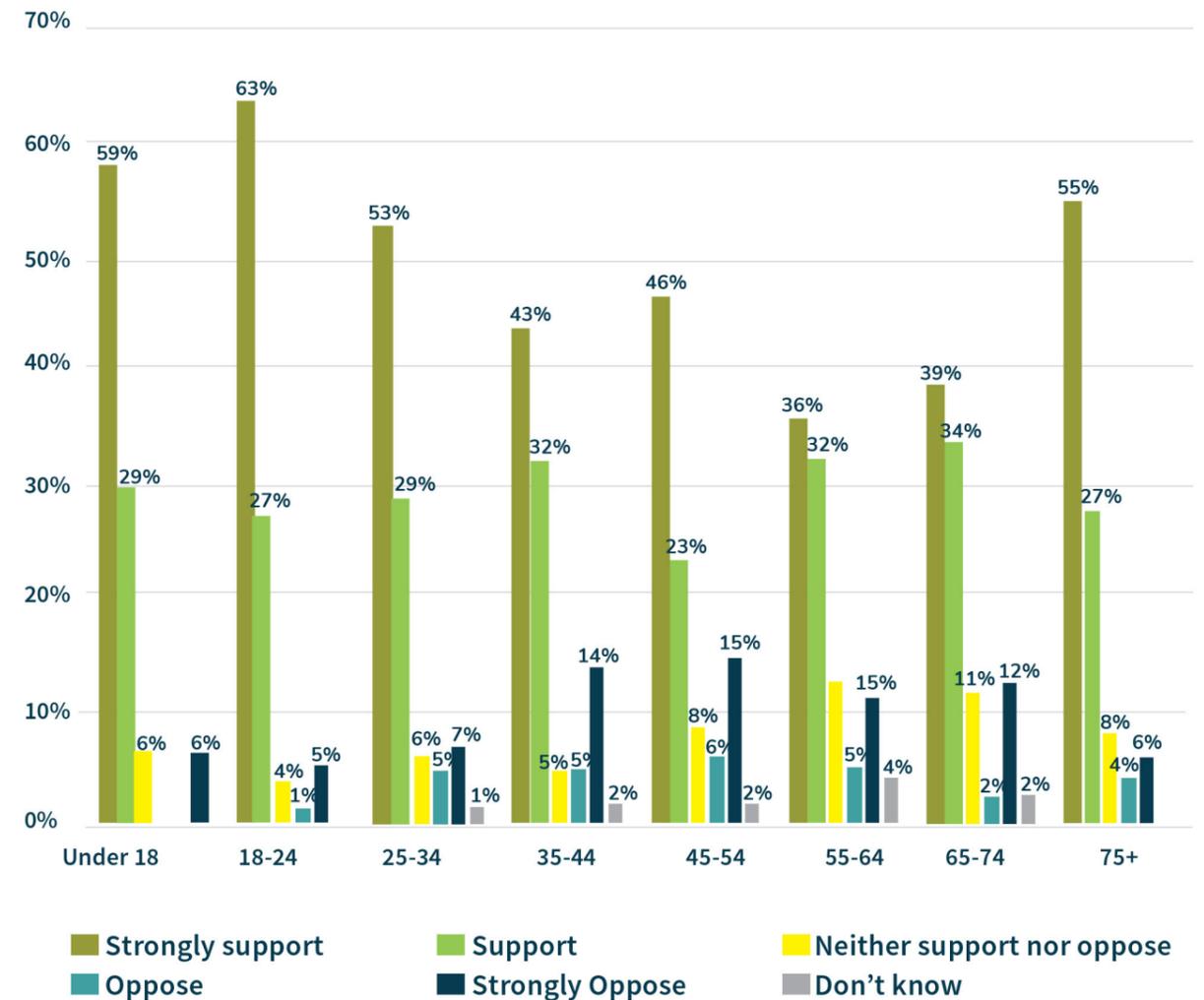


Figure 9- Levels of support for the HERT by age range

Base: All who provided a response (n: 1198 for Q5 and 996 for Q14)

Levels of support by geographic area

To get an idea of differences across geographic areas, we have mapped levels of support for the HERT by respondent postcodes.

Figure 10 shows that the most supportive responses to the scheme were based around the centre of the county. This area encompasses Hertford town centre and St Albans. Support for the HERT can also be seen from other areas, including Hemel Hempstead and Bishop's Stortford.

It is clear that the opposing views are more prevalent further away from the potential route of the HERT, whereas closer to the potential route, generally opinions shift to positive, either 'strongly support' or 'support'.

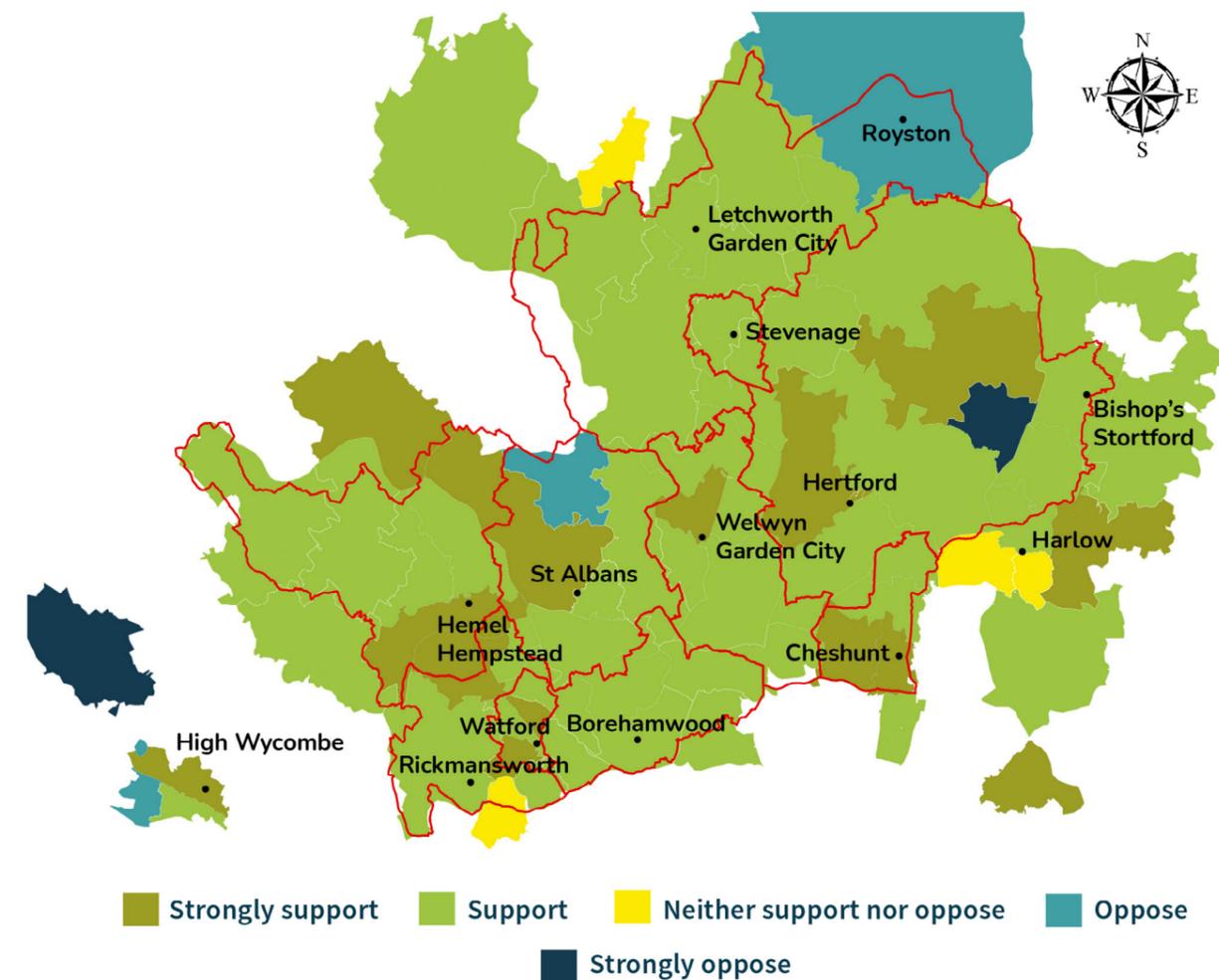


Figure-10 Levels of support by postcode

Other engagement with individuals and stakeholders

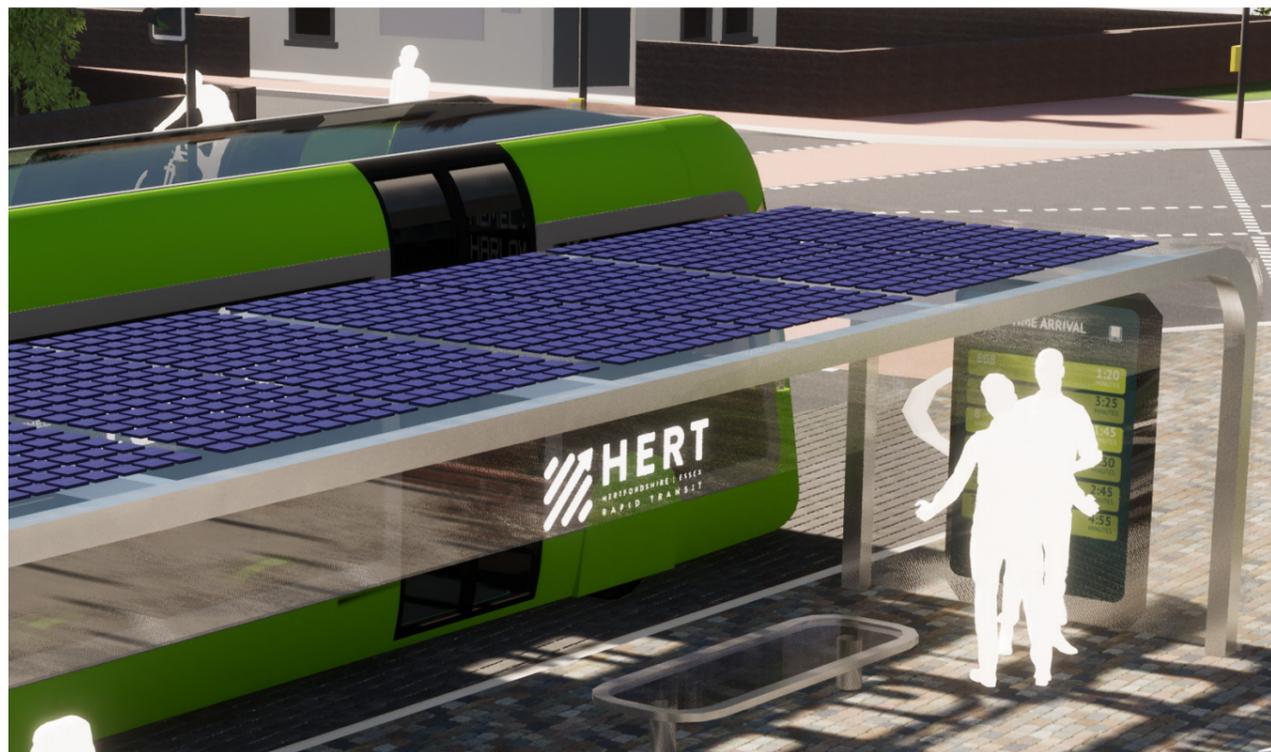
During the public engagement period, Hertfordshire County Council received eight written responses from individuals and 24 from organisations, which were all received by email through the dedicated HERT inbox. The table below shows a summary of the responses.

Theme	Summary
Support in principle for the plans	Many respondents noted their support for the scheme and looked forward to further information being shared.
Thoughts on the potential route	A number of respondents gave suggestions of the route the HERT should take, with ideas including Hemel Hempstead railway station, St Albans, Stansted Airport, Welwyn Garden City and Gilston. Some respondents felt it important that the HERT links with existing public transport facilities.
Suggestions on type of vehicle	Suggestions were made on the type of vehicle the HERT should be, with mentions of trackless trams and buses. It was felt by some that it is important that journey times are fast to encourage people to use the HERT instead of their cars.
This doesn't benefit North Hertfordshire	Organisations based in North Hertfordshire felt that the HERT would be of no direct benefit to residents there.
It won't happen/ will take too long	Some concerns were raised about a perceived lack of urgency in introducing road infrastructure improvements; it was asked what will happen between now and 2030. Some concerns were also raised about the potential cost of the project.

Meetings and briefings

Before and during the public engagement period the HERT team held a number of meetings and briefings with key stakeholders, informing them about the project, collecting feedback and encouraging the stakeholders to share information about the HERT with their contacts. The groups the HERT team met with included:

- Local MPs
- District, borough, parish and county council Member
- Herts Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership
- Transport East
- CoMoUK
- Herts Chamber of Commerce
- Herts LEP
- Transport for All
- Campaign for Better Transport
- Herts Innovation Corridor
- England's Economic Heartland Conference
- Stansted Transport Forum
- Gascoyne Cecil



Public engagement findings

The public engagement period had a wide reach and built awareness of the project publicly. Approximately 1.2 million people live in Hertfordshire (Census 2021, Office for National Statistics). During the public engagement period we reached approximately 600,000 people through bus stop posters, radio adverts and press coverage.

Analysis of the responses shows high level support for the vision and objectives of the scheme from members of the public and stakeholders alike. The vision and long-term aims of the HERT have been clearly articulated, though a number of respondents noted that they were reluctant to commit to a clear opinion until more details are shared about the route, and in particular the type of vehicle that would be used.

Despite their overall numbers being under-represented in the responses, support for the HERT is particularly high among younger age groups, with 90% of 18–24-year-olds supporting or strongly supporting the vision.

Analysis of the online survey suggested that opposition to the HERT is stronger in areas further away from the route. This data was supported by some of the comments from stakeholders from North Hertfordshire, who couldn't see how the HERT would have a positive impact on their lives. More work is needed to communicate the benefits of the HERT in these areas.

Respondents to the online survey felt that the main issue with the current local transport system is infrequent services, with 20% of respondents selecting this option. This was followed by unreliable journey times with 16% of respondents selecting this and slow journey times, with 15% of respondents selecting this. We recognise how important it is that the HERT is designed to address these perceived shortfalls.

Interconnectivity between the HERT and other transport modes was a common theme throughout the survey and written responses. A number of different views were expressed on where the HERT should link to, with Stansted Airport a common suggestion.

Encouragingly, 68% of respondents to the survey suggested that they would either be likely to, almost certain to, or certain, to use the HERT.

You said, we did

During the public engagement period a number of key themes emerged. The table below summarises some of these themes and details how we are responding to this feedback.

You said	We did
I don't have enough information yet	We are in the early stages of the project at the moment and will continue to engage with the stakeholders and public as the plans develop.
How supportive I am depends on the locations the HERT serves	The exact route that the HERT will take, and the type of vehicles it will use will be explored through detailed technical studies and further engagement.
The HERT offers no benefits for disabled people	We commissioned Transport for All to support help us to consult with disabled groups on the proposals and shared information widely with other national and local groups. We will continue to engage people with disabilities as the proposals develop further.
You should use and/or upgrade existing rail or bus routes instead	The HERT is a strategic connective route. The aim is to enhance local bus services through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and to connect the HERT to existing rail interchanges.
This doesn't benefit North Hertfordshire	The HERT aims to reduce traffic congestion and poor journey time reliability between east and west Hertfordshire, whilst connecting to existing north to south rail and bus services.
The HERT is environmentally important to the county	We agree that the HERT will play an important role in encouraging people to make more journeys using public transport, reducing congestion and improving air quality.

Looking forward

A project of this scale will take a number of years to develop and needs substantial investment from local and central government, together with private sector partners. We are in the early stage of developing proposals on the HERT and have a number of stages to go through before it can be built.

All comments received during the public engagement are informing our development work. Engagement on the HERT scheme will continue, with a plan in place to engage further with younger people during 2023.

Next steps

The HERT forms part of the county council's A414 corridor strategy - a package of proposals designed to improve travel between the east and west of the county and reduce car dependency. As part of this, the HERT is aligned with Hertfordshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan schemes, as well as the proposals for the Watford to Croxley Link.

Attracting further funding is key, as is ensuring that the scheme features in the county's Local Transport Plans. We are currently producing a prospectus for the HERT that outlines the challenge and our mission to provide an east to west mass transit route. The prospectus will set out a plan for the development and delivery of a transit route that facilitates economic growth, the movement of people through sustainable travel measures and reduces pressure on the transport network. It will be used in our conversations with potential funding partners, including the Department for Transport.

Above all, we remain committed to the HERT's ambitious vision to deliver a step-change in the passenger transport network across the whole of Hertfordshire and beyond. Feedback gathered during the public engagement period suggests that this is a vision shared by many, for its potential to improve the lives of our current and future generations.



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