

National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence

Improving connectivity between cities in the north of England

Response from Campaign for Better Transport

1. To what extent are weaknesses in transport connectivity holding back northern city regions (specifically in terms of jobs, enterprise creation and growth, and housing)?

A range of important factors should influence how northern economies develop and how any perceived weaknesses in transport connectivity should be addressed. These include:

- Desirability of demand management over capacity maximisation
- Legal responsibilities such as nationally and internationally protected habitats, species and landscapes, carbon dioxide emissions reduction targets, and abidance with legal standards concerning air quality
- Likelihood of phenomena such as Peak Car leading to reduced demand for road travel

Addressing weaknesses in transport connectivity – or the most effective ways of responding to any such weakness - cannot be considered without due regard to these factors. Each is an important material concern in future infrastructure planning and not something to be considered only in mitigation. We regard it as a significant risk that the National Infrastructure Commission has yet to make clear how each is being dealt with as a central part of its work.

2. What cost-effective infrastructure investments in city-to-city connectivity could address these weaknesses? We are interested in all modes of transport.

The main cities of the north of England are integral to the region's economy. Almost two-thirds of the region's gross value added is created by the cities of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Newcastle.

Effective transport between these five cities is therefore recognised essential in tackling economic under-performance.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374714/Transport_constraints_and_opportunities_in_the_North_of_England.pdf].

Rail transport is recognised as especially significant in delivering transport improvements for the north of England. The region's rail network has suffered a lack of investment going back several decades. The Government has begun to take steps to address this, most notably in the franchise announcements for Northern Rail and TransPennine Express [<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/rail-franchising-northern-and-transpennine-express-franchises>] and plans for other initiatives such as HS3.

Local Authorities across the north have also set out ambitions to very significantly increase rail's market share for both passenger and freight transport over the next two decades [<http://www.railnorth.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Long-Term-Rail-Strategy-2015.pdf>].

Research carried out for the DfT into transport constraints in the north of England concluded

"Enhanced rail connectivity between the North's city regions would provide an alternative way of travel for some of the journeys that would otherwise use the Strategic Road Network and, in particular, those trips between the centres of the North's Core Cities. While the very different rail and road mode share for journeys between city regions means that modal shift may not have an appreciable impact on highway congestion in isolation, combined with landuse policies which facilitate more development around public transport hubs, the impact on city-centre journeys could be material."

(Transport Constraints and Opportunities in the North of England, Steer Davies Gleave, October 2014 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374714/Transport_constraints_and_opportunities_in_the_North_of_England.pdf]).

Given this pre-eminent role and the major investment already committed to further development (for example, HS3) we rail represents the most cost effective option for improving city-to-city connectivity.

3. Which city-to-city corridor(s) should be the priority for early phases of investment?

Assessing which city to city corridors should be a priority requires a strategic approach, planned for long-term within a spatial framework. Such a framework should seek to ensure good connectivity across the region, and demonstrate how future road and rail network investments such as HS3 will integrate with each other. We accept the Commission's work can usefully contribute to such a process but are concerned by the risk of bias in options so far being considered.

Specifically, the proposed trans-Pennine road tunnel risks being fast-tracked without considerations of other options for Sheffield-Manchester transport, or other transport priorities for the north of England as a whole. For example, the Interim Report into the tunnel does not provide an analysis or evidence that supports the argument that a road improvement between Manchester and Sheffield is either a significant weakness holding back either city, or the northern economy more generally, or that a road intervention is optimal rather than that of other modes, particularly, rail.

Campaign for Better Transport, with representatives of environmental organisations including Campaign for Protection of Rural England, Friends of the Earth, and Friends of the Peak District (all members of the DfT/Transport for the North reference group for this proposal) produced a document looking at the feasibility of the Tunnel project (Trans-Pennine Tunnel Strategic Study: Testing the fundamental feasibility of the project). This found issues around the fundamental feasibility of the tunnel have not thus far been adequately addressed. These relate to the treatment of spatial economic and agglomeration benefits, integration with wider transport strategy, and impacts and risk.

We are concerned that none of the concerns raised has yet been properly addressed. By contrast, a road tunnel option of extraordinarily high cost is being developed in advance of many other schemes, modes, corridors and city locations. In comparison, improvements to the Manchester-Sheffield rail corridor - which would bring benefits much more precisely targeted to the two cities - have not considered despite the likelihood of significantly lower costs and existing infrastructure in the form of the Woodhead Tunnels.

In responding to the Trans-Pennine Tunnel study, Lord Adonis said the Commission represented 'a new approach, building broad consensus behind a long term plan backed up with serious and sustained investment' [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/trans-pennine-tunnel-study-response-from-lord-adonis-chair-of-the-national-infrastructure-commission>]. Such a consensus has yet to be reached with the tunnel proposal and continued development of the project is premature.

In order to address specific concerns about the trans-Pennine road tunnel and to genuinely represent a new approach to infrastructure planning, the Commission should set out which options for the north of England are being considered, which options have been rejected, how these have been arrived at, and how they would subsequently be delivered through long term spatial planning which integrates and gives equal weighting to social, economic and environmental objectives.

Please note that a longer version of these comments relating to the Trans-Pennine Tunnel has been submitted separately by the environmental groups on the TPT stakeholder reference group (referred to above) and that this has the endorsement of Campaign for Better Transport.

4. What are the key international connectivity needs likely to be in the next 20-30 years in the north of England (with a focus on ports and airports)? What is the most effective way to meet these needs, and what constraints on delivery are anticipated?

Campaign does not support a hypothesis that demand for air passenger travel is certain to increase. There are a number of reasons for this:

- The Department for Transport's most recent statistics on air travel show very little change since 2006 in the number and type of flights taken by British residents.
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336702/experiences-of-attitudes-towards-air-travel.pdf]
- Airports in the north of England cater strongly for local markets
[https://www.caa.co.uk/uploadedFiles/CAA/Content/Standard_Content/Data_and_analysis/Datasets/Passenger_survey/CAA%20Passenger%20Survey%20Report%202014.pdf]. With Government policy favouring airport expansion in the South East of England, it is unlikely that the north's airports will attract significant passenger numbers from elsewhere in the country.
- Air travel is a carbon-intensive mode of transport. Domestic and international targets to tackle climate change are unlikely to be conducive to major increases in air travel.

5. What form of governance would most effectively deliver transformative infrastructure in the north, how should this be funded and by whom, including appropriate local contributions?

Campaign for Better Transport broadly supports the devolution of transport powers within England. Transport for the North should be the body responsible for planning and overseeing the delivery of transport infrastructure within the region.

More information on devolution can be found in our research documents Making Transport Local [<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/14.10.making-transport-local.pdf>] and Going Local [http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Going%20Local%20web_2.pdf]. Key points can be summarised as:

- Operationally, city regions should be allowed to build on the Combined Authority / Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) model to deliver London-style integration of transport networks.
- Outside the city regions, new bodies should be allowed to form that are able to manage overlapping transport needs between districts, shires and cities. This would emulate the success of sub-national transport governance arrangements for transport in other countries such as Germany with complex social and economic geography.
- There should be regional decision making concerning strategic highways as is already the case on rail through the creation of "Rail North".