

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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National Infrastructure Commission
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

7th January 2016

Dear Commission Secretariat,

National Infrastructure Commission call for evidence - Improving connectivity between cities in the north of England

TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in NW England. We are pleased to give our views as follows to this call for evidence.

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)?

We can only comment in general terms. Motorway/Road congestion cannot be solved easily by new road schemes and there is the need to curb road traffic pollution. The alternative surely has to be, in the main, rail but the rail network in the North currently suffers widely from inadequate infrastructure capacity in terms of track and lack of train capacity to run more and longer passenger trains.

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

Much more can be done to improve rail capacity and services on top of the new franchise commitments. We commend the electrification of lines as set out in the report of the North of England Electrification Task Force to the Secretary of State for Transport in March 2015 ("Northern Sparks" – though with a caveat as demonstrated in the Appendix). We recognise that electrification brings significant benefits to passengers –

- Better reliability, faster acceleration and quicker journey times especially for services with frequent stops. Many local and interurban services in the North West would benefit from this.
- The electrification of Diversionary routes enables services to operate more conveniently for passengers at times of disruption. This helps to minimise the use of replacement buses which are not liked by passengers
- Bi-mode operation possible for services extending to non-electrified lines.

The Northern Hub investment is vital to improve connectivity and its scope should be reviewed to ensure capacity improvements are fully maximised.

In connection with this it is very important that a long term view of track capacity is taken when putting in electrification infrastructure. We understand that more capacity will be (re)installed on the North TransPennine route in conjunction with electrification but will it be enough in the long term? This used to be a 4 track railway between Manchester and Leeds. Experience shows that in most schemes capacity issues are skimmed to save costs. E.g. - the Borders Railway (even though this is in Scotland where investment has been generally more forthcoming).

Integration is a term much in common use and to be commended. However the private car will probably continue to be more attractive than connecting buses to rail stations for many people and the challenge will be to bring about a step change in the provision of parking space at the many totally inadequate current station locations. With more trains and more passengers this vital issue becomes increasingly exacerbated. Accessibility at many stations is poor or non-existent for those with limited mobility. This should be a priority.

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

In addition to Liverpool/Manchester-Leeds and onwards, other TransPennine routes stand out, especially Manchester – Sheffield. Rail connectivity is also poor between Leeds and Sheffield and between Leeds and Glasgow where the Settle-Carlisle line has enormous potential to be improved for intercity services, Very careful thought needs to be given to the effect of HS2 on the North and the relationship with and structure up of HS3 clarified.

We would also make an important general point. There is a danger that connectivity between city regions becomes solely focused on city centre connectivity. It is imperative that local connectivity improvements into city centres and other hubs complement city to city corridor investment. An example of a much needed local link improvement is the Lancaster – Morecambe/Heysham railway line (see Appendix for more details of this).

Another consideration and often related to more local connectivity is the potential for re-opening closed railway lines; some examples –

- Rochdale – Bury – Bolton
- Colne - Skipton
- The Burscough curves
- The Halton Curve
- Penrith - Keswick

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?

Public transport connectivity at Airports is essential. Manchester is reasonably good and improving but there is still room for more. Liverpool John Lennon has unattractive and unwieldy public transport links and major changes are necessary.

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?

We are not in a position to comment on a detailed structure but clearly local input is essential. Transport for the North and Rail North should work in close conjunction taking into account those more rural areas of the North outside the major conurbations. Public transport is vital in those areas and funding constraints have and continue to be instrumental in lowering service levels especially bus services.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary

Appendix – Lancaster – Morecambe/Heysham

The Lancaster-Morecambe/Heysham railway line was given the lowest ranking for electrification in the “Northern Sparks” report as it was included in an assessment of the whole line Leeds-Lancaster-Morecambe which, due to a long scantily used stretch between Carnforth and Skipton, gave rise to the very low rating. However the line should be seen as a separate entity - a short separate branch from the main line at Lancaster. It is a commuter route and should be seen separately from the line to Leeds.

There are very good reasons to include it as a corridor for investment -

It is a short route – 4 miles Lancaster to Morecambe and a further 2 miles to Heysham Port. It was partly previously electrified. There is no regular service to Heysham.

There is very heavy traffic congestion between Morecambe and Lancaster (and in Lancaster itself) and we understand that Lancashire CC considers this congestion will be only modestly reduced by the new link road from the M6 to Morecambe and Heysham.

However the new road is expected to result in further development of the port increasing employment and the Heysham Gateway project to develop old industrial land in the area will lead to similar employment developments.

Employees at two nuclear power stations in the area have to drive to work as there is no regular rail or bus service to Heysham. Heysham Port station is very central for the two power stations and the port. Parking arrangements for the Isle of Man ferries at Heysham Port are highly unsatisfactory, difficult to use and very expensive. There is only a limited train connecting service with some sailings

There is also potential for new stations -

- Mossgate (a large new housing development adjacent).
- Kingsway (adjacent to a large council estate).
- Regent Road (serving the deprived area of West End of Morecambe and adjacent to new football stadium/entertainment centre).

Bare Lane - the only existing small station on the line - showed a 21.49% increase in passengers from 2013 to 2014 to 167,726 on official figures which are known to be too low