

National Infrastructure Commission

RTPI Evidence on Transport in Northern England

8 January 2016

Introduction

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has over 23,000 members who work in the public, private, voluntary and education sectors. It is a charity whose purpose is to develop the art and science of town planning for the benefit of the public. The RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, practice advice, training and development.

Consultation Questions and Answers

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)?

Northern cities have GVA per head lower than the national average. One theory that has been advanced for this is the difficulty for Northern cities of reaching a critical mass which is sufficient both to compete with London and also with other global cities. The argument has been advanced that if the cities were to function as a single labour market, they would be able to realise the agglomeration economies of a much larger city. As it stands, commuting between Northern cities is surprisingly limited.

From	To	Total commuters	% by Train	% by Car
Leeds	Sheffield	1,154	12.9	79.4
Sheffield	Leeds	2,477	16.4	73.5
Manchester	Liverpool	666	21.0	67.9
Liverpool	Manchester	1,706	30.5	58.1
Manchester	Leeds	530	28.7	51.7
Leeds	Manchester	718	31.6	54.0
Manchester	Sheffield	236	31.8	51.7
Sheffield	Manchester	527	44.8	43.3

Data source: Census, 2011
Based on Local Authority boundaries

Via Alasdair Rae, University of Sheffield

And it is not only a question of commuting. The ability to meet others to share ideas can be encouraged by the ease of travel. If someone can hold a meeting in a different city and still be back at her desk by lunch, it could arguably assist economic growth.

But city-to-city connections are not enough. The opening of the Todmorden curve has been justified on the back of the benefits to Burnley of access to the Manchester job market. Connectivity must extend to the outer edges of city regions and beyond. Some parts of northern England such as coalfield communities, west Cumbria and Pennine Lancashire, not to mention the various seaside towns of the North, could both benefit from better economies at “home” but also from access to opportunities elsewhere.

We are concerned that the Commission’s questions focus only on “city-to-city connectivity”. The RTPI and IPPR North are concluding a year-long investigation of the question “Do we need a Great North Plan?”. This has involved six round tables and culminates in an invitation only Summit in January 2016. One of the themes underlying this consultation has been the need to tie in remoter parts of the North into the city centres. Another has been the importance of digital connectivity. The Commission should bear this in mind when focussing as it has been asked on transport connectivity specifically. Finally, a strong theme emerging is that planning for Northern infrastructure, economic growth and housing should be “for the North, by the North”.

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

When determining the best approach to boosting connectivity, the Commission needs to be aware that road traffic generates substantial negative externalities which need to be accounted for when determining cost-effectiveness over the long term.

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

As we have said above, we are concerned that an exclusive priority to city-to-city investment is not appropriate. Beyond that we are not equipped to distinguish eg between Manchester-Halifax-Bradford-Leeds and Manchester-Huddersfield-Leeds.

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?

The answer to this question requires consideration of infrastructure policy issues outside the transport field and also outside the North of England. For example the way in which UK and English energy policy operates has an impact on the transport network in the North. Biomass is now being imported at Liverpool and sent by rail across the Pennines to Drax for burning. This is gradually replacing the 100% coal burning at Drax. This is partly due to UK policy to reduce carbon emissions.

Furthermore the question seems to have been phrased with the assumption that international connectivity in the North is to be supplied only by air and sea. For certain journeys rail can be a suitable choice. Already Sheffield is linked effectively to Paris via St Pancras station, even given current lowish speeds by diesel traction. Whether such surface transport is “effective” and what the constraints are to developing it depends on matters such as the price of carbon and how transport markets are regulated¹. The Commission will need to consider various scenarios for the next 30 years around policy pricing and regulation, some of which could be quite different from now. It certainly seems appropriate for the Commission to consider the answers to its “North” question along side those of its energy question. It is fragmentation of thinking around highly-linked issues which has been the serious short coming of much UK policy making in many recent years.

Emissions reduction targets could be a constraint on delivery - the Committee on Climate Change says that a 61% reduction in emissions by 2030 relative to 1990 is required in order to keep on track for meeting 2050 target. Need to future-proof our connectivity investments so that they are compatible – especially for big emitters like ports and airports (see CCC 5th Carbon Budget, pg. 47)

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 repeat our comment above that governance of infrastructure investment for the North must be “by the North”. This goal could be made more easy to achieve if land value funding is brought into the frame, since it reduces the need for national grants. However the case for national funding of Northern infrastructure may be stronger than the case for national funding of infrastructure in other regions where land values may be higher.

Another clear message from the roundtables being held with IPPR North has been the need for transport governance to be closely linked to non transport matters. It is important for policy on economic growth, including provision for specific business sectors innovation hubs, supply chains, industrial and infrastructure sites, specific premises and the development of natural resource areas (e.g. the ‘energy coast’, areas which can attract tourism, etc). Green and low carbon infrastructure was also frequently mentioned, including energy, water and

footnotes

¹ The current regulation of rail passenger markets in the EU is not conducive to international travel by rail despite the existence of adopted Trans-European Networks, but is strongly favourable to air traffic (which does not follow TENs).

waste provision. And also the need to cater for population changes have been recurring issues. A Northern Transport Strategy cannot be successfully devised without reference to these wider questions, or else what is the transport *for?* , and its governance needs to be tailored accordingly.

Our workshops have suggested that the North may need different kinds of strategies in parallel:

- Vision statement
- Unified prospectus to attract investment
- Coordination strategy (to handle the various sector questions)
- Action plan

The opportunities to fund infrastructure through the increase in the value of land which it brings about should be maximised. The experience of the Jubilee Line and Crossrail in London shows that unearned gains can accrue to landowners as a result of public investments. This should be changed. Furthermore concentrating development at locations which are connected to new transport infrastructure, as opposed to permitting it to be highly dispersed, would ensure that these gains can be maximised.

The RTPI is about to publish a study of the location of all planning permissions for housing granted in 2012-15 in the city regions of Newcastle, Leeds and Warrington as part of a UK-wide study. This will provide show the impact of current policy on location and also a good “business-as-usual” base case for understanding the potential for a transport-focussed development pattern.

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