

Transport for the North Strategic Transport Plan

ACE response

April 2018

Response and recommendations

Pan-Northern objectives

The pan-Northern objectives in the strategic transport plan (the plan) appropriately strive to improve the connectivity of the North of England and to unlock economic growth opportunities across the region.

Transport for the North (TfN) should include an objective focused on social mobility and improvements to other social values from better transport connections. Too often the narrative around infrastructure jumps to economic benefits, however this ignores the fact that transport infrastructure must deliver social value to an area for any economic benefits to be realised. The Northern Powerhouse initiative has the potential to improve education facilities and unlock new life opportunities for young people, and this should be reflected in pan-Northern objectives. Furthermore, an increased focus on social value will also improve the productivity of transport infrastructure by ensuring the asset is fit-for-purpose and has been designed with the community in mind.

‘Good growth’ should be included in the pan-Northern objectives. As per recent efforts with Leeds City Council and the Greater London Authority (GLA), TfN’s transport investment approach should focus on building a more inclusive region, maximising opportunities along the transport routes that connect them and enabling public participation in how the region changes.

Lastly, ACE recommends TfN include an objective on embracing the digital revolution. The plan should consider how to respond to changes in technology, such as the uptake of autonomous vehicles, can be effectively and affordably integrated into the transport network and how the optimisation of data can help ensure better, faster and cheaper outcomes for Northerners. Embracing the digital revolution should not only be seen as a means to ensure the region is on par with the South of England, but also about establishing the North as a genuinely competitive region across Europe. There is a currently a significant gap between the standard of transport provision in the UK and much of western Europe, and incorporating a ‘transport futures’ approach to planning will help reduce competitive advantages elsewhere.

The need for change

The plan not only frames the unique challenges facing the North of England, but it also clearly outlines why bespoke solutions are needed to help deliver real change to the region. The plan appropriately uses findings from the *Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review* as a basis to outline the potential for the region and why improving transport connectivity is key to delivering these goals.

The plan's ambition to close the gap between the region and the rest of England is fair and just. As outlined in the plan, the economic value per person (GVA) in the region is currently 25% below the England average and per person income is £7,500 less. These figures clearly highlight why an overall increase in transport infrastructure funding and a more coordinated and targeted approach through TfN is needed to unlock productivity and growth opportunities across the region. The whole of the UK will benefit from the North delivering on its potential, with a more balanced economy across the country and more strengths to sell under the Global Britain brand.

Identifying the major strategic interventions

We highly support TfN's use of the Northern Transport Demand Model to estimate changes in GVA, employment, population and transport to help inform the plan's major strategic interventions. The ability to read and respond to future demands on the network and the impact of investments is key to maximising and facilitating growth opportunities across the region, and prioritising investments over the next 30 to 35 years. We feel this approach has been somewhat overlooked in other transport investment strategies.

The plan includes an ambitious and clear approach to improving the region's rail network, particularly through better East-West connections and supported by a long-term rail strategy. The proposed Northern Powerhouse Rail provides an opportunity to truly create a single economy across the region by bringing the North's six main cities and Manchester Airport closer together through better, faster and more reliable connections. The ability to connect 1.3 million people within a 60-minute train journey from four or more major cities through Northern Powerhouse Rail (up from 10,000 today) demonstrates how much of a game-changer this investment will be for the region. We support TfN's proposal to integrate Northern Powerhouse Rail with the delivery of High Speed 2 (HS2) to maximise and spread the benefits of improved North-South connections to the region.

While the plan commits to developing a long-term rail strategy, there is no commitment for a coordinated and central long-term road strategy for the North outside of the strategic outline programmes of highway schemes for the Major Road Network (MRN) along the strategic development corridors. We believe there is a strong case for a coordinated approach for all roads in the region, between local roads, the proposed MRN and the SRN, and therefore recommend TfN work with partner organisations to develop a long-term coordinated road strategy.

The seven strategic development corridors identified in the plan are an effective way of ensuring TfN's interventions are supporting the region's growth opportunities. These growth corridors appropriately overlap based on different economic needs and TfN's commitment to work with the region's connections with Scotland, the Midlands and Wales will ensure they are integrated into a wider context.

Lastly, TfN should include a strategic intervention in the plan focused on working with local partners to increase the use of active transport and to influence a model shift to public transport particularly in the region's major cities. We believe over-arching transport bodies should play a central role in encouraging and influencing a more sustainable approach to how users use the transport network across a region. A good example is the 'healthy streets' approach developed by GLA and Transport for London where there is strategic effort to increase journeys by active or public transport to 80%. We encourage TfN to set similar targets for the region.

Delivering TfN's Investment Programme

TfN appropriately highlights funding as the biggest challenge to TfN's investment programme. With around 94% of revenue raised by the public sector currently going to the UK Government, we believe a significant part of funding for transport infrastructure in the North must come from grants with support from new funding sources managed by TfN. To this end, we believe there is merit in a consistent approach to how major schemes are funded between UK Government grants and TfN funding sources centred on an agreed percentage split based on revenue raising powers. There is international precedent for such an approach between different levels of governments and the key benefit is it allows organisations such as TfN to have a more refined planning approach from the outset by being aware of what their contributions will need to be when developing proposals for major schemes. It could also help

change the debate to focus on the merits of proposed transport infrastructure rather than the specifics of the unique funding approach for the proposed scheme in question.

In regard to the list of potential new funding sources raised by TfN, we believe there is merit in investigating if a similar levy to the London Mayor's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is viable for the region. This revenue would need to be collected by local authorities or combined authorities and a proportion transferred to TfN for related activities. This could operate in a similar fashion to the UK Government's recently proposed 'Strategic Infrastructure Tariff'. We also believe there are opportunities here to also address some of the existing flaws around CIL, particularly its inability to raise sufficient revenue, and some of the unique challenges related to the North such as lower house prices than in the South East.

Lastly, we are very supportive of TfN's efforts to improve the appraisal framework with DfT to test out new approaches to quantifying benefits. We agree there needs to be more of a focus on how schemes can unlock growth and productivity rather than supporting growth that is already occurring in a region. We would be happy to provide any industry support required to help with these efforts.

About ACE

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ACE members are at the heart of delivering, maintaining and upgrading our buildings, structures and infrastructure. They provide specialist services to a diverse range of sectors including water, transportation, housing and energy.

The ACE membership acts as the bridge between consultants, engineers and the wider construction sector who make an estimated contribution of £15bn to the nation's economy with the wider construction market contributing a further £90bn.

ACE's powerful representation and lobbying to governments, major clients, the media and other key stakeholders, enables it to promote the critical contribution that engineers and consultants make to the nation's developing infrastructure.

Through our publications, market intelligence, events and networking, business guidance and personal contact, we provide a cohesive approach and direction for our members and the wider industry. In recognising the dynamics of our industry, we support and encourage our members in all aspects of their business, helping them to optimise performance and embrace opportunity.

Our fundamental purposes are to promote the worth of our industry and to give voice to our members. We do so with passion and vision, support and commitment, integrity and professionalism.

Further information

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