

## **Context and rationale for submission**

This submission is made by the Ormskirk Preston and Southport Travellers' Association (OPSTA), a rail user group for services between Liverpool, Preston, Southport and Manchester in response to the Call for Evidence on how connectivity between cities in the north of England could be improved. The submission addresses the first 3 questions with examples, issues and opportunities from our area.

If connectivity between city regions was to be solely focused on city centre connectivity, it could too easily lead into massive investment that actually impedes the network effectiveness and speed it is trying to achieve as a consequence of forcing each region to travel (often on poor links) into its own centre before it can go anywhere else. Moreover, this may even encourage each region to remain introspective with enterprise limited by historic administrative and transport authority boundaries.

### **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)?**

This is particularly true for the whole of South West Lancashire, northern areas of the Liverpool City Region, and even the north west of Greater Manchester which suffer poor rail services and a very limited road network. A commute to Manchester can take up to 2 hours each way; roads to the south of Preston are gridlocked at peak times; and despite proximity to the port of Liverpool very little industry, support or distribution businesses set up in the area.

Local Development plans feature schemes for thousands of new houses but building is not progressing, with the lack of effective transport solutions being a major negative influence.

3 large universities sit on a rail corridor between Liverpool and Preston and yet there is no through service. The majority of commuters travelling to the north or east are forced to spend hours on the road or if travelling by train, to first go south to Liverpool and then cross the city centre.

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

The West Lancashire rail route between Liverpool and Preston is severed with end on buffers splitting the track at Ormskirk. Connected and through services would greatly facilitate travel between the 2 cities and for West Lancashire; study has shown there is latent and unmet demand from work and education sectors.

A similar situation exists at Kirkby which if addressed would enable freight and passenger services to be run between the north of Liverpool city region and north west Greater Manchester, East Lancashire and beyond. Kirkby falls within the Liverpool city region and yet the majority of its residents live the wrong side of the buffers to be able to commute easily into their 'own' city centre. Skelmersdale is the largest town in the country without a rail service.

The Electrification Task Force report 'Northern Sparks' recommended that services from Manchester should be electrified through to Southport and Kirkby as one of its top 3 priorities. This would provide a strong connection between Liverpool and Manchester and the northern sectors of their city regions without making unnecessary journeys through busy city centres. By 'completing the routes', they would greatly enhance the return on the previously approved Bolton to Wigan electrification.

There would be a multiplier effect on benefits if the Manchester – Southport line and West Lancashire line had their junction reinstated at Burscough since it would then mean the entirety of the south Lancashire and north Liverpool area would be well connected with 3 cities, Liverpool, Preston and Manchester and it would also greatly enhance transport links and economic cohesion between those cities. The return on the modest investment in re-establishing a short 'chord' of railway has already been demonstrated at Todmorden and with the business case for the Halton curve.

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

The above improvements are mainly localised and contained which makes them easily and quickly deliverable at relatively low capital cost with high benefits in the areas affected. As such they are not

proposed as a priority over nor should they displace larger intercity programmes. Moreover, if considered and included in the overall design, they will be integral components that make an early contribution in the establishment of a cohesive transport network across the North.