

# IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY IN THE NORTH

## Submission to the National Infrastructure Commission from the Industrial Communities Alliance

### Industrial Communities Alliance

The Industrial Communities Alliance is the all-party association representing more than 60 local authorities in the industrial areas of England, Scotland and Wales. Around half its member authorities are in the three northern English regions or in the adjacent parts of the Midlands that lie within northern city-regions.

The Alliance and its predecessor bodies have been engaged with economic development and regeneration since the 1980s and the Alliance has a particularly close interest in investment in transport infrastructure. In October 2014 the Alliance published proposals for rail investment in Britain's industrial areas in a pamphlet *Tracks to Work*. In July 2015 it published a report, *Growth Beyond the Big Cities*, questioning the assumption that reliance on jobs in the cities is a practical way forward.

The present submission draws on these reports and has been endorsed by the Alliance Executive, comprising senior councillors from around the country.

### Context: the economy of the North

The Alliance welcomes growth in the North's big cities. However, the North comprises a great deal more than just its big cities:

- Only 20 per cent of the population of the three northern English regions lives in the North's five 'core cities' (Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield) and only 22 per cent of the North's jobs are located there<sup>1</sup>.
- Even if the 'core cities' are defined more widely to include adjacent boroughs in the same urban area<sup>2</sup>, they still account for only 39 per cent of the North's population and 37 per cent of its jobs.

The point is that the majority of the North's population, and the majority of its economic activity, falls well outside the North's main cities. This applies to many of its older industrial areas, including some of the North's most deprived communities, as well as to remoter rural and coastal locations. Indeed some parts of the North –

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<sup>1</sup> 2013 mid-year population estimates, and 2012 employment totals, from NOMIS.

<sup>2</sup> Using the Centre for Cities' definition: Leeds, Liverpool (plus Knowsley, St Helens), Manchester (plus Bury, Oldham, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford), Newcastle (plus Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside), Sheffield (plus Rotherham).

West Cumbria for example – are located a very long way indeed from the nearest big city.

Employment growth in the big cities is only likely to be of value to the wider North, and in particular to many of its industrial towns, if jobs in the cities can be accessed by residents in surrounding areas.

## **Focus of the Commission's inquiry**

The Alliance is therefore concerned that the focus of the National Infrastructure Commission's inquiry is on "improving connectivity between cities in the North". Indeed, this appears to be a subtle – and unwelcome – shift from the original announcement on 30 October that the Commission would look more generally at "future investment in the North's transport infrastructure".

The Alliance regards a focus just on connectivity between the North's cities to be mistaken. Whilst efforts to rebalance the UK economy away from London are welcome, transport infrastructure investment is needed more widely across the North and the connections into the North's big cities from surrounding areas are at least as important, if not more so, than the connections between the cities themselves.

The Alliance also recognises that an important task is to shift the balance of transport investment away from London. As figures from IPPR<sup>3</sup> demonstrate, current transport infrastructure spending is massively and unfairly skewed to London:

North West	£460 per head
North East	£263 per head
Yorkshire and the Humber	£395 per head
London	£3,095 per head

## **The limits to commuting**

While the North's big cities do attract commuters from miles around they cannot on their own sustain whole regions. Partly this is an issue of numbers: the North's cities are simply too small in relation to the population of the North as a whole. But partly the issue is the limited capacity of the North's rail and road networks to handle commuting flows. Unlike London, the North's big cities do not benefit from a vast and complex rail and tube network.

Across the North, travel-to-work times into the big cities are often substantial. Appendix A, taken from the *Growth Beyond the Big Cities* report, illustrates this point. It shows the typical peak-hour travel-to-work times from a range of northern industrial towns into the nearest 'core city'. These figures make realistic adjustments for congestion and, for public transport, for travel to and from stations/bus stops and waiting times.

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<sup>3</sup> L Raikes (2015) *Tax, Spend and Northern Productivity: a regional analysis of household income, taxation and public spending*, IPPR North, Manchester. Figures for transport infrastructure are current planned spending from 2014/15 onwards.

What these figures show is that:

- By public transport, commuting to the nearest core city takes at least an hour from almost two-thirds of the North's industrial towns
- By car, commuting to the nearest core city takes at least an hour from half the North's industrial towns

Some journeys (e.g. from Barrow, Workington and Whitehaven to Manchester) are to all intents not feasible.

Moreover, whereas in London and the South East the high cost of long-distance commuting is offset by high wages, in the North earnings are significantly lower. In practice, in the North long-distance commuting into the big cities is often unrealistic.

The point here is that ensuring job growth in the North's cities is of benefit to surrounding areas requires significant investment in the transport connections between cities and their hinterlands. At present, journey times are simply too long.

### **The opportunities for rail investment**

Investing in rail connections between the industrial towns of the North and the regions' cities would give a boost to their economies:

- In the places presently cut off from the rail network, or only very poorly connected, it can improve access to centres of growth
- It promotes the spill-over of people of businesses from more prosperous areas to more disadvantaged communities.
- It facilitates economic development in less prosperous areas by increasing the pool of available labour and by offering the option of shifting goods by rail.

Some of the benefits of rail investment can be achieved by re-opening existing goods lines for passenger services. In these cases the track is already in place but generally needs up-grading. An example is the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line, which is currently a fully maintained freight line but not used for passenger services. This line connects the heart of the former Northumberland coalfield with Newcastle and the rest of Tyneside. It would open up substantial employment opportunities for the area's residents, particularly in Newcastle.

Other small-scale investments can deliver large benefits. An example is the reopening of the Todmorden Curve. At a cost of £10m, this project has halved journey times by providing direct trains from Burnley to Manchester.

By comparison, although shaving ten minutes or so off journey times between the big cities, perhaps at great expense, would be welcome it will deliver little positive benefit for much of the North.

Appendix B lists a range of potential rail investments in the North. This list, taken from the booklet *Tracks to Work*, reflects the diversity of proposals put forward by in recent times by the rail industry and lobby groups. Many of the proposals would involve relatively modest costs, particularly compared to investments such as HS2.

In addition, the opening of new stations on existing passenger lines would provide access to services for communities that have previously missed out, and open up new job opportunities. Some of the places that might benefit are sizeable towns, in East Durham for example.

The Alliance sees incremental rail investment of this kind as an important tool to reinvigorate weaker local economies and stimulate economic development across the North.

## Conclusions

- The Commission should consider improvements to connectivity across the whole of the North, not just between the big cities
- A shift in the balance of transport investment away from London is long overdue
- The North's industrial towns would benefit most from improved connectivity with their neighbouring cities, not better links between the cities themselves
- Incremental rail investment in a range of schemes would deliver the biggest boost to growth in large parts of the North

***Industrial Communities Alliance***  
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## Appendix A: Estimated peak-hour travel-to-work times to nearest core city

	Nearest core city	By car	By public transport
Accrington	Manchester	1 hr 5 min	1 hr 30 min
Ashington	Newcastle	55 min	1 hr 10 min
Barnsley	Sheffield	50 min	50 min
Barrow-in-Furness	Manchester	2 hr 45 min	2 hr 40 min
Biddulph	Manchester	1 hr 15 min	1 hr 35 min
Bishop Auckland	Newcastle	1 hr 5 min	1 hr 40 min
Blackburn	Manchester	1 hr	1 hr 20 min
Blyth	Newcastle	50 min	1 hr 20 min
Bolsover	Sheffield	1 hr 5 min	1 hr 40 min
Bolton	Manchester	45 min	45 min
Bradford	Leeds	35 min	45 min
Burnley	Manchester	1 hr 5 min	1 hr 35 min
Bury	Manchester	35 min	50 min
Castleford	Leeds	45 min	50 min
Chesterfield	Sheffield	45 min	40 min
Chester-le-Street	Newcastle	35 min	40 min
Clay Cross	Sheffield	50 min	1 hr 20 min
Consett	Newcastle	40 min	1 hr 30 min
Darlington	Newcastle	1 hr 5 min	55 min
Doncaster	Sheffield	1 hr 5 min	50 min
Grimsby	Sheffield	2 hr	2 hr
Halifax	Leeds	45 min	1 hr
Hartlepool	Newcastle	1 hr 5 min	1 hr 20 min
Houghton-le-Spring	Newcastle	40 min	1 hr 30 min
Huddersfield	Leeds	50 min	45 min
Hull	Leeds	1 hr 50 min	1 hr 20 min
Huyton	Liverpool	30 min	40 min
Jarrow	Newcastle	30 min	45 min
Leigh	Manchester	45 min	1 hr 10 min
Middlesbrough	Newcastle	1 hr 20 min	1 hr 50 min
Nelson	Manchester	1 hr 10 min	1 hr 55 min
Oldham	Manchester	35 min	55 min
Peterlee	Newcastle	1 hr	1 hr 10 min
Pontefract	Leeds	45 min	1 hr 10 min
Redcar	Newcastle	1 hr 40 min	1 hr 45 min
Rochdale	Manchester	45 min	40 min
Rotherham	Sheffield	35 min	35 min
Scunthorpe	Sheffield	1 hr 25 min	1 hr 25 min
Seaham	Newcastle	55 min	1 hr 5 min
South Shields	Newcastle	40 min	55 min

Spennymoor	Newcastle	1 hr	1 hr 15 min
St Helens	Liverpool	50 min	55 min
Stockton-on-Tees	Newcastle	1 hr 15 min	1 hr 35 min
Sunderland	Newcastle	40 min	55 min
Wakefield	Leeds	40 min	40 min
Warrington	Liverpool	45 min	50 min
Whitehaven	Manchester	3 hr 25 min	4 hr
Widnes	Liverpool	35 min	1 hr
Wigan	Manchester	1 hr	55 min
Workington	Manchester	3 hr 15 min	3 hr 20 min
Worksop	Sheffield	1 hr	1 hr
Wrexham	Liverpool	1 hr 15 min	1 hr 30 min

Source: ICA calculations based on AA Route Planner and Traveline.

Figures allow for congestion, parking, and travel to and from stations/bus stops.

A total of 25 minutes has been added to the fastest public transport travel time to allow for getting from home to station/bus stop, waiting time, and then from station/bus stop to work. To allow for congestion, travel times by car have been increased by 50 per cent for journeys that normally take up to 40 minutes outside peak times, and by one-third (up to a maximum addition of 30 minutes) for longer journeys. Five minutes have also been added for parking.

## **Appendix B: Potential rail investments across the North**

### **Cross-regional**

- Electrification from Middlesbrough and Teesport to Darlington and Northallerton to complete the electrification of the Trans-Pennine rail network, to be followed by wider electrification of the Tees Valley network
- Trans-Pennine tunnel specifically for high speed trains to facilitate faster East-West services
- Teesside – Newcastle – Edinburgh: new inter-urban service
- Tram-train or Metrolink extensions – Manchester to Sheffield to connect to Hazel Grove
- Extension of the freight electric spine to allow freight facilities in Doncaster, Humberside and the North East
- Reopen Hadfield – Penistone – Deepcar line

### **North East**

- Reinstate and electrify the Leamside line (Newcastle to Durham and Ferryhill) to create new rail commuter services
- Reopen Ferryhill – Pelaw line (Leamside branch)
- Extend the Tyne & Wear Metro to Washington, Blyth, Ashington, Pelaw, Seaham, Doxford Park giving connections to Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland
- Reopen Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line
- Improve rail connections and gauge clearance to Teesport and Port of Tyne to support the growing market for bulk freight and container traffic

### **North West**

- Improvements to the West Cumbria coastal line and direct connections to Barrow
- Electrification of the line between Barrow and Carnforth
- Identify an appropriate site for a rail freight terminal, between J24 and 25 of the M6 on the line to Bryn
- Reopen St Helens Central – St Helens Junction
- Reinstate the Halton curve, which allows through Liverpool-Chester trains
- Electrification of the Warrington to Chester and Chester to Crewe line

- Full electrification of the CLC line from Trafford Park to the outskirts of Liverpool
- Delivery of the Arpley Chord freight avoiding line

#### Yorkshire and the Humber

- Electrification of lines between Leeds, Hambelton, Barnsley, Penistone, Pontefract, Doncaster, and Sheffield
- Penistone line light rail (Huddersfield – Sheffield)
- Pontefract line light rail (Leeds – Knottingley – Wakefield)
- Re-open Wortley Curve providing a direct link for Bradford-Wakefield to East Coast Main Line

List compiled from various industry and lobby group sources