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National Infrastructure Commission
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To whom it may concern

National Infrastructure Commission Call for Evidence

Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce (GMCC) is the largest Chamber of Commerce in the United Kingdom with over 4,700 members; together they employ over 300,000 people, approximately one-third of the workforce of the UK's second largest economic area. GMCC provides a variety of business services including policy, public relations, research and intelligence, networking and other events, and is the recognised voice of business for the Greater Manchester sub-region.

GMCC fully supports the government's plans for connectivity across the Northern Powerhouse and that it sees this commitment as a key strategic aim. It is now imperative that government moves to deliver this vision as swiftly as is practicable.

In its *Campaign for Business 2015*, GMCC noted the problems caused by the lack of an effective national infrastructure strategy:

National infrastructure projects suffer from delays in decision-making, planning and delivery resulting in increased costs and the holding back of economic growth. To enable strategic decision-making across successive parliamentary terms, there should be a single body that oversees, controls and agrees long-term national infrastructure planning and the delivery of projects based on demand and necessity, rather than political priorities.

To remedy this, GMCC called for the creation of an independent body with cross-party support that has responsibility for national infrastructure strategy on transport, digital, energy and major construction schemes (with the exception of housing), and oversight of key regional infrastructure requirements with appropriate local guidance. It also believes that this should also be supported through the devolution of appropriate powers and funding to enable the delivery of strategic projects at a city-region level providing that suitable and effective governance structures exist.

GMCC therefore welcomes the establishment of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and the opportunity to contribute to its initial call for evidence. In this submission we will restrict our response to the first part of the NIC's terms of reference: future investment in the North's transport infrastructure.

To what extent are weaknesses in transport connectivity holding back northern city regions (specifically in terms of jobs, enterprise creation and growth, and housing)?

Connectivity is the fundamental bedrock of the economy, allowing businesses to move their goods and individuals to travel freely in search of jobs and leisure. Its efficient functioning and the ability to deliver appropriate future capacity is critical. Successful economic growth that is not constrained by ineffective infrastructure can only be achieved if all aspects of connectivity are developed: for too long, the UK has been poor at delivering new infrastructure in a timely fashion and, particularly in the North, at a rate that allows the full potential of the region to be realised.

For decades there has been no coherent road building and maintenance strategy, despite the continued forecast growth of road traffic. There is an urgent need to address capacity requirements to support the development of economic growth both around and between our major cities and at major employment sites such as Liverpool Superport and Manchester Airport.

Rail investment in the North of England has been weak and there is a strong need for improved quality and increased capacity for both passenger and freight services. The current average age of some of the rolling stock in the North of England is 25 years (six years older than the UK average) and the recently upgraded West Coast Main Line is expected to reach capacity before 2020. Investment through schemes such as HS2 and the proposed Northern Powerhouse Rail (HS3) must help to re-energise the UK's rail engineering and construction industries, creating jobs and supporting skills development and regeneration.

Aviation, too, is critical, supporting significant employment, facilitating international trade and allowing access for visitors from all over the world. The ability to export goods and services through direct access to global markets from regional airports, either directly or via a major hub airport, is fundamental to supporting business and the growth of UK exports.

Connectivity within and between the North's major cities is heavily constrained by slow travel times, primarily caused by either an existing lack of capacity on both the local and strategic road networks, restricting travel times by car or bus. The North's road network cannot cope with current levels of demand and, even with a greater focus on public transport, the government's own data from the Department for Transport forecasts increases in road use over the coming decades. This lack of capacity is not only seen clearly during rush hour and major events, but also at the point of any accident or major incident. There are few alternative routes available if any major route is closed and recovery times after incidents are slow.

The situation is similar for travel by rail with Victorian infrastructure that is incapable of delivering even medium-speed journeys: city-to-city average speeds are mostly in the range of 30 to 50 miles per hour. Even with this poor level of service, demand for rail use continues to grow, even throughout the recession, and the current network is already capacity constrained. The constraint on rail is being caused by both lack of sufficient volume of high-quality rolling-stock led (i.e. insufficient capacity to carry future passenger demand) and network-led (i.e. insufficient free paths to run additional numbers of trains to serve the future demand for both passenger and freight). The density of services on the

network has also led to poor reliability on some routes where a delay on one train is immediately felt on many, sometimes for a long period of time.

The North suffers from a lack of inter-connectivity, not only between different modes of transport but often within the same mode. Connections between multiple rail stations in cities can be slow and require separate tickets, often bus and rail services are not closely located and there is a lack of high-quality and large-scale car parking opportunities near to public transport hubs. If the government's ambition of a well-connected single economy of the North is to be realised, there must be a focus on not just inter- and intra-city connectivity, but joining these two together efficiently. Significant investment in connecting outer-lying areas to city centres and city centres to other city centres will not in themselves be sufficient if the ability to switch between these journeys is not fast, easy and efficient. Quality of the travel experience must be high throughout the journey. Delivering passengers from London to the North in one hour on HS2 must not be followed by a 20-minute journey across a city to connect with a slow local journey in a poor-quality environment, whether rail, tram or bus.

Development and growth of infrastructure often lags behind major development works with new large-scale employment and logistics sites often developed to market without and provision of additional capacity to manage to the newly-created demand. Coupled with a lack of availability of housing in the right areas, close to either existing or proposed areas of employment or efficient transport links with the capacity to deal with higher demand, new residents are often pushed further away from their place of work, causing additional pressures on the transport network.

All the above significantly constrains the economy by restricting free, swift and inexpensive travel for commuters, consumers and businesses.

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

Rail

The strategic aim should be the development of a fully-integrated transport solution between local commuter services, the inter-urban rail network of the North of England, particularly focused on east-west connectivity between Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds, major economic sites such as Manchester Airport and interchanges with both High Speed 2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail (High Speed 3).

A number of projects that will begin to address some of these key problems have already been raised by government and many are now in progress. Faster delivery of proposed electrification schemes as well as the inclusion of other key Northern routes (e.g. Calder Valley) would provide greater capacity through faster acceleration times and the provision of an alternative Trans-Pennine route for diversions. Other corridors such as Manchester to Liverpool via Warrington and Manchester to Sheffield via the Hope Valley should be included for the same purpose.

Developments to rail infrastructure such as re-signalling to deliver shorter block sections and the four-tracking of routes where the alignment remains clear (e.g. Thornhill LNW Junction to Diggle) will also deliver significant additional capacity through providing more paths on existing lines and the provision of additional tracks will allow the separation of slow/stopping services from semi-fast and express services.

Capacity and quality within services themselves as well as within the network as a whole is also important. GMCC welcomes the announcements of the new Northern and TransPennine franchises and their commitments to new and/or as new refurbished rolling stock, but this must become a core aspect of the North of England's railway services. The NIC should seek to support an effective national rolling stock strategy which undertakes timely procurement for replacement of old rolling stock based on compatibility and value for money.

Finally, whilst the project is committed and recent announcements to speed up delivery to Crewe are warmly welcomed, it is important that a sharp focus remains on the delivery of both phases of HS2 as quickly and efficiently as possible and that, when the proposals are published, that a similar level of efficiency is seen with the delivery of HS3. There must also be keen attention paid to the station location and interchange possibilities of conventional, HS2 and HS3 lines in all major cities.

Road

In the same manner for rail, the delivery of a long-term road transport strategy that acknowledges the importance of the national road network and seeks to increase capacity where needed, to underpin the industrial strategy relating to sites of significant economic growth is important. This should also be partnered with greater devolved powers for local areas to manage their own local road networks more efficiently including appropriate funding mechanisms for both road building and the maintenance of the existing networks. Those responsible for both local and strategic road networks should also seek to better manage the recovery from accidents and incidents with a clearer focus on maintaining traffic flow. Together these must enable more efficient use of the local road network to sustain economic growth and ease traffic congestion.

The introduction of smart motorway schemes in the West Midlands and West Yorkshire has been successful and the expansion of the M62 scheme westwards to the M60 is welcome and progressing. There remains the opportunity for greater use of these schemes to deliver further capacity on the existing physical infrastructure and this should be progressed on key congested routes across the North. There are also significant opportunities for incremental capacity improvements, e.g. the redesign of poorly functioning junctions, the reversal of capacity reduction on routes (e.g. reducing two lane roads to single lane, etc.) and the introduction of new relief routes and bypasses.

Airports

The delay to the government's decision to the Davies Commission on airport capacity is disappointing. GMCC has previously called for government to prioritise the swift delivery of a national aviation strategy that states not only the plan for alleviating immediate capacity issues in the South East, but

also highlights clearly the role for regional airports in supporting economic growth across the UK as well as the intelligent use of spare capacity at regional airports for hub interconnections.

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

The primary routes that should be considered the highest priority are those between the principal cities of Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield, including the major towns that lie in between. Key out-of-town employment sites and major logistics sites (e.g. Manchester Airport and the Port of Liverpool) also require improved connectivity to maximise the economic potential of these assets.

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 future growth of international activity within the North will be focused around Manchester Airport, the ports of Liverpool and Hull, the Manchester Ship Canal and the wider Ocean Gateway scheme and access to key southern routes. This will include international rail connectivity, including direct services from the North of England to Europe via the Channel Tunnel for both passenger and freight, as well as ensuring appropriate capacity for railfreight movements from the deep sea ports in the South and East of England.

Key constraints will be sufficient road and railhead access to the increased number of ports in the North West from Liverpool to Manchester, to the Ports of Hull and Newcastle, the identification of paths from Southampton, Felixstowe and Harwich and their connection to major rail heads across the North of England and into Scotland. Connectivity to Europe should ensure a direct link from HS2 to HS1 allowing changeless travel from the North of England to the continent and the latent capacity for additional freight traffic through the Channel Tunnel should be developed.

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?

The establishment of Transport for the North is a significant positive step in this area. Supported by greater devolution of powers over infrastructure spending and prioritisation, this body as the local knowledge and expertise to drive forward the improvements in pan-Northern connectivity required to support the delivery of the government's vision of the Northern Powerhouse.

Evidence from our members indicates a willingness for local business to contribute financially to local infrastructure development providing sufficient democratic controls are in place, but the government's current rationale that Local Enterprise Partnerships form an accountable voice on behalf of private sector business is misguided. Existing examples of local businesses contributing to significant

infrastructure investment exist in the Crossrail business rates levy, but there should also be consideration of more innovative funding streams including the use of private sector funding.

GMCC stands ready to work closely with government, the National Infrastructure Commission, Transport for the North and other local governance bodies to further develop and enhance the connectivity in and between the economic centres of the North of England, and will continue to feed evidence on these matters to the appropriate bodies.

Yours faithfully

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