

The Mersey Dee North Wales Group of MPs is an All Party Parliamentary Group promoting the interests of the geographical region it encompasses ("the Region").

The Region is unique in the UK in that it straddles a national border but is an integrated economic unit. Trade flows in the region operate East-West in both directions across the England-Wales border. It has been recognised by UK Government and Welsh Government Ministers that north Wales is a key part of the Northern Powerhouse and indeed it has long been formally recognised that north east Wales and north west England constitute an economic sub-region.

The transport infrastructure does not, at present, reflect the economic dynamics of the Region. East-west connections whether by rail or road extend from key population centres, ports and major businesses from Holyhead through to east Yorkshire and all related hubs and connects in between. In particular easy connectivity, for example by compatible electrification, within the Northern Powerhouse is vital so the whole of the "North" is operating dynamically.

The Region includes a large number of manufacturing businesses, many of whom are globalised in scale and export a large proportion, in many cases, a majority, of their products. Examples include Airbus, Toyota, GM Vauxhall and JCB as well as their connected supply chain companies.

Increasingly, service businesses have developed successfully in the Region and there has been development of the Region's learning infrastructure in the last decade with the establishment of Chester University and Glyndwr University in Wrexham. Additionally, Bangor University is a world leading institute in the field of Ocean Sciences and is increasing its offer in other sciences as it establishes links with major projects being developed in the region such as the Wylfa Newydd nuclear power station on Anglesey. Moreover, a large further education unit, Coleg Cambria has been created in North-East Wales whilst Coleg Menai (as part of a wider Coleg Llandrillo Menai group) looks to establish itself as a skills base for the next generation of nuclear engineers. There is increased recognition that these institutions must work together to support the economic needs of the Region.

The Region does not include a "City Region." We urge the National Infrastructure Commission to accept that, in today's economy, most major manufacturing employers are situated, not in cities, or even in City Regions, but in geographical areas peripheral to those regions. It is, therefore, essential that their needs are nonetheless taken into account in devising successful infrastructure development. Successful Business Parks such as Deeside, Chester and Wrexham must have their needs considered to build on past progress.

We request, therefore, that the Commission recommend that the use of phrases such as "city to city" connectivity and "northern cities" be avoided as it does not take into account the vital role of industrial parks and towns outside the cities and City Regions and understates, unnecessarily, their importance.

The UK Infrastructure Commission is a UK body. Its role is to "carry out independent and unbiased assessments of the UK's long-term infrastructure needs". We request, therefore, that when assessing the needs of the north of England, it takes into account also the closely allied needs and requirements of North Wales.

For example, North Wales is an important part of the market for Manchester and Liverpool Airports and public transport connectivity to the Airports is extremely poor at present. In addition to increasing consumer demand for air travel, multinational businesses situated in North Wales are detrimentally affected as compared to overseas competitors by poor transport links. Demand for the Airport Services is predicted to rise in the years ahead.<sup>1</sup> This active sub-region adds a huge amount to the Northern Powerhouse mix and connectivity with the airports is key, for example 12% of Manchester Airport passengers come from North Wales/Cheshire but we only have 2 direct services to the airport despite the track already being available. Studies for the Mersey-Dee Alliance in 2012 suggest that the transport corridor between Anglesey and Manchester airport – running along the A55 and M56 – generated an output of £31 billion; in comparison, the M4 corridor between the Vale of Glamorgan and Bristol generated £25 billion.<sup>2</sup> There are over 1mn. cross border commuting trips every month very few of which are made on rail and consequently puts acute pressure on the A494 around Queensferry at peak periods.

Key regional services are too slow e.g. Rhyl to Manchester 1hr 40 mins (70 miles); Rhyl – Liverpool 1hr 29 mins (48 miles) with a forced interchange at Chester. Rail in North Wales must be more competitive against road if there is going to be a modal shift to rail thus relieving pressure on the A55. The slow journey times do not encourage labour market mobility or B2B connectivity and act as a brake on economic growth and prosperity. A previous Transport Minister ‘Good transport connectivity is essential for cities and regions to build and maintain their economic competitiveness, and regions served by rapid rail services will prosper at the expense of those with inferior connections’.

Gwynedd County Council and the Snowdonia Enterprise Board are supportive of the development of North Wales infrastructure developments and initiatives to contribute to the supply of energy, and would note two developments.

Firstly, Trawsfynydd's former nuclear power station which is approaching the end of decommissioning, has been identified by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers as an ideal site for the construction of the UK's first Small Modular Reactor (SMR). The potential SMR development at Trawsfynydd is complementary to manufacturing development opportunities for the Nuclear Advanced Manufacturing Research centre in Rotherham, to the development opportunities of the National Nuclear Laboratory in Warrington as well as the nuclear skills base of companies in N Wales and N W England

Secondly, the Llanbedr Airfield bid for the UK Spaceport is highly likely to be on a shortlist of three UK sites to be invited to provide further details, as its Gwynedd site offers exceptional safety features such as coastal runways and no commercial over-flying. If successful, this project has immense potential for enterprises along the A55 corridor, as it will combine space tourism with satellite launch facilities.

It is important that the NIC take into account not just links East across the Pennines but also west to North Wales from Liverpool, Manchester and beyond. North Wales is an international corridor for links to Ireland, historically recognised by construction of infrastructure by Thomas Telford and Ireland remains one of the UK's most important trading

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<sup>1</sup> [Written Answers — Department for Transport: Manchester Airport](#) (14 Dec 2015); [Written Answers — Department for Transport: Manchester Airport](#) (14 Dec 2015); [Written Answers — Department for Transport: Manchester Airport](#) (14 Dec 2015); [Written Answers — Department for Transport: Manchester Airport](#) (14 Dec 2015); [Written Answers — Department for Transport: Manchester Airport](#) (14 Dec 2015)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.merseydealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/N.-Wales-Sectors-Final-Report.pdf>

partners. Passenger numbers on the key Holyhead to Dublin route continue to increase (3% increase 2013 – 2014 year on year)<sup>3</sup> while there is over 2million tonnes of cargo passing through the Port of Holyhead.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the development of a new nuclear site on Anglesey creates employment and training needs which can benefit the whole of North Wales and North West England. During the peak construction phase of Wylfa Newydd, the project could employ 8,500 workers with the creation of 1,000 permanent jobs when the plant goes live. This does not include the downstream jobs that will also be created as a consequence of the construction project.<sup>5</sup> The region will also benefit from the development of the Orthios Eco-Park on Anglesey. The eco-park will see the construction of world-leading biomass plants and associated food production stations. The project, a £1billion investment, will see the creation of 500 jobs.

It is essential, therefore, that the NIC maintain a close relationship not just with the UK Government and Parliament but also with the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales. The creation of the Mersey Dee Alliance has enabled local government to work together across the England/Wales border and there is widespread recognition that this cooperation must be enhanced in order to develop needed infrastructure projects within the Region. Governmental borders must not be allowed, as they have in the past, to act as a brake on, or even a barrier to, the development of essential improvements to support the local economy.

The lack of investment in public transport infrastructure in the Region has meant that Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire have very high proportions of people who travel to work by car. A report into the matter noted that:

*“It is clear that while public transport exists, it does not meet aspirations in terms of linkage to employment, frequency or quality of service. Journey times are simply not competitive to those by car and there is clear evidence that this is having a significant impact on both employee and employer aspirations.”*<sup>6</sup>

Employers such as Airbus and Toyota are virtually impossible to travel to by public transport at present and there is inadequate exploitation of existing public transport infrastructure assets. The most obvious example of this is the Wrexham- Bidston-Liverpool rail line which lies immediately adjacent to the Deeside Industrial Park but which does not have a station at the Park. Relatively small levels of investment could bring about significant modal shift facilitating travel from the major population sites of Wrexham, the Wirral and Liverpool to Deeside Industrial Park.

In North-West England, the Cheshire & Warrington devolution bid specifically refers to the importance of the Mersey Dee axis. The bid estimates that there is in this area GVA of £17 billion per annum with a number of growth employment sites in Chester, Ellesmere Port, North East Wales and Wirral. It estimates that there are opportunities to bring forward over 700 hectares of employment land, realise 1 million square feet of prime city centre commercial space and deliver 54,000 new jobs and 41,000 new homes by 2040. Clearly this can only be deliverable in a sustainable way if there is a cross border and cross local authority approach to infrastructure.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/business/business-news/holyhead-sees-surge-ferry-passengers-8486875>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/465439/port-freight-statistics-2014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/465439/port-freight-statistics-2014.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.horizonnuclearpower.com/wylfa> - Further information about Wylfa Newydd

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.taith.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/130628-NEWITT-Report-FINAL-High-Res.pdf>

The Cheshire Oaks retail park has now grown to be one of the largest in Europe with approaching 10 m visitors per year. Capacity in the transport sector has been stretched by its success and there is greater scope to link this attraction with others in the sub region to enhance the visitor economy significantly. The University of Chester have at Thornton Science Park the potential to becoming a cutting edge link between academia and high tech business start-ups in areas such as energy and engineering.

A Forum to facilitate necessary cross-border investment is essential. Business in the region is intensely frustrated by the inability of Government to deliver objectives for the Region which are widely supported. Failure to deliver such objectives will, inevitably, lead to detriment to the long term interests of UK Plc and could lead world-beating, multinational business to look elsewhere. It may be that, given the right proposals, appropriate private sector contributions could be successfully levied to support projects but there is a strong view from business in the Region that it has not secured public sector investment commensurate with its contribution to the public purse in the past.

In short, agreed objectives have, in the past, not been achieved because of lack of investment and inadequate governmental structures to deliver investment. If the Region is to continue to develop, these barriers must be overcome.