

National Infrastructure Commission Call for Evidence

Response from Cumbria

December 2015

Summary

Cumbria is pleased to provide an input to the National Infrastructure Commission's Call for Evidence on these three issues. This response provides an overview of our views on the following elements of the consultation:

- 1) Connecting Northern Cities
- 2) Electricity interconnection and storage

The response will address the specific questions asked by the Commission, as well as a short introductory section that summarises Cumbria's strategic importance both in the Northern Powerhouse region and in the national economy.

Cumbria LEP has commissioned an Infrastructure Plan to fully articulate the requirements that will facilitate the delivery of planned investment. This will be completed in February 2016. However, although this Plan has not yet been signed off, Cumbria feels confident in setting out the high level priorities in this response.

Introduction

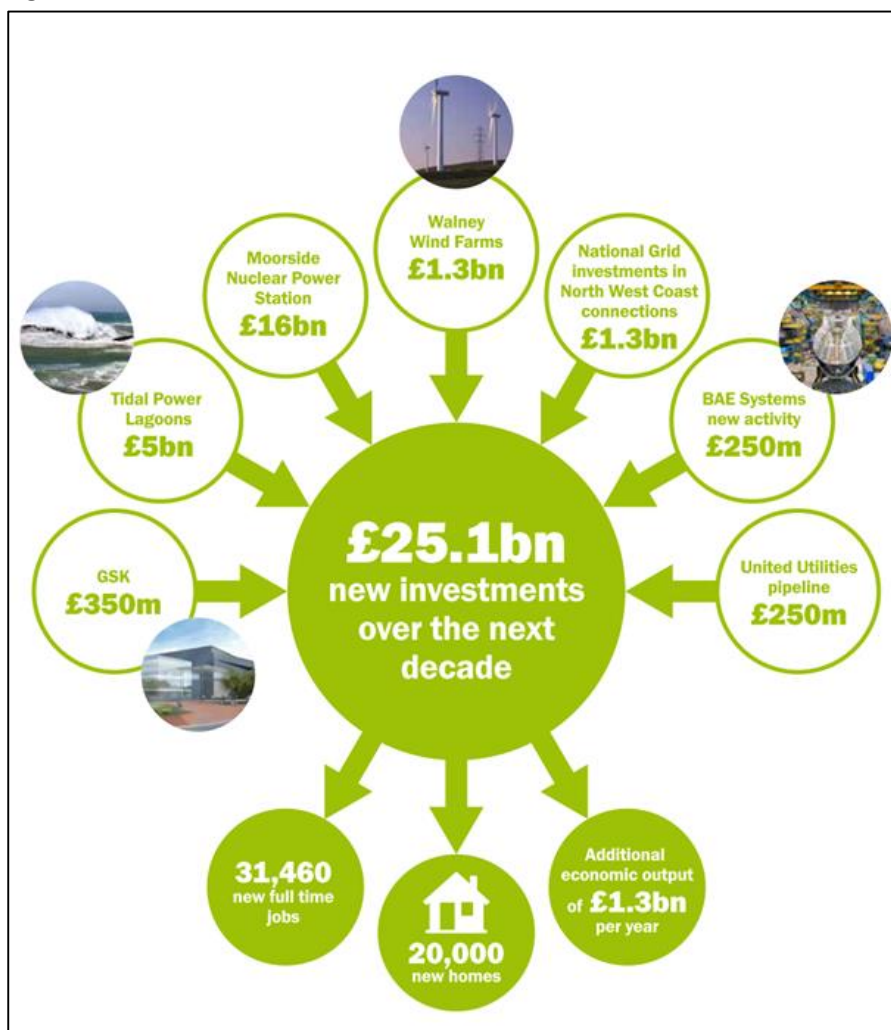
Cumbria is a key part of the Northern Powerhouse, providing a strong and export orientated economy and the power, water and environment that underpin the wider UK economy. This strength is reflected in the level of investments coming into our county over the next decade, approximately £25bn in total.

Cumbria's stunning natural environment hosts a dynamic and diverse economy. Cumbria's businesses include those playing a leading role in hi-tech fields such as energy, nuclear and advanced manufacturing, but also in those sectors that capitalise on the geography of the county such as logistics, food production, farming and forestry, plus our globally-recognised tourism offer. These strengths have already attracted major industries and investment, from large household names to dynamic small- and medium-sized businesses in the manufacturing supply chain.

We are a high-performing economy with a plan and ambition to grow further. Cumbria is in the top performing LEP areas on indicators such as employment in export intensive sectors and manufacturing. It is also one of the top performing LEPs for enterprise survival and has the highest proportion of apprentice qualifications in the country. In both national and international terms, what makes Cumbria unique is the combination of being a great place for business innovation and enterprise alongside a world-class environment, landscape and quality of life.

The infographic summarises the scale of investment being attracted into Cumbria in the next decade, which illustrates why it is so important that connectivity is improved into the Northern Powerhouse and UK as a whole.

Figure 1 Scale of Investments in Cumbria



Northern Connectivity

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)?

Currently, there are significant weaknesses in connectivity within Cumbria but also to the wider Northern Powerhouse, as well as national and international hubs. This weakness is reflected through slow journey speeds, poor route resilience and poor links between modes of transport, which must be addressed if Cumbria can fully deliver the economic impacts that could be derived from planned investment.

Cumbria's Strategic Economic Plan seeks to make the county an internationally recognised destination for businesses and visitors and a global leader in its core sectors. It is aiming to deliver 31,460 jobs together with 20,000 new homes over the next decade. Improved connectivity within the county and to the wider Powerhouse and beyond will be vital to realising these benefits – currently there is a mismatch between the scale of ambition and the reality of the transport network.

As summarised above, the county is due to benefit from large-scale planned investment from the energy, nuclear, defence and pharmaceutical sectors. As a result, Cumbria will play a critical role in the economic growth and success of the country. To fulfill its potential, there is a pressing need to provide the right supporting infrastructure to allow the efficient movement of people, goods, materials and plant.

Current challenges include:

Rail: Cumbria's rail network suffers from underinvestment, lack of capacity, slow line speeds, aging rolling stock, and infrequent services. We also need to achieve appropriate rail infrastructure connections between the West Coast Mainline and HS2/HS3. At the same time, the network is critical to the construction and operation of nationally significant infrastructure projects, chiefly the new nuclear plant at Moorside.

Roads: Strategic road connections from the M6 to West Cumbria, Furness Peninsula and North East England are variable and are in need of journey time and resilience improvements. Delivering these will support major investments; the continued diversification of the economy, and open up new housing and employment sites by improving the movement of goods and people across the county.

Airport: Carlisle Airport offers significant potential for growth in commercial and passenger operations. The airport provides the opportunity to widen Cumbria's international visitor offer and develop a strategically significant logistics hub. To achieve this, it will be important for on-site facilities for aircraft and passengers to be improved. It is also recognised that links between Cumbria and Manchester Airport will need to be improved to support international business and tourism.

Ports: Cumbria has a number of ports situated around the county's coastline that would benefit from investment in order to service the needs of the off-shore energy industry, nuclear new build and supply chains. Currently, the ports do not have the infrastructure and connectivity required to take on this role.

Sustainable Transport: Cumbria is a key visitor destination and in order to grow the visitor economy particularly in terms of the international market there is a need to develop sustainable transport connectivity by bus, boat, cycle and on foot to the main attractions.

In short, Cumbria is a key engine of growth for the Northern Powerhouse. It provides the energy and water supplies that support the ongoing sustainable development of the UK economy. Cumbria has a development pipeline of national significance, uniquely combined with an internationally important tourism destination. To achieve its ambitions, a transformational shift in Cumbria's connectivity needs to be achieved.

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

We would urge the National Infrastructure Commission to expand its area of interest beyond simply 'city-to-city' and also factor in the major economic importance and potential of county areas. The County Council Network estimates that counties represent two-fifths of the national economy: they have more active businesses than any other part of England and business start-up rates in counties are second only to rates in London.

The economy of the north is complex; it is home to 11 LEPs each of which make an important contribution. For example, while Cumbria does not comfortably sit within an established 'city region' like Manchester, Leeds or Sheffield, it nonetheless makes a critical contribution to the economy of the north; delivering jobs, exports, energy and water. Recognising this point, Transport for the North is increasingly moving dialogue from 'City Regions' to 'LEP Areas'.

This is a more responsive approach and one that should be taken here. The National Infrastructure Commission should consider what economic benefits could be derived from improvements to connectivity across the whole of the Northern Powerhouse.

We have identified solutions for Cumbria and detail on priority schemes will continue to develop as the Cumbria Infrastructure Plan being prepared by the Cumbria LEP moves towards completion (due in February 2016).

Rail - Investment is required to support the delivery of major new investments and to facilitate the continuing growth of Cumbria.

- Physical and operational improvements to Furness Line and Cumbrian Coast Line between Carlisle and Carnforth via Barrow. This includes improved linkages between the Port of Workington and Moorside. Demand analysis indicates that this improvement will need to be in place by 2018.
- Additional freight and passenger capacity on West Coast Mainline and Carlisle Station in particular, by 2020.
- Improved connections between Manchester Airport and Cumbria.
- Improvements to our stations and rolling stock following the new franchises becoming operational in 2016.
- Appropriate rail infrastructure connections between the West Coast Mainline and HS2/HS3.
- Significant upgrades to our station infrastructure.

Road – Road connections with the M6 need to support growth and for the delivery of crucial homes and jobs.

- Road improvements east of M6 on A66 and A69 to form a commitment within RIS2. Highways England has already committed to the strategic road studies for A69 and A66 to improve connectivity.
- Road improvements west of M6 to the A595, A66 and A590. We are commissioning a strategic road study for west of M6 to align with the A66 and A69 studies.
- Delivery of new road links between Junction 42 of the M6 and the A689 in order to unlock a significant mixed use development and to support strategic east-west connectivity.

Ports – with further investment, ports will play a critical role supporting the nuclear industry and off-shore industries.

- Port of Workington – package of improvements to increase capacity and connectivity by road and rail, from 2016 onwards.
- Port of Barrow – improvements to both port facilities and access

Airport – Carlisle Airport can play an important role in supporting our economy by facilitating business and leisure travellers and in the field of logistics. The Government has signalled its commitment to Carlisle Airport through funding from the Regional Air Connectivity Fund to develop the route from Carlisle to Belfast. To maximise potential there will be a requirement to improve aircraft and passenger facilities.

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

Over the next 10 years Cumbria is expected to see significant levels of investment. Delivering this will create immediate and acute infrastructure challenges that must be addressed over the next 5 years. In particular improvements will be required with respect to the following areas of infrastructure:

Cumbrian Coast Line – to enable it to play a critical role in delivering material from the Port of Workington to the Moorside Development Site alongside other major investments in west Cumbria.

Port of Workington – to ensure the port is capable of supporting major investments planned in west Cumbria while also supporting future growth of the local economy through related activity and associated employment land.

A595 Corridor – this would allow it to play a critical role in facilitating major investments within west Cumbria improving connectivity to key investments and supply chains along the coast and wider connectivity to the strategic road network.

Carlisle Airport – to support the range of investment coming into the County and ensure connectivity is in place between the local area and international destinations to support major investments.

Port of Barrow – to ensure the Port is ready to support major new off-shore investments and BAE's investment associated with the Successor Programme.

Rail Stations – stations across the County require improved facilities. In particular Carlisle Station will require improved commercial, parking and rail improvements for it to be able to fulfil its strategic function as a key freight and passenger interchange on the west coast mainline.

Sustainable Transport – in particular there will be a requirement to deliver transport corridor improvements that can support the visitor economy.

4. 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?

We have described above the investment required in Cumbria's ports, Carlisle Airport and improved links with Manchester Airport for these gateways to take on their pivotal position in delivering the planned investment in the nuclear, off-shore and logistics sectors but also the growth of our visitor economy and to encourage multinational or export orientated firms to locate in Cumbria.

We are pursuing these priorities through all available channels, including the Cumbria Deal discussions with Government, as well as in the regional forums of Transport for the North and Rail North, and via direct discussions with the Department for Transport, Highways England and Network Rail.

We need recognition from the National Infrastructure Commission and agencies that this investment is not just locally significant and relevant to communities in Cumbria, but is of national importance.

5. 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?

It is anticipated to parties will need to work together to deliver critical infrastructure for Cumbria and the north.

Cumbria is actively pursuing a 'Deal' with Government. If successful, appropriate governance arrangements will be agreed that will enable transparency and accountability, while ensuring certainty over the investment pipeline over the short to medium term. This will allow Cumbria to take the lead on delivering the infrastructure improvements that are required to unlock economic growth and radically improved connectivity with the Northern Powerhouse.

Together with Cumbria, Government and its associated agencies (like Highways England and Network Rail) must also take a proactive role in the delivery of essential infrastructure, especially where it concerns strategic transport networks or nationally important investments.