

## Shropshire Council's response to the National Infrastructure Commission consultation

### 1. Connecting northern cities

#### Questions

#### **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)?**

As a large, rural and sparsely populated county (310,000 population; 0.96 persons per hectare (Source: ONS mid- year estimates, 2014), Shropshire is dependent on a good, well connected and integrated road network, which links to rail networks and to airports. Travel to work patterns across our porous borders indicate large numbers travelling for work across to the West Midlands, to the South and East, and North and North West, to Cheshire, Staffordshire and Manchester and beyond, as well as into Wales.

This Council has previously made submission to the BIS Select Committee Inquiry into the Government's Productivity Plan, and is one of just two rural unitary authorities to do so, the other being Cornwall.

We have already commented to that Committee as follows: *"In welcoming the forthcoming new long-term National Infrastructure Plan (NIP), Shropshire Council advocates that Government follows the Natural Capital Committee recommendation for incorporation of natural capital into each of the economic infrastructure sectors including energy, flood defences and water, and for an investment programme for natural capital to explicitly feature in the NIP. (paragraph 4.1 of the Shropshire Council response)*

Shropshire sits within The Marches LEP, one of the largest geographical LEPs in the country covering the local authority areas of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. It is an area of both urban and rural assets; Hereford, Shrewsbury and Telford are the principal urban settlements which provide employment and social opportunities, supplemented by market towns and villages, whilst the landscape supports a rural economy of farming and tourism and attracts people to live and work in the area.

This natural landscape itself presents a tangible economic asset, given the actual and potential positive value of natural capital. For this reason, we advocate including the actual and potential positive value of natural capital as a specific measure to aid productivity growth, using measures such as site based natural capital assessments.

The physical realities of a geography that includes the River Severn and upland and hill areas, with a dependency on key arterial routes through the region that are liable to flooding, causes practical challenges around transport connectivity exacerbated by ongoing challenges around digital connectivity.

In seeking to address weaknesses in transport connectivity for northern city regions, including the natural geographical challenges brought into stark relief by recent flooding in Cumbria, we hope that the Commission will find it helpful to also consider the geography of areas such as Shropshire and the Marches in which families seek to live, and businesses seek to thrive, and through which business, education, tourism and family traffic seeks to flow to the north as well as to points east, west and south.

The Marches forms the southern boundary of the North Gateway and directly adjoins Chester West and Chester and Cheshire East. Shropshire and the Marches is equidistant to Manchester and Birmingham and is closer to Chester than Worcester.

The Marches forms the western boundary of the Midlands and directly adjoins Birmingham and The Black Country, the largest urban areas of the Midlands. The Marches also benefits from close proximity to a number of other urban centres:

Stafford;  
Stoke-on-Trent;  
Worcester; and  
Cheltenham/Gloucester/Bristol.

The Marches plays a key role linking England and Wales with a number of key Welsh towns located on the periphery of The Marches, including:

Wrexham;  
Welshpool;  
Newtown;  
Abergavenny; and  
Monmouth.

And through the A483 and A55 to Ireland

These strategic links mean that The Marches has a role to play in both the regional, national and international economy.

We feel that there should be more joined-up strategic planning and awareness between transport infrastructure (eg HS 2) housing and employment land and electricity provision. We would argue strongly that the National Infrastructure Commission should take a lead on this and promote this approach.

The following table summarises the challenges to growth in jobs, enterprise creation and growth and housing in terms of key connectivity corridors, considering Shropshire within its wider Marches LEP context.

Key Transport Corridor	Current Transport Link (road / direct rail)	Issues and Challenges
The Marches North ↔ Birmingham and The Black Country	Road: A5 – M54	Reliability issues between M54 junctions 6 and 7 (for Telford) and delays on the M5 and M6 corridor <sup>[1]</sup> . Speeds on this route are 15% worse than average <sup>[2]</sup> .
	Rail: Shrewsbury – Telford – Wolverhampton – Birmingham.	Journey times are slow <sup>[3]</sup> and services infrequent (only 1-2 direct trains an hour <sup>3</sup> ). There are also issues in terms of capacity of rolling stock on some services <sup>[4]</sup> .
The Marches South ↔ Birmingham and The Black Country	Road: M50-M5, A449/A41303 – Worcester – M5	Lengthy journey times <sup>3</sup> , delays on the M5 and M50 <sup>2</sup> and journey times around urban areas can be unreliable due to congestion particularly in Hereford and Worcester <sup>2</sup> .
	Rail: Hereford – Worcester – Birmingham	Only 1-2 direct trains per hour whilst speeds are more than 15% worse than average <sup>3</sup> .
The Marches: North ↔ South	Road: A49	Delays and poor journey time reliability along the entire route, specific issues on the A49 at Hereford Bridge (between A465 and A438) <sup>2</sup> .
	Rail: Carmarthen to Manchester Piccadilly	Lengthy journey times and frequency of services is low <sup>4</sup> .
The Marches ↔ North Wales	Road: A5	Congestion and delays along this key route, particular issues around Shrewsbury <sup>2</sup> .
	Rail: Hereford-Shrewsbury/Wrexham/Holyhead (Cardiff-Holyhead service)	Lengthy journey times and infrequent services <sup>4</sup> .
The Marches ↔ Mid-Wales	Road: A458 ( Shrewsbury to Welshpool and A483 to Newtown), A44 (Hereford to Llandrindod Wells)	Indirect route and lengthy journey times.
	Rail: interchange required at Shrewsbury.	Infrequent services and lengthy journey times.
The Marches ↔ North-West (Cheshire / Stoke-on-Trent)	Road: A49 / A53 / A518	Congestion around urban areas and unreliable journey times.
	Rail: Hereford-Ludlow-Shrewsbury-Crewe	Infrequent services <sup>4</sup> .
The Marches ↔ South Wales and the South West (including	Road: A49 / A40 / M50 / A465 / A438 / A4137	Delays on the A49 <sup>2</sup> , and poor journey time reliability on the A40, M50 A438, A465 and A4137.

Key Transport Corridor	Current Transport Link (road / direct rail)	Issues and Challenges
South Wales, Gloucestershire and S West)	Rail: Carmarthen to Manchester Piccadilly	Lengthy journey times and frequency of services is low <sup>4</sup> .

<sup>[1]</sup> Midlands to Wales and Gloucestershire Route Strategy, Highway Agency, April 2014

<sup>2</sup> Objectives for Improved Transport Connectivity, Midlands Connect, September 2014

<sup>3</sup> The Marches Rail Study, The Marches LEP, March 2014

<sup>4</sup> SWOT Analysis of Transport and the Economy, The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, January 2014

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

### 3.

Key Transport Corridor	Links (road / direct rail)	Schemes	Details
The Marches North ↔ Birmingham and The Black Country	Road: A5 – M54	Shrewsbury/Wolverhampton A5/M54/M6 corridor.	Improvements to junctions on the M54 (including J4),
		M54/M6/M6 Toll Road Link at M6 Junction.10A	Provide access from M54 in all directions at M6 junction 10A e.g. from M54 to northbound M6 and M6 Toll Road, M54 from southbound M6. Expanding catchment area for employers. Ensure M54 designated all the way to Shrewsbury.
	Rail: Shrewsbury – Telford – Wolverhampton – Birmingham	Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton Rail Line Electrification.	Reduce journey times, provide more frequent services and improve connections to the Black Country, West Midlands, North West (interchange at Wolverhampton), London and the South East. KPMG (2012) showed that electrification could provide £262m GVA benefit to West Midlands as well as 3,320 jobs (majority in Shrewsbury and Telford).
		Shrewsbury to Birmingham Route.	Initially, increasing frequency of service to every 30 minute. Also, lengthening of the trains on this line
The Marches South ↔ Birmingham and The Black Country	Road: M50-M5. A449/A41303 – Worcester – M5	Worcester Southern Link Road and M5 J6 and J7.	Dualling the Southern Link Road (A4440) to the south of Worcester linking to the M5. Improvements to both M5 J6 and J7,
	Rail: Hereford – Worcester – Birmingham	Double Track Shelwick Junction to Great Malvern,	Hereford to Birmingham Line
The Marches: North ↔ South	Road: A49	Hereford/Shrewsbury A49 corridor	Provision of safe passing places and junction capacity/safety improvements between Ross and Whitchurch
	Rail: Carmarthen to Manchester Piccadilly	Train lengthening for services between Cardiff and Manchester via Marches.	Various different options for the scheme, with different value for money assessments carried out.
		Additional Services on the Marches Line.	Additional local service on Re-timetabling as well.
	Road: A5	Shrewsbury/Wrexham A5 corridor	Dualling / partial dualling of the A5/A483 north of Shrewsbury and improving junction

Key Transport Corridor	Links (road / direct rail)	Schemes	Details
The Marches ←→ North Wales			capacity on Shrewsbury/Oswestry bypasses.
	Rail: Hereford - Shrewsbury/Wrexham/Holyhead (Cardiff-Holyhead service)	North-South Journey Time Reduction Scheme - between Shrewsbury and Chester via Wrexham	Committed scheme - enabling faster journey times and some additional capacity.
		Shrewsbury to Chester Full redoubling likely to be required by 2043.	Shrewsbury to Chester Full redoubling likely to be required by 2043.
The Marches ←→ Mid-Wales	Road: A458 (Shrewsbury to Welshpool and A483 to Newtown), A44 (Hereford to Llandrindod Wells)	A458 Buttington Cross to Wollaston Cross.  A483 Newtown (north-south link, Newtown by-pass)	Welsh Transport Plan
	Rail: interchange may be required at Shrewsbury.		
The Marches ←→ North-West	Road: A49 / A53	M54/M6/M6 Toll Road Link at M6 Junction.10A	Provide access from M54 in all directions at M6 junction 10A e.g. from M54 to northbound M6 and M6 Toll Road, M54 from southbound M6. Expanding catchment area for employers. M54 designated all the way to Shrewsbury.
	Rail: Hereford-Ludlow-Shrewsbury-Crewe	Shrewsbury to Chester Full redoubling likely to be required by 2043.	Shrewsbury to Chester Full redoubling likely to be required by 2043.
The Marches ←→ South Wales and the South West	Road: A49 / A40 / M50 / A465 / A438 / A4137	No schemes identified within The Marches.	
	Rail: Carmarthen to Manchester Piccadilly	Additional Services on the Marches Line.	Additional local service on route Re-timetabling as well.

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

The corridors (rail and road mode) within The Marches which will contribute the most towards achieving local growth priorities in the short / medium term, in order, are:

- Double Track Shelwick Junction to Great Malvern
- Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton Rail Line Electrification
- Shrewsbury to Birmingham highway corridor
- Shrewsbury to Chester rail route. Full redoubling likely to be required by 2043.
- Shrewsbury to Crewe especially the massive boost to development of settlements in this corridor such as Whitchurch due to the new HS2 Station at Basford Crewe.

#### **Commentary on Rail**

In order to travel via train, most business people have to drive to a main rail network station such as Crewe, Stafford or Wolverhampton. Shrewsbury, the county town of Shropshire, is still insufficiently connected for many. Direct trains eg to London are still very infrequent and in most cases slower than in-direct trains via Crewe. The same applies to airports, with Birmingham, Liverpool John Lennon and Manchester Airports being the nearest, plus access to smaller airports at Bristol and Cardiff.

Specific projects recommended that would aid "Northern city interconnectivity" and in particular Shrewsbury as county town are:

- 1) Electrification of line to Birmingham and then Birmingham International terminal, with new higher speed connection;
- 2) Development of a Parkway style station for Shrewsbury with good parking facilities: potential location end of M54/A5 link to A49;
- 3) Link to HS2 main station at Basford: objective would be to be able to reach London in under 2 hrs, via car and then rail.

### **Intensifying development around commuter hubs – NPPF CHANGES**

There is also an ongoing consultation regarding potential planning policy changes in the NPPF and one of the ideas floated here is about intensifying development around commuter hubs (all major train stations with a pop of 25,000+) any outcomes from this call for evidence around connectivity should be cross referenced with any changes to NPPF.

### **Commentary on Road**

We have noted the policy intention for revenues raised from Vehicle Excise Duty to be allocated through a new Roads Fund for investment directly back into the strategic road network. National infrastructure activity to engender local growth needs to take into account that car ownership is higher in rural areas (Source: Defra, Statistical Digest of Rural England, May 2015), and that fewer trunk roads may mean our communities putting in more but benefiting less.

As per the Council response to the BIS Select Committee Inquiry into Government's Productivity Plan (paragraph 4.6.1) we have commented that: *"...just 15.8% of households in Shropshire do not have a car or van, compared with 25.8% nationally. There are also related issues of fuel poverty and access to rural garages, all factors to take into consideration to aid equitable allocation of VED revenues."*

The county supports 14,420 businesses (2014, ONS IDBR), including significant numbers of home-based entrepreneurs and SMEs, with small businesses rating their van or car as crucial for business. As a rural county road journeys tend to be longer in miles and time which has cost implications through fuel, car maintenance and time.

More than half of the members of the Shropshire Branch of the Federation of Small Businesses have reported that the poor state of roads costs them up to £2,500 a year. To ensure their economic growth, a functioning road network is vital.

More strategic planning to ease congestion on the major roads such as the M54, A5, A49 and A483 is needed and an approach towards transport in rural areas that would enable Shropshire small businesses to move and grow. Ensuring that existing roads are fit for purpose and that new roads are built in conjunction with other modes of transport (rail links, airports), would relieve congestion and provide better access for small businesses, in both rural and urban areas. It will also require better strategic planning and co-ordination between local authority highways departments and Highways England.

Efforts to prioritise road corridors for investment would usefully include consideration of garage locations as well as surface conditions and adequacy and sufficiency of road junctions along these corridors to effectively link businesses and communities in rural and market towns with economic, learning, cultural and sporting and service access opportunities across the Marches LEP area and across borders to the North, to the South, West to Wales, and East to the Midlands conurbations.

The issues outlined above have a direct impact on productivity and profitability for small businesses. Transport costs are higher than within more urban areas and access to new business markets including opportunities to export are constrained.

As a consequence, many small businesses cannot offer new employment or expand into new markets, especially if they are based in a rural town/village where the only practical mode of transport is by car. This is made worse when coupled with other infrastructure issues such as poor broadband and mobile connectivity.

**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?**

- Making the most of HS2. Improving access to HS2 stations / hubs in both Birmingham and Crewe.
- Linking to international gateways. Improving access from and through The Marches to Holyhead international port and Birmingham and Manchester airports.
- Improving east-west connectivity. The A5 / M54 corridor is a key east-west link to/from the Midlands, and provides connectivity to international gateways.
- Ensuring improved access from Shrewsbury, Telford and Hereford to the Black Country and Birmingham and for onward journeys to the East and West Midlands, Oxford to Cambridge Arc and to the Haven Gateway.
- Improving freight services. Facilitating freight movements from and through The Marches to regional centres and freight hubs.

***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?***

Shropshire Council, as a unitary authority and as a constituent member of The Marches LEP, fully supports the current West Midland Rail devolution process and has taken up a Director role on the WMR franchise partnership company with DFT. Shropshire Council would also welcome similar strategic input to the devolving Welsh Rail Franchise, given the cross border interdependence on this franchise for key rail corridor links to the West Midlands and direct connections to Birmingham Airport.

There are also related economic interdependencies with Wales and the South West, not least for further and higher education opportunities opened up by effective transport links. This includes efforts to attract young people from outside the region to the new University Centre Shrewsbury venture with the University of Chester, and to Harper Adams University, as well as efforts to reduce outward migration of local young people post-education by generating more higher value, knowledge based jobs in Shropshire and the Marches.

Similar devolution in terms of local Highways Management and development, with appropriate strategic representation under representative and balanced regional or sub regional ITA structures may also be welcomed. Devolved, adequate and ring-fenced national funding would be a prerequisite to such arrangements. Assuming such however, the ability at a Regional /LEP / sub regional level to then align Growth Fund Projects or similar capital streams more closely to devolved strategic rail and highway initiatives could accrue additional local synergies and ultimately enhance local economic outcomes.

To have a lasting, positive economic impact Shropshire would want the Infrastructure Commission to seek to ensure that infrastructure investment is balanced, not least through greater understanding about urban and rural interdependencies, and greater awareness of the actual and potential value of natural capital, therefore enabling all regions of the UK to benefit.