14 October 2026

Response from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority

1. Executive position

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) welcomes the invite to comment on the CMA's Interim Report. We note and support the CMA's provisional finding that the transaction may be expected to result in a substantial lessening of competition in the wholesale supply of fixed broadband services.

GMCA remains of the view that the transaction risks materially weakening infrastructure competition in Greater Manchester. The acquisition would remove Netomnia as an independent network builder and bring it within a group closely aligned with Virgin Media O2, reducing the number of independently controlled full-fibre networks able to compete for wholesale customers, investment opportunities and future deployment.

Our concern is not with investment or scale in themselves. GMCA actively welcomes long-term private investment in full-fibre infrastructure. Our concern and stated position in our published paper 'Delivering World Class Connectivity in Greater Manchester' is that investment should support genuine, sustainable competition, consumer choice, resilience and continued deployment across all parts of the city region.

2. Greater Manchester Combined Authorities competition concerns

GMCA's earlier invited submission in favour of an investigation into the merger, set out the importance of Netomnia/YouFibre as an independent challenger in Greater Manchester and the potential local consequences of its absorption into the nexfibre structure. Those concerns remain.

At city-region and local level, the loss of an independently controlled altnet is likely to reduce competitive tension between physical networks. This may weaken incentives on price, service quality, innovation, wholesale access and expansion into areas where the commercial case is more marginal.

The effect is particularly important in a market where local outcomes depend on the number of genuinely independent networks serving, or credibly planning to serve, individual towns and neighbourhoods. National scale does not remove the need to assess local overlaps and the loss of future competition in Greater Manchester.

GMCA does not have a preferred provider, our concern is purely to preserve a competitive local market.

3. Investment and deployment

GMCA recognises the parties' argument that the transaction could provide greater financial scale and support future investment. However, scale should not be treated as a substitute for competition, nor should projected investment benefits be accepted without clear, enforceable evidence that they are merger-specific and will translate into additional deployment.

Any assessment of investment benefits should therefore consider whether planned build would proceed without the transaction, whether overlapping build plans would be rationalised, and how the transaction would affect investment in underserved or higher-cost communities. The CMA should also consider the potential deterrent effect on other altnets deciding whether to enter or expand in Greater Manchester.

4. Requested CMA approach

GMCA supports the CMA continuing its detailed assessment of the substantial lessening of competition identified in the Interim Report, including local overlap, loss of potential competition and the relationship between nexfibre, Virgin Media O2 and the acquired businesses.

If the CMA concludes that the competition concerns cannot be removed with confidence, GMCA considers that the transaction should not proceed in its current form. If remedies are considered, they should be structural wherever feasible and must be effective, enforceable and durable. Any behavioural commitments should include clear delivery milestones, transparent wholesale access, safeguards against discriminatory treatment, protection of independently determined build plans and meaningful monitoring and enforcement.

GMCA would be willing to engage privately with the CMA on Greater Manchester evidence and local market impacts.

5. Conclusion

GMCA's position remains aligned to our published position that the proposed transaction risks a substantial lessening of competition in Greater Manchester. Continued fibre investment is essential, but it should not come at the expense of independent infrastructure competition, affordability, service quality, resilience or future consumer choice.

We therefore ask the CMA to give full weight to the local competitive effects in Greater Manchester and to ensure that any final decision or remedy protects both effective competition and continued investment.