

NORTH WEST

TRANSPORT



North West England is the third most populous UK region outside London, with 87% of its communities¹ living in urban areas. The North West is the second most densely populated region in the country, producing 10% of the nation's Gross Value Added².

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

ICE has compiled State of the Nation reports each year since 2000, drawing on expertise across its membership and beyond to stimulate debate and to highlight the actions needed to improve the UK's infrastructure.

ICE's State of the Nation: Transport 2013 UK report presents a series of detailed recommendations – for the short, medium and long-term. While all are important, we believe that three are particularly critical to our success:

- 1. IMMEDIATE ACTION TO IMPROVE ROAD CONDITIONS, PLANNING AND FUNDING**
- 2. ENSURING CLEAR NATIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGIES FOR ALL PARTS OF THE UK**
- 3. CONTINUING AND EXTENDING DEVOLUTION TO FULLY-INTEGRATED TRANSPORT BODIES**

Our emphasis is on making best use of existing assets and achieving the most with public money. The headline recommendations are backed by a series of further points requiring rapid action and a suite of detailed changes by mode and topic. The report concludes with a proposal to create the capacity to address the major social, economic, environmental and technological change which ICE anticipates through the 2020s.

The UK report, with the full detail behind our recommendations, can be downloaded at ice.org.uk/SoNTransport. This briefing sheet highlights how ICE's UK-level recommendations impact on business and communities across our region.

In the past decade, the volume of traffic using our major roads has increased by 5.9%, 2%³ above the national average. This type of growth has created specific challenges for the development of transport infrastructure as an agent of economic growth and social prosperity. The region is currently benefitting from a range of important civil engineering led projects which will aim to deliver these objectives: the new Mersey Gateway river crossing; the Northern Hub rail project; Manchester Metrolink extensions and the Pennine Reach Bus Scheme.



Image credit – Mersey Gateway

TRANSPORT IN GREATER MANCHESTER

The North West (NW) has seen some important developments since the last ICE North West State of the Nation briefing sheet was published in 2008. At that time Greater Manchester was poised to implement a major programme of investment (TIF funding⁴) in public transport to be unlocked by the implementation of demand management through peak-time congestion charging.

In the event, the package of measures was rejected by local referendum. Clearly, there was insufficient local support for the proposals. However, an alternative strategy developed by the new Combined Authority, has put in place an innovative funding package to improve public transport in the area, particularly the very successful Metrolink tram system.

ICE NW continues to believe that more robust demand management is required to address current and future congestion problems on our roads. When the economy picks up again, the North West's roads will inevitably become even busier, with congestion adding to business costs and increasing pollution. Despite the rejection of congestion charging by Greater Manchester, ICE NW still believes this remains the most appropriate way of addressing the congestion problem in the biggest conurbation in the North West.

TRANSPORT STRATEGY

ICE NW has long held the view that we need a national transport strategy for England, to establish specific interventions and infrastructure projects in a truly strategic context. The national strategy should cascade to the regional and local levels, supporting local transport authorities and bodies in developing local strategies, and working together across boundaries to improve the transport offer.

Following the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), which were responsible for the regional spatial strategies including transport strategies, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Local Transport Bodies (LTBs) are now emerging. The latter will be responsible for decisions on local major transport schemes. Five LEPs have been created in the North West, covering the whole of the region, with no gaps or overlaps; while the development of regional LTBs is proceeding.

ICE NW continues to support the devolution of power to the appropriate level, and generally welcomes what is being done and achieved in the North West. However, it remains unclear how the LEPs and LTBs will operate in parts of the North West, and how they will work with local transport authorities.



M6 Lancashire (Image © Ian Lawson)

The pioneering Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Transport for Greater Manchester appears to be working well, and is often held as an exemplar for local transport governance. Merseyside has opted for a different model, with the City Region LEP and LTB operating alongside the Merseyside Integrated Transport Authority and Halton Borough Council, whose boundaries are coterminous with the LEP and LTB areas. These arrangements are crucial to the development and implementation of a transport strategy for the North West, and it is hoped that the governance structures will mature over the coming months and years. However, it is not at all clear how they will work in the future, particularly on transport issues that cross LEP and LTB boundaries.

REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A comprehensive transport strategy for England; incorporating a mechanism for integration across modes, responsible organisations and creating a framework for regional and local transport strategies
2. North West bodies such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships, the new Local Transport Bodies, the highway and transport authorities working together to enable a regional transport strategy and associated investment priorities to be established
3. Priority given to development of freight links, particularly road and rail links in support of major port developments, such as the Liverpool SupaPort
4. All North West transport authorities and relevant bodies following the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's example, and developing a comprehensive long-term transport strategy and implementation programme, with an associated funding package

MAKING THE MOST OF TRANSPORT

ROADS

There have been some important improvements to the road network in the North West in recent years, including improvements at the M62/M602/M60 junction, to reduce congestion; M60 Jn 8-12 Managed Motorway, M60 Jn 15-12 Lane gain; A556 Knutsford to Bowden improvements and Edge Lane link into Liverpool city centre; These

are welcome enhancements to our strategic road network, but there remain many bottlenecks in the North West, that will need to be considered as part of the future major schemes programmes, either by the Highways Agency or by the newly-formed LTBs.

The condition of the road network nationally is a cause for concern, and there are signs of serious deterioration in the condition of roads in the North West. As funding for maintenance is squeezed, local highway authorities increasingly appear to be using a 'patch and mend' approach to dealing with defects, rather than planned maintenance improvements; and even the normally well-maintained motorways are showing increasing signs of wear. Unless additional funding is allocated to highways maintenance, our roads infrastructure will inevitably deteriorate further, with knock-on impacts on safety and the local economy.

BUSES

The bus is a crucial part of the North West transport network with some 227m journeys per annum⁵ across Greater Manchester alone. They are vital in both our conurbations and in many of our more rural areas. The quality of buses has improved substantially in recent years, and the work being done to improve punctuality and reliability of services, introduce smart ticketing, and enhance information for bus passengers, is welcomed. However, much still needs to be done to ensure bus services are properly integrated into the rest of the transport network.

Arguably, the Local Transport Act 2008 made it easier for local transport authorities to introduce Bus Quality Contracts, allowing London-style franchises to be let. But no Quality Contracts have yet been introduced in the North West and none of the transport authorities appear to be developing them.

Some transport authorities are pursuing Bus Statutory Quality Partnerships, with agreements between local authorities, transport authorities and bus operators on timetables, service frequencies and infrastructure improvements. Partnership agreements which have been introduced, such as in Merseyside, are showing signs of improvements in services and customer satisfaction. However it remains uncertain whether Quality Partnerships will ever achieve the scale of bus service improvements and integration with other transport modes that could be achieved with Quality Contracts.

CASE STUDY

MANCHESTER BUS PRIORITY



Oxford Road (Image credit – Transport for Greater Manchester)

Bus services in Manchester city centre are to be given high priority under a proposal now under public consultation.

The proposed bus priority package – a partnership between Transport for Greater Manchester and Manchester City Council – aims to deliver access improvements across the city centre, speeding up journey times, improving reliability and making bus travel an attractive alternative to the private car.

Key proposals for Oxford Road include a bus, hackney carriage, cycle and emergency vehicle only section between Hathersage Road and Grosvenor Street. The scheme also includes continental 'Dutch-style' cycle lanes along on the carriageway, as well as wider pedestrian footpaths.

Manchester city centre and Oxford Road are viewed as essential components in driving the bus priority package and its key aim of connecting people across the region to employment, educational, health, leisure and retail.

The overall bus priority package is one of the largest investments in the Greater Manchester bus network in decades. It is a co-ordinated programme that will ultimately enhance over 25 miles of network, improving links between Manchester city centre and Leigh, Atherton, Middleton and Parrs Wood. The scheme also includes a 4.5 mile guided busway, a first for Greater Manchester.



RAIL

The West Coast Route Modernisation Programme, completed in 2008, has delivered substantial improvements in rail services between the North West and London. Fastest journey times between the two major conurbations – Manchester and Liverpool – and London are now just a little over two hours. The improved connectivity with London and the South East provides considerable economic benefits for the North West.

Despite recent improvements, parts of the West Coast Line are already operating at capacity. More seats have been provided on Pendolino trains, by increasing the number of carriages from 9 to 11, but there remains little scope for any further growth on the line.

East-West connectivity within the North West and along the trans-Pennine route to Leeds and York is being substantially improved by the electrification of the line, and by the phased introduction of the Northern Rail Hub proposals. Electrification of the line between Manchester and Liverpool, due to be completed in December 2014, will see faster electric trains operating between Liverpool and Manchester, allowing four fast trains an hour to run between the two North West conurbations. There are also electrification proposals for the North West that will see the Huyton to Wigan (by Dec 2014), Preston to Blackpool (by May 2016), and Manchester to Preston (by Dec 2016) lines electrified.

The Northern Hub, scheduled to be completed in 2019, will eliminate bottlenecks in Manchester and elsewhere, allowing increased capacity and faster journey times on the trans-Pennine route. Up to 700 more trains will run each day, and space will be provided for 44 million more passengers a year⁶. All of these improvements will provide substantial economic benefits (approximately 60% of the benefits directly to the economy of Greater Manchester⁷) to the North West, and are warmly welcomed by ICE.

The HS2 rail proposals promise to usher in a new era for UK rail, substantially increasing capacity and reshaping our urban geography.

The published proposals see a direct high-speed connection from London and Birmingham into the heart of Manchester, with so-called 'classic-compatible' trains operating to other North West destinations, operating at high speed on the new line, and at conventional speeds on existing lines.

The HS2 proposals will provide considerable benefits to the North West, and are warmly welcomed. However, concerns remain that, whilst Manchester will achieve maximum benefits from direct high-speed services to the South East, benefits for Liverpool and other areas in the North West are lower. This potentially disadvantages these areas and these issues must be addressed as proposals are developed.

LIGHT RAIL

The Metrolink tram network in Greater Manchester (over 19m journeys per annum⁸) continues to be expanded and developed, offering an alternative to the private car for access to Manchester city centre and other towns in the conurbation. The next few years will see the recently-opened line from Manchester city centre to Droylsden extended to Ashton-under-Lyne; the St Werburgh's Road line extended to East Didsbury; the existing line extended into Oldham town centre from the rail station; and a new line to Manchester Airport. There are also proposals for a new line across Manchester city centre, to increase capacity through the heavily trafficked central section.



Metrolink, Manchester (Image © Ian Lawson)

The expanding tram network in Greater Manchester will provide huge benefits to the conurbation. However, it is disappointing that new tram networks are not being developed in other cities, including Liverpool. While the heavy rail network and buses can supply many of the services required for people to access jobs, services and leisure opportunities, trams can complete the jigsaw in many areas and should be seriously considered for those cities currently without such a network.

CASE STUDY

NORTHERN HUB



The Northern Rail Hub is a multi-million pound scheme to upgrade the region's rail network, stimulating economic growth and freeing up capacity to travel. ICE NW supports these economic and social objectives and believes the project will deliver extensive benefits to our region. These could include:

- £4 boost to the economy for every £1 which is spent;
- £560m of targeted infrastructure investment injected into the North West economy;
- A doubling of train capacity at Trafford park freight terminals;
- Over £4bn in regional benefits, plus up to 30,000 new jobs created.

The ambitious project will deliver a number of long cherished schemes, including electrification between Manchester and Liverpool, two new platforms at Manchester Piccadilly Station, plus a new route across Manchester linking all three major stations.

Overall, the Hub will deliver 700 more trains every day, allowing space for 44 million more people to travel across the region annually. An additional benefit will see this increased capacity ease road congestion on our overburdened road network, currently under strain from increased traffic volume and reducing maintenance levels.

6. Network Rail
7. Northern Way – Manchester Hub Conditional Output Statement
8. Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)



FREIGHT AND LINKS INTO THE TRANSPORT NETWORK

The continuing development and expansion of freight facilities in the North West, including the Liverpool SuperPort proposals, demonstrates the requirement for further infrastructure investment in the region. A recent study by MDS Transmodal and others shows increased freight tonnage moving through the Liverpool City Region and other areas in the North West, with significant reductions in tonnage in central and southern UK.

Construction of the post-Panamax container terminal in the Port of Liverpool will commence in 2013, and the winning bidder for construction and operation of the new Mersey Gateway Bridge is due to be announced in the summer. Both are transformational projects for the North West, and are crucial to future economic growth. Indeed, the new Mersey Gateway Bridge is in the KPMG Top 100 infrastructure projects in the world.

Whilst there are projects in hand that support more efficient freight movements into and out of the region, there are still areas that require improvement. The A5036 Dunning's Bridge Road link between the Port of Liverpool and the motorway network in the area is a serious constraint on road freight movements. Improved access to the Port of Liverpool is included in the City Region Deal with Government, and work is in hand to progress this. It is essential that this is addressed as soon as possible.

Rail freight access to the Port of Liverpool and to other sites in the North West is similarly important. Some smaller-scale improvements have recently been made, including reinstatement of the Olive Mount Chord for better rail freight access to the Port of Liverpool, but much more needs to be done. HS2 will provide the opportunity to free up capacity for freight on the existing rail network, but that is some way off.

CONCLUSION

ICE NW believes the current range of transport infrastructure projects will play a key role in developing the economic competitiveness and social prosperity of our region. However, investment in transport infrastructure needs to continue with the responsible organisations in the North West working together on investment priorities. Behind the headline schemes there is an imperative to ensure our infrastructure is properly maintained. Road maintenance is increasingly undertaken on a 'patch and mend' basis as budgets are tightened. This can only serve to reduce the effectiveness of investment in major projects, particularly if the maintenance of motorways suffers from budget cuts.

View the full report online at ice.org.uk/stateofthenation



Port of Liverpool (Image © Ian Lawson)

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