

The West Midlands Regional Transport Priorities

November 2007

Executive Summary

Introduction

In August 2007 the Regional Minister, Liam Byrne MP, announced a West Midlands' 'transport challenge'. He requested that Cllr Roger Phillips (Chair, Regional Transport Partnership), Olwen Dutton (Chief Executive, West Midlands Regional Assembly), John Edwards (Chief Executive, Advantage West Midlands) and GOWM should set out the Regional Transport Priorities and identify the opportunities for the Region from the forthcoming Local Transport Bill.

This initial response has been produced in collaboration with the Region's Local Transport Authorities, Centro/West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority, Highways Agency, Network Rail, West Midlands Business Council and West Business Transport Group. It demonstrates the regional partners ability to work together in judging the key issues for the West Midlands and set aside any more parochial considerations, in the interests of the Region as a whole.

Context

The focus for the Region is economic prosperity. The Minister has clearly stated this and we all agree, understanding that sustainable economic prosperity and the housing growth that will go with that can only be delivered in conjunction with significant changes in transport across the region. Furthermore, given the central location of the West Midlands, the transport networks into and through the region must work so that the country as a whole can prosper.

The Eddington Study acknowledges that efficient transport networks are needed to support economic growth and the Stern Report tells us of the economic impacts of climate change. The Department for Transport agrees with Eddington and Stern and our regional strategies already point us in that direction. We will work with Government and other partners to make sure that transport plays its part in achieving a sustainable, low carbon economy.

Significant change is urgently required. We will collaborate with public and private, national, regional and local organisations, to combine all our resources to deliver improvements across the inter-national, national, regional and local transport networks. The priorities we have identified are the most significant strategic schemes necessary to deliver now upon the economic and housing growth agenda. They require recognition and support from government.

In order for the Regional Minister to help us achieve this, we will provide him, not only with the list of priorities and the reasoning behind those choices but also with the necessary evidence to overcome any funding or decision-making barriers that continue to limit our potential.

Region's Approach to Identifying the Transport Priorities

The Regional Spatial Strategy and West Midlands Economic Strategy both highlight the inadequacy of the region's transport infrastructure and the clear need for significant investment to realise the sustainable economic and housing growth agendas which will meet the ambitions of the Region.

The drivers that have shaped the strategic transport priorities are the need to:

- Improve international connectivity and inter-urban linkages, and address congestion and improve connections;
- Support and promote the urban and rural renaissance of the four Major Urban Areas and the Regeneration Zones, and underpin the needs of the New Growth Points and Settlements of Significant Development; and
- Maximise the opportunities for the region through supporting the current regional strategies and set the framework for future growth and prosperity.

As a result we have identified a focused list of the most strategic transport priorities that we collectively believe should be taken forward and progressed in the short term. We need the Government to play a key role, and work with us, to make these happen.

The background work is set out in the draft 'Transport Challenge' document which outlines the rationale and a summary of the potential impacts for the strategic transport priorities. This work is underpinned by a wealth of background information, including specific Major Scheme Business Cases, Transport Innovation Fund Bids, the RSS and RES shared evidence base (including the Black Country Study and Implementation Plans), New Growth Point studies, the relevant Government-led Multi-Modal Studies, the West Midlands Regional Planning Assessment (for the rail network) and the relevant Route Utilisation Studies.

The background work has been prepared in collaboration with a wide group of regional stakeholders and will be the starting point for debate and discussion with the Minister in January 2008.

The West Midlands Regional Transport Priorities

The Region's transport priorities can be described under two broad headings: strategic priorities which support competitiveness and growth across the region through improving international and inter-urban linkages, and sub regional priorities which are equally important in supporting regeneration and access to employment and other services through improving local transport links and addressing urban congestion. The benefits of these priorities will be supported by encouraging and promoting smarter travel choices.

The Region's transport priorities are:

- Birmingham New Street Station;
- Birmingham International Airport - runway extension and surface access;
- M6/M5 capacity improvements and Motorway Box Active Traffic Management;
- Rail Freight Upgrades - Peterborough and Southampton to Nuneaton;
- Regional Rail Capacity, both for passengers services and strategic freight connections;
- Black Country 'strategic transport spine' (rapid transit);
- North Staffordshire Integrated Transport;
- New Growth Points/ Settlements of Significant Development;
- Smarter Choices.

West Midlands Transport Priorities

Birmingham New Street Station

The redevelopment of New Street station as a "Gateway" for the Region remains a cornerstone of our economic, growth and transport strategies. It unlocks significant benefits by alleviating constraints on the development rail services and will transform the experience of users and the perceptions they first form of the region – enhancing Birmingham's status as a global city. The economic benefits are also significant – it will generate over 5000 jobs, deliver 1.3 million square feet of private sector development and increase business rates by over £600m.

Birmingham International Airport runway extension and surface access

The runway extension is critical to our Region's future competitiveness – including underpinning Birmingham's role as a global city. It will enable direct flights to more distant international destinations, supporting links with new and emerging markets, particularly in India and China, and promoting opportunity for inward investment.

The immediate priorities are the runway extension (including the A45 measures) and surface access improvements, closely followed by improvements to increase capacity at Junction 6 of the M42.

M6/M5 Capacity Improvements and Motorway Box Active Traffic Management (ATM)

The performance of the motorway network impacts on both the productivity of the West Midlands economy and the competitiveness of the national economy. Increased capacity is required from M6 Junction 19 through to M5 Junction 2. Whilst the recent DfT announcement regarding the £150m extension of Active Traffic Management (ATM) phases 1 and 2 of the Motorway Box around Birmingham is welcomed, additional funding needs to be secured for phases 3 to 5 which are particularly important for supporting regeneration in the Black Country. In addition, there is a well evidenced need for increased capacity on the M6 (north and south of the Region - including the M54 Link and the A14 junction).

Rail Freight Upgrades – West Coast Main Line to the Key Ports of Southampton and Felixstowe

Gauge enhancement on the rail links to the country's two largest deep sea ports will boost regional competitiveness, improve connectivity, access wider global market opportunities and improve regional productivity. These schemes will allow 9'6" containers to be conveyed on standard wagons of freight services allowing a greater volume and proportion of freight to be transported by rail, reducing road haulage, thus enabling better use of existing highway capacity. Both schemes have identified significant GDP benefits.

Regional Rail Capacity, both for passenger services and strategic freight connections

We need to develop connections between the strategic centres and the wider region, particularly the New Growth Points, Settlements of Significant Development, and our unique cultural assets, in places such as Stratford. These changes are required to increase accessibility, with particular benefits for extending labour catchment areas, providing high quality travel options to reduce car dependency.

Network Rail's Business Plan sets out the immediate work programme. We need to make sure that their Business Plan is delivered in conjunction with other critical connections. These are:

- Bordesley chords - to free up additional capacity and open up new services;
- Midland Metro street running - to improve accessibility and connectivity to/from central Birmingham;
- Re-route rail freight away from the congested mixed use rail lines by opening the Lichfield/Walsall/Stourbridge corridor;
- Improve service quality and capacity to the wider region; and
- Provide interchange opportunities with strategic park and ride at Worcester and Brinsford

Black Country 'strategic transport spine'

The 'strategic transport spine' is the much needed public transport network which supports urban renaissance and economic regeneration by connecting the strategic centres and corridors in the Black Country, with Birmingham and the Regeneration Zones. The immediate priorities are to connect Brierley Hill/Merry Hill with an improved Midland Metro Line One into Birmingham City Centre and provide a high quality public transport connection to economic development opportunities in North Wolverhampton.

North Staffordshire Strategic Public Transport Network

North Staffordshire has suffered greatly in the recent past with the loss of its traditional industries. This has left a serious problem with worklessness and a very low economic base. The North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (NRSP) has been formed to combine the efforts of the Housing Market Renewal programme (RENEW), the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone and the local authorities of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands and Staffordshire County Council. Key to the work of the NSRP is the need to improve the transport infrastructure supporting the economic and housing regeneration. The specific project identified as a transport priority is the North Staffordshire Strategic Public Transport Network. This project will help to address the accessibility and congestion issues facing North Staffordshire which threaten to undermine the regeneration investment programmes.

New Growth Points/ Settlements of Significant Development

Development plans for the New Growth Points and Settlements of Significant Development require a programme of public and private investment needs. In some parts of the region transport schemes are being developed to support the sustainable growth for homes and employment, including 'SPARK' in Warwick/Leamington, enhanced heavy rail services between Nuneaton and Leamington Spa (with new stations at Bermuda/Hawkesbury, Ricoh Arena and Kenilworth), a river crossing in Burton, a north west relief road in Shrewsbury, and public transport and road improvements in Worcester.

Smarter Choices

Smarter choices consist of a range of initiatives to change behaviour in favour of more sustainable, low carbon options such as: public transport, cycling, walking, car sharing, green travel planning etc. These measures can have the following impacts:

- Reduced number of trips;
- Change in time of travel.

The DfT supported Sustainable Travel Town demonstrator project in Worcester has demonstrated the benefits of investing in this area.

There are a number of other transport priorities which are important for enabling the delivery of sub regional and local strategies and addressing local transport constraints. It is important that in taking forward the regional priorities identified these, and the important local benefits they can delivery, are not undermined or lost.

We also need a better understanding of what we can do to deliver our longer term ambitions. The future of the M6 needs urgent attention and we need to explore the potential for High Speed Rail. While these projects will be led by the DfT and their agents the Region must be involved in the detailed discussions and technical work.

Funding

Regional partners recognise that the current levels of central Government funding for transport are insufficient to deliver the wide range of priorities identified. This constrains the potential of the West Midlands.

Regional partners have a key role to play in informing and shaping national strategies and investment programmes, to ensure they support and deliver improved accessibility and connectivity from, to and within the West Midlands. Regional partners (including the regional delivery bodies) are committed to working with the Department for Transport, Treasury, Highways Agency and Network Rail to identify ways to drive forward delivery of schemes on the national networks.

In addition to the national investment that supports West Midlands' growth, regional partners will work together with Government Departments, national, regional and local delivery organisations, and the private sector to explore and identify a range of funding mechanisms which can either work in isolation, or alongside central Government funds, to support the region's needs.

It is well recognised that economic growth drives added value to existing funding streams. We want to explore with Government the potential to capture some part of that increased income to deliver our ambitions. In addition, investment in new homes and

jobs should create significantly increased income streams. Whilst there may not be a direct relationship between these additional income streams and the regional transport priorities; collectively across the region, there is significant potential to capture this and maximise the opportunities for prudential borrowing.

Governance/Local Transport Bill

The future requirement to produce a Single Regional Strategy (SRS) needs a new approach and new thinking. Regional partners have begun to review governance arrangements, including those related to transport. Future transport governance arrangements for the Region need to build on the opportunities provided by the Sub National Review.

The existing transport governance arrangements do not meet the needs of developing and delivering the strategic transport priorities or managing the strategic implementation of the RSS and RES. The wide range of partners involved and the increasing need to push forward multi agency projects requires the development of new ways of working at a strategic level.

We wish to take advantage of the Local Transport Bill and examine the democratic leadership and accountability of transport decision making within the context of the proposals set out in the Sub National Review.

The Region therefore is developing proposals based on the following key principles:

- Putting in place governance structures that will achieve an integrated transport strategy for the Region;
- Enabling more effective delivery mechanisms;
- Ensuring effective democratic involvement without losing local focus and accountability;
- Enabling links between key partners i.e. AWM, WMRA, Centro – WMPTA, strategic local authorities, the Highways Agency, Network Rail, business and other stakeholders;
- Reducing costs/increasing value for money; and
- Strengthening accountability.

Next Steps

We plan to meet with the Regional Minister, early in the New Year, to discuss our transport priorities. Between now and then we will continue to work on these and identify further refinements. This is the starting point for debate and discussion with the Minister. The meeting in January will provide a real opportunity to agree our 'game plan' and show how a region at the heart of the nation can deliver sustainable economic growth underpinned by robust high quality transport infrastructure.