

**Transport for the North:
Consultation on the draft Strategic Transport Plan
Response of Lancashire County Council**

The county council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Strategic Transport Plan, which the council considers be a significant and positive step towards identifying the transport challenges that the Government and the North collectively will need to address if the North's economy is to be transformed. As an extant member of Transport for the North with representation on its various member, executive and technical groups, the county council has been closely involved with developing the draft plan and associated Long Term Rail Strategy, and therefore able to influence their evolution. However, whilst expressing broad support for the draft plan, the council has three key strategic concerns it wishes to see addressed before final publication. These relate to Northern Powerhouse Rail / Long Term Rail Strategy, the Major Road Network and Strategic Development Corridor priorities.

Northern Powerhouse Rail / Long Term Rail Strategy

The county council understands the rationale for Northern Powerhouse Rail, but is concerned about inference and presentation. Enhancing rail connectivity between the North's largest cities will not be a game changer in its own right. Northern Powerhouse Rail should be properly set within the wider context of the Long Term Rail Strategy, of which it should be part. The premise should therefore flow from the analysis underpinning the Long Term Rail Strategy as well as the Independent Economic Review. This collective evidence base needs to demonstrate that the North cannot achieve transformational economic growth simply through upgrading existing rail infrastructure and services alone.

In its current form, Northern Powerhouse Rail will be of little benefit to communities along the West Coast Main Line, including the key growth centres of Preston and Lancaster. The diagram on Page 45 of the draft plan only serves to reinforce a sense of separation and perception that these places add little economic value. Lancashire has one of the largest economies in the North of England, home to over 40,000 businesses employing in excess of 670,000 people. Valued at over £29bn, Lancashire's economy is comparable to or more productive than those of city regions such as Liverpool, Newcastle and Sheffield.

Major Road Network

The county council participated in the development of the Major Road Network as set out in the draft plan. However, this network is significantly larger than the indicative network included in the recent Department for Transport consultation setting out its own proposals to create a Major Road Network. Clearly, there will need to be a consolidation of views between Transport for the North and the Department going forward, as it will be self-defeating to have two Major Road Networks defined in the North. The county council considers the indicative Major Road Network included in the Department's consultation documentation to be a fair reflection of roads within Lancashire that should be included based on the approach proposed therein.

Strategic Development Corridors

The county council supports the corridors approach set out in the consultation draft, and is particularly pleased with the priority given to taking forward the Central Pennines and Connecting the Energy Coasts corridor studies. However, given the implied absolute priority given to developing Northern Powerhouse Rail throughout the draft plan, the county council wishes to see the North West to Sheffield City Region corridor study progressed immediately and set alongside the ongoing Northern Powerhouse Rail work. This corridor is of strategic importance to Lancashire given ongoing joint work with the Sheffield City Region to develop the Northern Powerhouse Advanced Manufacturing Corridor that anticipated such a corridor study coming forward. Joint working has facilitated key initiatives such as the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre on the Samlesbury Aerospace Enterprise Zone.

The county council would also draw Transport for the North's attention to a number of key strategic priorities within the corridors the council expects to inform the development of the final plan. They reflect Lancashire's strategic priorities for transport investment to support economic growth, development and regeneration as set out in the Lancashire Strategic Transport Prospectus. Given the significance of Lancashire's economy to the Northern Powerhouse, its growth potential and the importance of better connectivity with other parts of the North, the council's expectation is that these priorities will feature prominently therein.

Central Pennines Strategic Development Corridor

East-west connectivity by road between East Lancashire, North Yorkshire and the Leeds City Region is currently restricted to single carriageway roads that tend to follow historic routes dictated by topography; most are poorly aligned and unsuitable for carrying large volumes of traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles. Main line rail links are likewise constrained, with low line speeds, ageing infrastructure and limited capacity having a significant impact on journey times and reliability. Both are of a much lower quality than those further to the south that link Liverpool and Manchester with Leeds, Sheffield and the Humber ports. Note also that there are currently no through train services between East Lancashire and Manchester Airport.

Several long-standing aspirations for improved strategic connectivity in the Central Pennines corridor by both road and rail currently exist and a number of schemes have been considered in the past; however, to date little has been forthcoming. It is therefore not surprising there is a strong perception locally that the transport network hinders the efficient movement of people and goods, and that this poor connectivity is having a negative impact on economic development and regeneration.

The M65 represents the key economic corridor of East Lancashire, linking the towns of Blackburn, Accrington, Burnley, Nelson and Colne with the M6 and M61 motorways at Bamber Bridge near Preston. It plays an essential role in the local economy, connecting people and businesses internally as well as providing the primary means of access to the M6, particularly for freight. Almost all existing and future strategic employment site developments in East Lancashire are located in close proximity to the M65 and/or require effective access to and from it.

Unlike most motorways, the M65 is not three lanes throughout its length, with reduced capacity on some sections, particularly between the M61 (Junction 2) and Junction 6 at Whitebirk east of Blackburn. Evidence now suggests that the current level of demand at peak times is causing congestion, exacerbated by the limited capacity, traffic flow composition and the capacity and close proximity of some junctions. The County council would therefore wish to see improvements to this stretch of the M65 in Road Investment Strategy 2 to ensure that the motorway has sufficient capacity to accommodate future economic growth.

The M65 ends abruptly at Colne, the continuation across the Pennines into North Yorkshire and the Leeds City Region provided by the A6068 and A56 routes linking with the A629 at Cross Hills in Airedale and the A59 at Broughton west of Skipton respectively. Congestion in the North Valley area of Colne is a particular issue with standing traffic affecting local air quality and effectively severing the North Valley housing estate from all amenities in the town. In the villages of Foulridge, Kelbrook and Earby further north along the A56, issues of road safety, noise, air quality and severance arise from the conflict between through traffic and the needs of the local communities. There are protected routes for bypasses of Colne-Foulridge and Kelbrook-Earby, but schemes have yet to progress. The county council considers the introduction of the new National Road Fund from April 2020 and associated definition of a Major Road Network represents a genuine opportunity to address the east-west connectivity challenge in the Central Pennines and to resolve these outstanding issues.

The county council acknowledges the commitment in the current Northern franchise to introduce brand new or refurbished diesel trains on the Blackpool North to York service via Preston, Blackburn, Burnley Manchester Road and Leeds as part of the wider 'Northern Connect' network. However, modernisation and electrification of the route would deliver transformational change to city region connectivity across the North and for East Lancashire in particular. The North of England Electrification Task Force report of March 2015 included the full 'Calder Valley' route, including to Burnley and Preston, as a Tier 1 scheme for implementation in Control Period 6 (2019 to 2024). The County council also welcomes the recent announcement by the Secretary of State to fund a feasibility study of the potential to reinstate the railway between Colne and Skipton and looks forward to working closely with the Department for Transport and Transport for the North to take this work forward.

Also in East Lancashire, the importance of strategic transport links into Manchester from the Rossendale Valley needs to be recognised. The M66 is Rossendale's key transport link with the rest of the country, as other road connections are severely constrained by topography and the borough has no station on the national rail network and is remote from it. Very severe congestion now occurs on the M66 during peak periods and increasingly at other times. This affects travel to and from Greater Manchester, particularly for commuters using the express bus services that Transdev operates into Manchester city centre from East Lancashire using purpose-built luxury coaches. Aspirations remain for the reinstatement of a main line rail service between Rawtenstall and Manchester for commuters using existing heritage railway infrastructure.

In West Lancashire, there is a general issue of poor connectivity and network resilience, particularly for east-west travel by road between Southport and the Sefton Coast and the M6. Furthermore, whilst the A59 is the most direct road link between Liverpool and Preston, it is much slower than via the M58 and M6. In October 2014, the County council abandoned a long-standing proposal to construct a bypass of Ormskirk in part on the basis that there was no realistic prospect of securing funding for its delivery. The A59 passes through both Ormskirk and Burscough, with the A570 also passing through Ormskirk town centre and forming the most direct route between Southport and the motorway network. In both communities, issues of road safety, noise, air quality and severance arise from the conflict between through traffic and the needs of the local community. As with Colne, the county council considers the creation of a Major Road Network linked to funding for improvements through the National Road Fund presents an opportunity to address the connectivity challenges associated with the A59 and A570 in West Lancashire.

On the rail network, the most direct route between Liverpool and Preston requires a change of trains at Ormskirk. The service linking Preston with Ormskirk is hourly and operated by poor quality rolling stock, contrasting sharply with the fast and frequent service Merseyrail operates between Ormskirk and Liverpool city centre using electric trains. Electrification with appropriate infrastructure improvements would resolve the majority of current issues with the line and reduce the travel time between Preston and Liverpool. Through services currently travel via Wigan North Western with a journey time of approximately one hour. Refurbished electric trains now operate these services, some of which extend to Liverpool South Parkway for access to/from Liverpool John Lennon Airport. Better interchange between services on the Ormskirk to Preston and Southport to Wigan lines would significantly improve rail connectivity across West Lancashire.

Elsewhere in West Lancashire, Skelmersdale is one of the largest towns in the country without a town centre railway station. The county council is currently working with partners including Network Rail and Merseytravel to develop a proposal for a new rail link and town centre railway station. A new railway station could act as a direct stimulus in terms of employment and housing development, allowing residents of the town to benefit from its proximity to both Liverpool and Manchester city centres.

Connecting the Energy Coasts Strategic Development Corridor

The county council expects the connectivity issues in Lancashire to receive equal consideration to those elsewhere within this SDC geography given the quantum of energy related assets located in the county. There are specific issues with regard to strategic access to and from the northern Fylde Coast, particularly by road. The A585 trunk road, which links the Hillhouse International Business Park Enterprise Zone at Thornton with the M55, is one of the most congested routes in the North West. Hillhouse is a prime location for industrial and commercial development, and is currently home to several multi-national companies engaged in the manufacture of advanced materials and polymers. Whilst the county council is supportive of the commitment in the Government's first Road Investment Strategy (RIS1) to deliver a new, off-line bypass of Little Singleton to reduce the impact of traffic on the local community and remove the bottleneck, the A585 needs to operate as effectively as possible along its entire length between the M55 and Fleetwood.

Further north, the county council and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership are supporting the development and delivery of the Bailrigg Garden Village near Lancaster, one of the Government's 14 designated garden villages. This requires the reconfiguration of M6 Junction 33, which will also unlock expansion plans at Lancaster University, one of the UK's top teaching and research institutes.

Despite the ongoing investment in the modernisation and electrification of the railway line between Preston and Blackpool, the wider rail network serving the Fylde Coast and Morecambe/Heysham will remain an underutilised asset without further investment in infrastructure and services. There may be opportunities for integration with the Blackpool Tramway, for example, in the South Fylde and the Fleetwood area, complementing committed investment through the Lancashire Growth Deal that will deliver an extension of the tramway from the Promenade to Blackpool North station by mid 2019. Seamless interchange between the rail network and tram system will be achieved for the first time to the benefit of both residents and visitors.

Further north, because of the fragmented rail network around Morecambe Bay and into the southern Lake District, there are limited options for through journeys. Most require a change of train at Lancaster as there are no direct services between Morecambe and Barrow and interchange between Furness Line and Windermere Line services is not possible at Carnforth due to previous rationalisation of track and station infrastructure. Addressing these limited connections could open up opportunities to access jobs around the Energy Coast 'West', particularly in the advanced manufacturing and nuclear sectors, and support tourism and leisure activity given the close proximity of Morecambe Bay and the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.

Central Lancashire

Central Lancashire, with the city Preston at its heart, is a transport hub of national significance straddling the Central Pennines, Connecting the Energy Coasts and North West to Sheffield City Region Strategic Development Corridors. It provides most of Lancashire's connections to the West Coast Main Line, the M6 and, in the future, to HS2. The Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal agreed with the Government in September 2013 is one of the most significant growth agendas in the North, building on the strong economic performance of the area to create over 20,000 net new private sector jobs and deliver 17,000 new homes by 2025, increasing the size of the local economy by £1bn. Lancashire's growth sectors will account for many of these jobs, in particular, the Enterprise Zones at Samlesbury and Warton where EZ activity is forecast to create some 6,000 new jobs. However, Preston's business and financial sector will also expand, with the University of Central Lancashire (the country's fifth largest in terms of student numbers) reconfiguring to place itself at the heart of the city.

The M6 Preston Bypass is the busiest section of motorway in Lancashire and one of the busiest in the North West. It is the critical link in the county's strategic highway network, catering for east-west travel between the Fylde Coast and East Lancashire in addition to travel in the nationally significant north-south corridor. There is also significant interaction with the local highway network during morning and evening peak

periods leading to congestion on the M6 and at a number of interfaces. Even with full delivery of the four road schemes identified in the City Deal, evidence suggests that Preston Bypass will be under pressure by 2026, particularly during peak periods on the section between Junctions 30 and 32 with the M61 and M55 respectively.

Many existing and future commercial and residential development opportunities in Central Lancashire lie close to the M6. The county council would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with Highways England and Transport for the North to investigate the wider resilience issues facing the SRN in Central Lancashire including potential benefits to the M6 from the establishment and future development of the Preston/South Ribble Western Distributor route. This route, which will link the M55 at a new Junction 2 with the M6/M61/M65 motorways at Cuerden, is central to the City Deal, supporting delivery of a number of strategic housing locations together with the regionally significant Cuerden strategic site. Cuerden, which lies close to the intersection of the M6, M61 and M65 motorways, has the potential to create over 4,500 new jobs locally.

City Deal partners aspire to deliver a new crossing of the River Ribble to connect the South Ribble Western distributor with the Preston Western Distributor, thereby providing a continuous dual carriageway for distributing regional and local traffic movements across a wide area including Central and West Lancashire and the Fylde Coast. Completion of this route will link together a number of strategic housing locations and major development sites on both sides of the Ribble, including the regionally significant Cuerden Strategic Site, which has the potential to create over 4,500 new jobs locally. Whilst delivery of the City Deal is not predicated on a new crossing, such a scheme has the potential to support significant further economic growth and development across Central Lancashire and its environs beyond the current Local Plan period to 2026. Furthermore, early indications using the traffic model developed as part of the Preston Western Distributor Business Case preparation suggest a new crossing will have a significant positive impact on the Strategic Road Network to the west and north of Preston (the M6 and M55), providing much needed network resilience.

Preston station lies approximately mid-way between Glasgow and London on the West Coast Main Line, and with an estimated 5 million passenger trips annually and a further 1.49 million interchanges, is one of the busiest stations in the North of England and the busiest in the North West outside of Manchester and Liverpool city centres. In addition to West Coast Main Line services to London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh, there are also regular direct trains to Manchester city centre, Manchester Airport and Liverpool, and to Leeds in the increasingly important east-west corridor linking Lancashire with North and West Yorkshire. The station provides connections into these services from Blackpool, Blackburn and East Lancashire, Lancaster and the Lake District. It is therefore a critical asset for the city and for Lancashire as a whole, serving as a gateway for an extensive catchment of communities further afield, particularly for connectivity with the West Coast Main Line.

Whilst Preston station has retained its original Victorian fabric, it has received limited/piecemeal investment over several decades, resulting in a poor passenger experience and preventing the station from contributing towards the wider commercial development of the city centre. The station building lacks presence, resulting in poor

first impressions of the city for visitors and poor customer satisfaction. A number of key issues need addressing, both from a rail operating perspective, particularly once HS2 services begin operating in 2026, and from a passenger perspective in terms of access, circulation and safety. With ongoing upgrades to key routes linking Preston with Manchester, Liverpool and Blackpool and the impending introduction of new rolling stock on a number of key services, for passengers, the contrast between the station and on-board experience will quickly become even starker.

In future, Preston station will serve as the access point for High Speed 2 services for a large catchment with a population of over 1.4m people extending across much of Lancashire and South Cumbria and including Barrow, Blackburn, Blackpool, Burnley, Kendal, Lancaster and Windermere. Its transformation into a modern 21st century facility is a key priority for both the county council and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership.

Freight

The county council welcomes the strong emphasis given to freight transport in the draft STP but requests that further attention be given to the so-called 'last mile' of freight movements. Whilst acknowledging such access is an economic necessity, the STP should take a lead on developing a pan-northern framework for concepts such as freight consolidation centres. These could help to reduce/eliminate the challenges associated with large vehicles in urban areas, particularly in city and town centres where there is an increasing desire to 'place-shape' the built environment in favour of people.