

### Transport for the North – draft strategic plan

#### Policy context

1. Transport for the North (TfN) has issued a draft Strategic Transport Plan for consultation. This covers the entire north of England and puts forward a range of projects as the basis for helping transform the economic performance of the area.

#### Background

2. As a sub national transport body (to be formally instituted from 1<sup>st</sup> April TfN has a range of duties including:
  - preparation of a transport strategy for the area;
  - provision of advice to Government about the exercise of transport functions in relation to its area;
  - co-ordination of the carrying out of transport functions exercisable by different constituent authorities, with a view to improving the effectiveness and efficiency in the carrying out of those functions.
3. The draft Plan sets out the case for investment in strategic transport infrastructure in the period to 2050 needed to support the additional travel demands generated by higher levels of economic growth in the future. It builds upon work contained in the Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review and includes the following objectives:
  - Increasing the efficiency, reliability and resilience of the transport system;
  - Transforming economic performance;
  - Improving access to opportunities across the North;
  - Promoting and supporting the built and natural environment.
4. The aim is to build a long term investment programme based on:
  - A strategy for improving rail services, stations and lines, including connecting to the HS2 high speed rail line;
  - A Major Road Network comprising the area's main roads;
  - Development of integrated and smart travel for public transport users.
5. As a basis for developing more detailed proposals seven strategic development corridors are identified, of which the following are relevant to Gateshead:

- Connecting the energy coasts (a generic term for east-west connections between the north east and Cumbria);
  - East coast to Scotland rail corridor;
  - Yorkshire to Scotland road corridor.
6. Currently planned investment levels are anticipated to amount to some £39-43 billion in the period to 2050. The Plan estimates that an additional £21-27 billion will be needed to achieve its aims.
7. The Plan is intended as a framework for the development of future priorities, rather than something which identifies individual schemes. However there is some reference to specific priorities, for example upgrades to the East Coast Main Line as part of the strategy for improving rail lines and services.

### **Implications**

8. Overall the draft Plan is a welcome attempt to provide a basis for an improved transport network. If successful in its aims it could support enhanced levels of economic growth and greater prosperity. However there are also risks to Gateshead in the Plan's approach which need to be minimised.
9. In taking forward the Plan it will be important for the Council to continue to work with a variety of bodies to ensure that Gateshead and the North East's interest are reflected in future programmes. The most immediate of these are the joint working arrangements within the North East Combined Authority area, including the local Enterprise Partnership, as well as joint working with highways England, especially in relation to accommodating future development and further improvements to the A1.

### **Gateshead response**

10. A proposed response to the draft is provided in the attached Annex. While welcoming the Plan's objectives it does highlight four principal concerns with the proposals as currently framed:
- The lack of attention paid to pressing pan Northern transport problems encountered at a local level, notably the availability of sufficient revenue funding to support road maintenance and networks of local bus services;
  - The potential imbalance in investment between the strategic and local levels;
  - The lack of recognition of the need to manage demand, particularly for road travel;
  - The need to counter the risk of HS2 drawing economic activity away from more peripheral areas such as the North East.

## Implications of recommended option

### 11. Resources:

- a) **Financial implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that there are no specific financial implications arising from this consultation response.
- b) **Human Resources implications** – none.
- c) **Property implications** – no immediate implications. However the Council's Highways Asset Management Plan already identifies the shortfall in funding for the adopted highway network. Failure to address the points raised above could contribute to a worsening of the position in future.

12. **Risk management implications** – none arising from this report.

12. **Equality and diversity implications** – given its strategic road and rail focus the Plan as currently drafted raises concerns its benefits will not be evenly distributed throughout the population.

13. **Crime and disorder implications** – none.

14. **Health implications** – proposed improvements to road networks need to be carefully targeted if they are not to promote increased car dependence, potentially worsening problems of pollution, road safety and limited physical activity. The lack of attention paid to local investment means the Plan does little to support investment in active travel.

15. **Sustainability implications** – the limited attention paid to bus services, cycling or walking raises concerns in this area.

16. **Human rights implications** - none

17. **Area and ward implications** – none specific.

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### Proposed Gateshead Council response

1. The publication of the draft Plan is to be welcomed as an opportunity for the North to make the case to Government for improved levels of support for the transport network. The objectives of the Plan are fully supported, highlighting the broad areas in which it needs to be successful if it is to support important economic, social and environmental aims.
2. In relation to the above there are concerns with the Plan as currently drafted. While many of the proposals relating to strategic investment are appropriate in nature, this in itself does not go far enough to provide the overall strategy that is one of TfN's functions. The main concerns relate to:
  - The lack of attention paid to pressing pan Northern transport problems encountered at a local level, notably the availability of sufficient revenue funding to support road maintenance and networks of local bus services;
  - The potential imbalance in investment between the strategic and local levels;
  - The lack of recognition of the need to manage demand, particularly for road travel;
  - The need to counter the risk of HS2 drawing economic activity away from more peripheral areas such as the North East.

#### *Pan Northern local transport problems*

3. Transport has suffered from a long-running imbalance in available funding between capital investment and revenue support. This has been made worse by cuts to local authority spending which have seen many councils struggle to provide effective basic services such as road maintenance and a network of local bus services. It is estimated that since 2005/6 there has been a fall of 45% in the mileage of local bus services supported by local authorities nationally. Recent years have also seen 53% of local authorities cut their road maintenance spending, with an average reduction of £900,000 per year.
4. These matters are of importance to local authorities across the north of England and should be highlighted suitably by TfN in their strategy. Without them the objective to improve access to opportunity and increase efficiency, reliability and resilience are unlikely to be achieved.

#### *Imbalance in investment between strategic and local levels*

5. While strategic investment may be an important element in achieving the Plan's aims, it is only one component. A focus on such investment risks creating an imbalance in funding between local and strategic level,

undermining the Plan's effectiveness. This is something recognised in previous work on which the Plan is based, notably the Independent Economic Review and the Rees Jeffrey's Funds work on the major road network. High quality strategic links will be of little value if travellers then comes up against inadequate local provision.

6. Of specific concern are:
  - The apparent absence of any inclusion of the need for additional local funding in the estimate of £21-27 billion additional funding needed;
  - the comment on page 85 of the draft suggesting that one source of funding for the Plan could be through the redirection of local sources of funding;
  - the importance of tackling poor air quality (something usually associated with more major roads) is not addressed.

### *Managing demand*

7. While efforts to increase pan northern connectivity (thereby increasing labour market size) through better rail networks may have some impact, the issues around improving the effectiveness of the road network are much more complex. This is because the main sources of delay on the road network are in and around conurbations. The problems in such areas relate principally to very large numbers of short distance journeys using main roads rather than strategic traffic movements.
8. The desire to increase road capacity to improve connectivity also needs to be balanced against potential disadvantages, principally in the potential to increase car dependence, thereby leading to:
  - Increased congestion in urban areas;
  - Poorer air quality;
  - Reduced viability of public transport;
  - More longer distance car based commuting and increased emissions;
  - Reduced attractiveness of healthy and active travel.
9. Investing in improved inter-urban capacity on its own is therefore unlikely to be effective in improving strategic connectivity on the road network and meeting the plan's objectives. Successfully managing demand for private travel in and around the main urban areas is likely to be far more important to developing an effective pan-Northern road network than continued increases in road capacity elsewhere. This will include measures both to curb unnecessary demand and improve alternatives to private travel.
10. To be effective any plan has to include appropriate and integrated management and land use policies. This will need to include a heavy emphasis on the promotion of sustainable travel, smarter choices programmes and the appropriate location and design of new development.

11. The draft plan identifies four possible scenarios for future travel demand in the north. Given the above it is recommended that planning should be based on Option 1, which sees development focused on urban areas and brownfield land, with high levels of digital connectivity, as opposed to more dispersed development options. To plan for other options risks creating unnecessary capacity, and potentially providing a perverse incentive for more dispersed development.

#### *Impacts of HS2*

12. While improvements to the rail network should have beneficial impacts in supporting growth, there is a need to be aware that some local impacts could be negative. Completion of HS2 will mean that the cities of London, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester are all within an hour's travel time of each other. There is a risk that this will concentrate economic benefits in these areas, with the potential for some activity to be drawn away from the North East.
13. This is not a reason to resist connectivity improvements, but it does again emphasise the importance for an appropriate balance between pan Northern and local spending. It also suggests that, in coming to investment decisions, the needs of more peripheral areas may need a degree of particular consideration when compared with those cities on the main Manchester/Leeds/Sheffield axis who will benefit most directly from HS2.
14. In addition the Plan needs to recognise the possibility of future extensions of the high speed network beyond that currently envisaged.