

Midlands Connect as a statutory Sub-National Transport Body ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

June 2018

Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment.

We welcome opportunity to respond to Midlands Connect's proposal to become a statutory Sub-National Transport Body.

Scope of devolution to Sub-National Transport Body

We believe that devolving decisions on transport can bring real and tangible improvements to people's lives with better public transport, better managed roads, better public spaces and more support for cycling and walking. These can also enhance communities and local economies by enabling much better and more co-ordinated local transport.

Transport planning in England has been highly centralised, with local government outside London having limited transport powers, limited funding and limited freedom in how it uses the money it has. We support the move to enhance devolution to combined authorities and city regions, as being the bodies best placed to deliver and co-ordinate high quality local transport, supporting every day journeys.

We support the principle of devolving functions to the most appropriate tier for the type of decision, including for transport. A new sub-national transport body such as Midlands Connect should therefore draw its powers and funding down from central government, not away from those local authorities, most notably Transport for West Midlands, that are already delivering effectively on the ground.

On that basis we believe there may be a better case for two Regional Transport structures with more local emphasis, one for the East Midlands and one for the West Midlands, based on the former Government regions, would make more sense than a single Midlands sub-national transport body and that the inter-connections between the two regions could be handled by joint working between the two.

We believe that if Midlands Connect goes ahead it should:

- Build on what is there as far as possible rather than starting again, and use technological innovation to make the best use of existing transport infrastructure and services rather than planning for lots of new infrastructure, especially new roads
- Support and encourage cross-boundary working to reflect real travel patterns and economic geography, including recognising the importance of intra-urban and local travel as well as inter-urban and longer distance travel
- Have openness and transparency at its heart, so that decisions and strategies are consulted on and people are involved in them. In particular, transport users should be represented on boards of devolved transport bodies and it should engage with non-government organisations to ensure it is fully inclusive.

- Link transport with land use planning and economic strategies, as in London, and to sustainable development and climate change strategies.

Operation of Sub-National Transport Body

It should also operate in a way that is truly open and accountable, and that makes a positive contribution to wider social and environmental challenges.

We therefore believe that in operation, Midlands Connect must:

- Hold its board and scrutiny meetings in public with minutes and membership published on the website and be subject to Freedom of Information legislation
- have a remit to consider the social and environmental impacts of its strategies and proposals, including, but not only, formal sustainability appraisals, and has specific board members with a remit to champion these issues
- demonstrate that its transport and other strategies are aligned with key national policies and targets, including on air quality, CO2 reduction and the Government's 25-Year Environment Plan.

Priorities of Sub-National Transport Body

The challenges the region faces are as much social and environmental as they are economic. We believe that Midlands Connect must show environmental leadership, and focus on delivering good growth, centred on truly sustainable development.

We support the potential of sub national transport bodies to deliver economic growth and believe that this can and should be achieved sustainably in relation to its environmental and social impacts. As noted above, better connectivity must be within cities as well as between them, and must be integrated with city-region local public transport networks, which are joined-up with wider networks, involving frequent rail services, light rail and bus, all supported by smart, multi-modal ticketing.

Midlands Connect should not simply attempt to accommodate growth, but should pursue interventions that contribute to the most sustainable trends, including reducing the need to travel through better digital connectivity, and supporting agglomeration by aligning transport and spatial planning objectives.

We support the development of an integrated transport strategy to contribute to long-term economic and environmental sustainability and help improve the region's productivity and prosperity.

The right transport strategy will not simply pursue economic goals in isolation. It will seek to retain and enhance the good quality of life that is part of the region's attraction to businesses, investors and consumers.

It will improve mobility and connectivity, without replicating the errors of suburban sprawl, car dependency, and costly congestion.

It will seek to connect and support vibrant modern cities, without undermining the high environmental quality of the surrounding areas. It will support modern businesses through provision for sustainable freight transport.

It will see environmental leadership as a positive outcome rather than a negative constraint, embracing good growth to secure a high quality, low carbon future which protects the natural environment and meets carbon reduction targets.

This means moving away from a focus on new road infrastructure which would come at great financial and environmental cost, yet deliver little or no social and economic benefit. In particular we object strongly to the idea of a new west of Birmingham orbital motorway. Facilitating more and longer road journeys is not in itself an economic benefit and will have adverse impacts on local networks.

A high quality transport network is essential to provide access to jobs and services, to support economic activity and to connect communities to the public transport network, integrating rail services, light rail and bus, supported by smart, multi-modal ticketing. Recognising that all journeys are local at some stage, we welcome the potential for the Strategic Transport Body to provide a framework for not only cross-regional provision, but to work with local and metropolitan transport authorities to provide a quality framework, encouraging a levelling up of the local service provision on which many journeys depend.

On this basis we propose that the priorities for Midlands Connect should be to:

- Work with the city regions and existing transport networks to deliver smart and simple integrated ticketing
- Provide a framework to manage overlapping transport needs between Districts, Shires or existing PTE areas, with a regional bus and coach investment strategy.
- Work closely with the West Midlands Rail Executive to co-ordinate management of and local priorities in rail franchises, including better provision for rail freight, and champion new railway lines and stations. We note that the railway and economic geography in the Midlands is different to the North, but believe there are still valuable roles for Midlands Connect to play to create a vibrant and growing railway and the jobs and supply chain to serve it, especially at Derby.
- Support strategic interventions to deliver cross-regional movement by the most sustainable means, for example by supporting new multi-modal rail freight interchanges.
- Support local authorities within the Midlands Connect region in bringing together transport and land use planning, to reduce the need to travel and promote use of sustainable transport.

Getting transport right is not only vital for the sustainability of the transport system but is also central to addressing the challenges the region faces now and in the future. Breaking the false link between economic growth and traffic growth is central to having a sustainable future, enabled by investment in affordable, reliable, accessible public transport for all.

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Bridget Fox
Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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