

Union Connectivity Review | Submission from High Speed Rail Group

Introduction

The following is a response to the call for evidence from the Union Connectivity Review. It is submitted by High Speed Rail Group (HSRG) and focuses on how the rail sector and specifically high speed rail can play a major role in supporting investment, economic growth, and cohesion across the UK.

About High Speed Rail Group

HSRG is committed to supporting the successful delivery of a world-class high speed rail network in Britain. Our members have helped deliver major infrastructure projects in the UK and around the world, from creating entirely new high speed networks to improving the UK's existing rail network. This gives us a unique insight into both the shortcomings of the current network and the transformative capacity, connectivity, economic and environmental benefits that high speed rail brings.

HSRG supports a national high speed rail network including the delivery of HS2, high speed rail's integration with the existing rail network and investment to maximise the released capacity benefits HS2 brings on and off route, and other rail investments such as Northern Powerhouse Rail and Midlands Engine Rail. A full list of our membership can be found at www.rail-leaders.com.

Response

3. In general terms, is there a need for new or improved transport links between the nations of the United Kingdom?

Yes. There a need for new and improved transport links between the nations of the United Kingdom because:

- (i) they are being systematically neglected – see answer to Q4, below*
- (ii) they accommodate (by UK standards) a disproportionate amount of longer distance travel. The small number of these longer distance trips account for:
 - a significant proportion of highway sector carbon emissions (23% of carbon from road traffic comes from journeys over 25 miles) and for
 - the large majority of the UK's domestic air travel which also of course contribute significantly to the UK's carbon emissions.Measures that would reduce the adverse carbon impacts of cross-border travel could be highly targeted and in our view, should focus on increased use of electrified rail services*
- (iii) cross-border travel markets, certainly for rail, were growing strongly over the period to 2019. Travel generates economic value, but the opportunity for further economic stimulus from this source will be lost if transport network capacity constraints are not addressed.*

4. What are the main obstacles and challenges in improving transport connectivity between the nations of the UK?

We believe there are four obstacles and challenges:

- (i) **responsibilities** for transport policy, planning and provision across the UK are devolved and held by agencies & departments of the four national governments/assemblies. There is nothing wrong in that but there is an inevitable tendency to find cross-border investment 'peripheral' and less essential*
- (ii) there is no overarching mechanism by which infrastructure and services are planned across 4-nation boundaries. There are some **ad hoc arrangements** – such as the Mersey Dee partnership spanning the North Wales/North West England border. But they have no powers (or funding, other than those of participating bodies)*

- (iii) *while the UK Government retains responsibility for cross-border transport as a ‘reserved matter’, it has been little used. The creation of the M4 motorway and A55 trunk roads which span the English and Welsh border and the M6/M74 motorways (English/Scottish border) were planned and executed before devolution*
- (iv) *examination of transport investment needs at a **regional** level is generally helpful, but across the UK this is now largely limited to England (and even here, commitment to forming sub-national transport bodies is waning). This precludes the opportunity for adjoining regions across four-nation boundaries to work collaboratively on transport and connectivity improvements.*

To give two specific, but linked, examples of failures to progress connectivity improvements despite apparent high-level political support:

- (i) *Holyrood and Westminster transport ministers agreed on a longer term target to reduce rail journey times towards 3 hours on 21st March 2016. An initial report released at the time had been commissioned by DfT in November 2013. Carried out by HS2 Ltd, work was overseen by DfT, Transport Scotland, Scotland Office, Network Rail and HS2 Ltd. Unfortunately this only managed to rule out rather unlikely solutions at either end of a very wide cost spectrum. The results of further collaborative work have not been published. There has been no apparent progress since to develop a business case for a more probable approach which would see matched improvements north and south of the border*
- (ii) *the failure to identify a strategy to develop rail (and high-speed rail) for the Anglo-Scottish market, has left a position of uncertainty on the future of cross-border travel. This leaves uncertainty and has inhibited progress with ‘domestic’ (within-nation) schemes:*

“The appraisal found that Scenario D14, the addition of a small piece of link infrastructure to that required for an extension of high speed rail into Scotland [from England] on a western alignment, was the best performing high speed rail option. However, the appraisal identified that whilst there could be a business case for an advance build of these high speed routes between Glasgow and Edinburgh, as part of a wider high speed rail network, they would be unlikely to offer good value for money as a free standing scheme. Accordingly, with no certainty that the HS2 would be extended into Scotland nor an identification of potential routes for it to do so, it was therefore not possible in May 2014 to reach a conclusion on the best option... A high speed route between Glasgow and Edinburgh is therefore possible, but its feasibility is dependent on a commitment to extend high speed rail [from England] to Scotland”¹

5. What evidence exists to demonstrate the potential impacts of improved transport connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom?

There is a substantial body of evidence that there is a strong case for better connectivity between the four nations. We give two examples in the sector we know best (rail): one England-Scotland the other England-Wales.

Our report ‘High Speed Rail and Scotland’ summarises a large amount of work carried out by Network Rail, Transport Scotland, Greengauge 21 and others who have examined the case for investment in cross-border (Anglo-Scottish) rail links.²

This work shows that studies over an 11-year period have identified strong economic cases for investment, especially over the northern section of the West Coast Main Line. These benefits derive from capacity and connectivity gains and cover person travel and freight.

The Strategic Case for cross-border rail investment between North Wales and England has been set out powerfully by the work of the Mersey-Dee partnership and others.³ It provides a mass of evidence on the connectivity benefits on offer.

¹ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/1606/rail-high-speed-rail-scotland-summary-report-web-version-march-2016.pdf>

² <http://www.greengauge21.net/wp-content/uploads/High-Speed-Rail-and-Scotland.pdf>

³ <https://www.growthtrack360.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/WEST-WALES-RAIL-PROSPECTUS-FINAL.pdf>

6. When making transport investment decisions that aim to improve connectivity between the different nations of the UK, does the current appraisal framework capture all the potential impacts?

There are five reasons to believe the current appraisal methodology misses some of the key benefits of better connectivity between the UK nations.

*First, it is worth noting that there is **no single methodology** in play. This need not be a problem if fresh analysis is undertaken as a result of the Union Connectivity Review, with appropriate 'buy in' obtained from the nations affected. The transport investment appraisal systems in England and Scotland are different, with the STAG-2 framework being used in Scotland and WebTAG in England. But insofar as arrangements to improve connectivity are very largely likely to comprise measures which lie within a pair of nations, then using different appraisals systems and metrics to appraise separate projects within differing nations that form part of an overall programme could be unhelpful.*

*Second, perhaps the most substantive piece of work on the economic effect of national borders was carried out at the instigation of Lord Cockfield in the 1980s, when the European Commission was examining the case for the creation of the Single Market. The work he commissioned showed the expected benefits of removing tariff and other barriers, but it also identified a similarly **large impact from simply creating larger markets**. This second effect was estimated to add over 2% to GDP.⁴*

Of course, the four nations of the UK do not experience the border effects on their economies in the way that affected pre-single market European nation states. But the southern highlands of Scotland and the fells of northern England leave a 100 mile+ gap between cities (Glasgow-Carlisle and Edinburgh-Newcastle) on each side of the country. Travel times between Glasgow/Edinburgh and Manchester/Leeds are not conducive to 'day out' business travel. This is sufficient to diminish the ability of businesses in northern English cities to serve the Scottish market and vice versa, leaving to one side any cultural impacts⁵ that may affect such business activities.

The economic benefit described here is an agglomeration effect, but much of the research and application of this factor in the UK has focused on labour markets, rather than business travel (it was used to some effect in the appraisal of Crossrail).

This argument also applies – and to a greater extent – for Northern Ireland given the sea/air crossings involved in travel to/from Britain. In practice, the easier approach would be to improve connectivity between Belfast and Dublin – a corridor where there is work on high-speed rail about to start (which we would support).

*The third issue is the question of **spatial strategies**, to which DfT's current appraisal framework makes no reference. Where they exist, they have generally been devised with an aim to help foster economic growth. Transport links are a key factor that determines their effectiveness.*

Scotland is on its third revision of a national spatial strategy having produced the first in 2004. This identified a major arc of economic opportunity along Scotland's East coast/England's NE coast. Wales has now prepared one. The UK2070 Commission has considered this specific issue and concluded in its first report that⁶:

"There is ... a complementary need for a UK Spatial Reference Framework agreed between the administrations of the UK that sets out a common understanding of overarching spatial priorities (e.g. energy) and matters requiring cross-border collaboration in the United Kingdom"

and in its second report, under the heading of Aligning the Nations, it noted the existence of:

"the Borderlands Partnership between authorities in the North of England and the South of Scotland, and between England and North/South Wales. It proposed that this alignment of the nations could be through a

⁴ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/de6e9bed-bb51-456d-9830-b12debb83019/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>

⁵ We found no evidence of the existence of these but we speculate that perhaps some English-based businesses feel inhibited by any Welsh language obligations arising from serving markets in Wales

⁶ <http://uk2070.org.uk/publications/>

UK Spatial Framework agreed between the administrations of the UK. The British Irish Council already has a Working Group on Collaborative Spatial Planning that facilitates discussion on matters of common interest across the UK and Ireland.”

*Fourthly, there is a risk of overlooking the need to level up rural areas lying close to national borders that typically under-perform. Locations served by surface cross-border links are amongst the **least accessible/most peripheral places** and have poor economic indicators.*

They are not peripheral areas in the UK sense, but they are peripheral in terms of the nation of which they are a part. English rural areas with multiple deprivation cluster along the English coast and its borders with Wales and Scotland (see Figure 1 in the Annex). In the Northern Irish context, an equivalent effect would be found in the statistics of places lying near to the border with the Irish Republic.

The link between peripherality and economic productivity has been studied and shows a clear link between productivity and distance/accessibility to the UK’s main centres, including London.⁷ Peripherality was seen as a challenge by the EU worthy of specific funding packages which post-Brexit calls out for consideration of a UK-wide equivalent. Some of any such funding package could be used to co-fund cross-border improvements that bring gains to places lying close to the borders.

*Fifth: the importance of **freight** is easily overlooked when looking at rail and road border crossings. It is especially important in the context of the Anglo-Scottish border, as a 2015 study found:*

A study by the Transport Research Institute, Edinburgh Napier University, examined the development of port-centric logistics, dry ports and offshore logistics hubs as possible strategies for overcoming what its authors called Scotland’s “double peripherality” – referring to Scotland’s status both physically and institutionally. Scotland’s low accessibility was reflected in the limited share of Scottish unitised freight traffic coming through the country’s own ports, said the report, which highlighted over-reliance on English ports and the lack of government initiatives to promote direct links by sea.

“Peripheral regions and nations within the EU require a range of transport options for access to the economic centre of the European continent. Yet for market access, Scotland relies heavily on maritime services via remote southern seaports, with the result that the majority of Scotland’s trade travels overland through England.”⁸

Similar observations would no doubt apply to Northern Ireland and Wales.

7. Which specific journeys would benefit from new or improved transport links?

We identify the following key cross-border connections, selected because of the scope to improve rail connectivity and bring transformational economic benefits:

- i. Glasgow/Edinburgh-London*
- ii. Birmingham-Manchester-Glasgow/Edinburgh*
- iii. Cardiff-Birmingham-Newcastle-Edinburgh*
- iv. Cardiff-Liverpool/Manchester*
- v. Edinburgh-Galashiels/Hawick-Carlisle*
- vi. Manchester Airport-Chester-Bangor-Holyhead*
- vii. Edinburgh/Glasgow/London-Belfast.*

a) What would be the benefits of improvements to these specific journeys?

We summarise our answer to these questions in the following table:

⁷ <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ProductivityWiderEconomicImpactStudy.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.seatrade-maritime.com/europe/borders-ports-and-scotland-s-double-peripherality>

Cross border flow	Proposed Enhancement	Benefits	Sources	Comment
1. Glasgow/Edinburgh - London	Crewe-Glasgow/Edinburgh WCML (north) route upgrade to get journey times reduced (post HS2) to 3h10 and to ensure there is sufficient capacity to accommodate expected extra demand including for train paths that HS2 will bring north of Crewe	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very large economic benefits 2. Carbon reduction from major switch to rail (passenger and freight) 3. Access to HS1 and European high-speed network for Scotland 	See HSR Group submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2020	<p>Adds to the environmental and wider economic case for HS2</p> <p>Major boost to Scotland's tourism sector</p> <p>Addresses the need for better low-carbon freight connectivity via English ports</p>
2. Birmingham/Manchester - Glasgow/Edinburgh	WCML (north) upgrade (as above) to add capacity and reduce journey times	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carbon reduction from major switch to rail from air services and long distance car use 2. Huge expansion of the day/half day business catchments of 4/10 UK's biggest city economies 		The fastest growing rail markets 2010-2019
3. Cardiff-Birmingham - Newcastle-Edinburgh	Converting the Y-shaped HS2 network to an 'X'. This provides a direct connection between the capital cities of Cardiff and Edinburgh (to match those with London)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provides direct rail connections currently missing between Cardiff and Sheffield, Leeds, York, Tees Valley & Newcastle 2. Improves Gloucester's rail connectivity 3, Brings South Wales into the set of beneficiaries of HS2 	<i>Beyond HS2</i> , Greengauge 21 for full detail of rationale	Requires implementation of Midlands Rail Hub and electrification of the railway between Bromsgrove and Bristol Parkway/Severn Tunnel Junction
4. Cardiff - Liverpool/Manchester	Upgrade of Newport-Crewe railway to accommodate additional and faster services (including between North/Mid Wales and the Welsh Capital)	Besides cross-border link enhancements, this also provides better cross-Wales connections and much better connectivity for the economically weak English border counties, especially Herefordshire	<i>Beyond HS2</i> , Greengauge 21	Cardiff is the least well-rail connected major city in the UK. It has no direct links with Liverpool
5. Galashiels/Hawick - Carlisle	The Borders railway southern extension	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provides a potentially useful diversionary route from Carlisle to Edinburgh at times of service disruption 2. Strengthens the borders region cross-border link in an area of poor roads (and no rail service) and low productivity 	Borders Railways Extension Campaign	Improves Carlisle's role as a hub station & catchment strengthens the business case for service enhancements such as those at 1 and 2 above
6. Manchester Airport - Chester-Bangor - Holyhead	Route electrification and use of the proposed (and protected) Manchester Airport western rail link to attract passengers and freight to rail and take pressure off key sections of the national motorway network that will experience added pressure from HS2 Phase 2b Crewe-Manchester	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A boost to the key industrial cluster of major businesses that straddle the N Wales/English border (Toshiba, Tata steel, Airbus Industries, Ineos...) 2. Broader labour market catchment for cluster of financial services in the Chester and West Cheshire area (Bank of America, MBNA, Lloyds..) 3. Boost to North Wales tourism 	North Wales Economic Ambition Board and Mersey Dee Partnership, multiple reports	<p>Bangor University is crucial to the NW Wales economy and its international students rely on access via Manchester Airport with which there is no direct rail link.</p> <p>Opens up opportunities for HS2 services to Chester and N Wales</p>
7. Edinburgh/Glasgow & London - Belfast	Provision of a cross-Irish Sea rail tunnel	Binds Northern Ireland closer to the GB and helps address problems in economic status of Northern Ireland post-Brexit	<i>Connecting Great Britain and Northern Ireland: A short report.</i> Greengauge 21	<p>Needs new rail connection Carlisle-Stranraer.</p> <p>Major positive tourism impact</p>

b) Are you aware of any work that has been done to assess the need or feasibility of improvements to all or part of these specific journeys?

The best sources for evidence in respect for each journey flow are in all cases Network Rail, with the most up to date work lying in the continuous modular strategic planning studies for each route.

In addition, the following additional route-specific sources of Feasibility Study evidence should be examined:

*Glasgow/Edinburgh-London – **Transport Scotland; Network Rail ‘New Lines’ study of 2009***

Birmingham-Manchester-Glasgow/Edinburgh

*Cardiff-Birmingham-Newcastle-Edinburgh – **Midlands Connect** (in relation to Midlands Rail Hub), **Transport Scotland** in relation to Edinburgh-Newcastle line improvements⁹*

Cardiff-Liverpool/Manchester

*Galashiels/Hawick-Carlisle **Borders Rail Extension Campaign***

*Manchester Airport-Chester-Bangor-Holyhead **Growth Track 360, North Wales Economic Ambition Board and Manchester Airport Group***

*Edinburgh/Glasgow/London-Belfast **James Barton 1901 paper (can be sourced via Greengauge 21 if needed)***

c) How would the costs and benefits of the identified improvements be distributed?

Please see reference material and sources in column of the Table above for the limited evidence that is available on this question.

d) How will demand for these journeys change in the future?

The Next 20-30 Years

The high growth experienced in long distance rail travel, most notably across the England-Scotland border has been affected by many factors over the last 20 years including:

- *strong growth in international tourism*
- *stable fuel prices for motorists*
- *new and much improved rail services*
- *intensive air competition, including from low-cost airlines*
- *the introduction of APD*
- *the unfolding of digital and mobile technology*
- *gradually increasing road congestion.*

A record number of people have opted to travel on Virgin Trains’ Anglo-Scottish rail services instead of flying. In the 12 months to July, 29% of people chose to travel with Virgin Trains rather than flying between Glasgow and London. This is nearly 2% more than the previous record set in 2014 when passenger numbers increased due to Glasgow’s hosting of the Commonwealth Games.

Source: Virgin Trains, July 2019

None of these influences do we judge likely to disappear or reverse trend effects. But whether rail services will improve, now that the network is operating at close to capacity (in terms of train paths) depends critically on investment decisions ahead. One of these has been taken already: the southern part of HS2 is proceeding and this speeds up London-Glasgow/Edinburgh rail times.

One new factor is likely to arise, stemming from changes in consumer behaviour seeking to travel ‘green/low carbon’ and this is expected to foster added growth in rail market share.

⁹ See **SCOTLAND’S PRIORITIES FOR THE INTEGRATED RAIL PLAN** – Transport Scotland’s submission to the Integrated Plan consultation

Covid-19 Impacts

The most discernible impact of Covid-19 has been on work behaviour with those able to work from home (wfh) doing so (at times under Government direction). The available evidence is that many people who have been able to make this change would wish to retain an element of wfh in future.

Business travel was already changing fast pre-Covid. Increased use of rail by self-employed people; the undiminished need for face-to-face contact for key meetings (promotion boards; job interviews and financing deals, for example) and the growth in corporate team-building events all increased the use of rail, with mobile technology allowing rail travellers to work in transit (a facility much less viable if travelling by other modes). And a lot of business travel demand site visits of one sort or another.

The evidence on post-Covid-19 business travel on behaviour does not match that for commuting, and it is a lot more important for cross-border demand. Business travel is not immune to corporate environmental policies and these, we judge, will probably favour rail. We believe demand will return to pre-virus levels and resume a pattern of growth, but research into this area is needed.

Leisure travel is expected to return to pre-Covid levels and experience a catch-up effect.

The commuter market is small as a proportion of all Anglo-Scottish and GB-Northern Ireland flows. It is also small in relation to flow #6 (North Wales) above; there is some commuting by rail to/from Chester, but only a proportion of this will be office-based work able to sustain wfh options. But it is significant in relation to the South Wales cross-border flows. Even here, these are shorter distance movements that are not the focus of either flow #3 or #4, although any decline in these flows may affect a wider case for investment in this part of the M4 corridor.

e) In your opinion, what is the preferred means by which to improve these journeys?

A programme of upgrades to existing rail lines, combined with new dedicated sections of high speed line joining HS2 to Scotland will boost capacity and meet the projected demand for both freight and passenger travel. See <http://www.greengauge21.net/wp-content/uploads/High-Speed-Rail-and-Scotland.pdf> Current plans for HS2 infrastructure do not extend north of the Manchester-Leeds-York axis, instead HS2 services are expected to operate over existing railways lines (the East and West Coast Main Lines). Studies into options for the nation's high-speed rail network have found that adding a high-speed line northwards from Manchester to Glasgow/Edinburgh had a strong economic case with a benefit: cost ratio of 7.6:1, a much higher return than all other routes studied. In addition, as the economy recovers, so too will any short-term loss of freight demand and there is considerable scope to move more freight onto rail. With the loss of air carrying capacity during Covid, there has been a sharp uptake of interest in creating new high-speed logistics capabilities, which will only succeed if the infrastructure has the capacity to support them.

f) What would be the environmental impact of improving these journeys in the way that you have identified?

The greenest option for Anglo-Scottish travel is rail which produces a fifth of the climate emissions that comes from air travel. Analysis by Transform Scotland shows that total carbon emissions from air and rail travel between Edinburgh/Glasgow and London have fallen by 12%, saving 98,000 tCO₂e in total. 60,000 tCO₂e of the total savings were made on the Glasgow to London route.¹⁰ This work looked at the carbon savings achieved in recent years by shifting travel from air to rail between Central Scotland and London, and highlights the additional emissions that would be saved should rail continue its progress towards a 50% share of the travel market.

g) Are there any interdependencies with other policies that may impact the deliverability of the identified improvements?

The improvements needed require:

¹⁰ <https://transform.scot/a-green-journey-to-growth/>

- *strategic oversight, as used to resolve the delivery the West Coast Route Modernisation programme by the SRA: the ‘Guiding Mind’ is needed urgently*
- *a collaborative approach so that there is full engagement with the devolved administrations in each of the four nations and local buy-in*
- *acceptance that this approach may change plans through a single UK lens/mind-set.*

Business cases would be hugely helped by establishing a UK price for carbon emissions to be used in investment appraisals that will deliver investment outcomes consistent with achieving net zero and interim milestones.

8. Is there a need for the development of a national strategic transport network to replace the European Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) network following the end of the UK-EU transition period?

The Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T), a European Commission policy, was initially launched in the late 1990s mainly to improve European internal trade¹¹. The scope of the policy has been broadened over the years from a focus on prioritised infrastructure projects, to implementation of harmonised and multimodal infrastructure corridors and networks across the European Union¹².

High profile infrastructure projects in the UK—such as ground investigations for HS2 and new underground stations along the Crossrail (Elizabeth) tube line—have receiving funding within the framework of TEN-T. It is notable that the existence of TEN-T and its use of a range of funding sources – some but not all drawn from EU programmes – has the effect of channelling some investment into areas that are remote from major cities (as is often the case with border areas) and into projects that wouldn’t otherwise score as highly as major urban projects in terms of benefit cost ratio performance.

The parallels with the UK post-Brexit and the connectivity needs across the four nations are striking. We believe that adopting a TEN-T equivalent format would help instigate new investment funds that would improve pan-UK connectivity.

It could also work well with European partners going forward. The HS1/Eurotunnel infrastructure is critical for UK business and tourism travel. And investment in Dublin-Belfast rail could well help make the case for investment a cross-Irish Sea tunnelled rail route.

a) How should such a network be defined?

The EU’s TEN-T criteria form a good starting point. They are multi-modal and reflect wider policy aims.

Just as has happened with TEN-T, a key driver needs to be sustainability and carbon reduction, alongside economic improvement. As the responses above have shown, this is also an opportunity to address issues of peripherality. A TEN-T criterion that has little relevance at the UK level relates to the ambition to develop common standards: these typically exist to satisfactory extent (the only real exception being Irish track gauge).

b) What would be the potential impact of such a network?

Besides the obvious benefits, addressing the needs of cross-border travel and connectivity will:

- *Assist with ‘domestic’ network development decision-making*
- *Help ensure that the benefits of within-nation investments are optimised*
- *In addition to helping the economies of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in particular, a properly funded UK ‘TEN-T’ network – at least in the case of rail – potentially help the large parts of north of England share in the connectivity gains that HS2 offers south of Leeds-Manchester*

c) How should a network of this nature be managed or financed?

¹¹ See 2018 article - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2213624X1730247X#b0065>

¹² Complementary governance for sustainable development in transport: The European TEN-T Core network corridors – <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2213624X1730247X#b0070>

It will need to be majority funded by the UK Government. Cross-border links, as we have shown, tend not to be the highest priority at nation level.

An arms-length organisation with strong and passionate leadership and an integrated team of staff drawing on the expertise and knowledge of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Parliaments/Assemblies combined with expertise drawn from the nascent regional English transport bodies would seem appropriate.

d) Do you have any further comments on the development of a national strategic transport network?

Ministers have long spoken of HS2 being for the whole country. Without wishing to imply a 'build high-speed rail everywhere' approach, we firmly believe that high-speed rail services should be available and accessible across the whole of the UK and this Review could lead to this becoming achievable.

9. With reference to the unique geographical position of Northern Ireland, please set out how best to improve cross-border transport connectivity with other UK nations

Any scheme to successfully connect mainland Britain and Northern Ireland via a fixed link has to be developed and considered as a combined package of substantial improvements and new transport connections, both in Northern Ireland, in South West Scotland and in North West England. So reinstating rail links between Portadown, Armagh, Enniskillen and both Sligo in the Irish Republic and Derry/Londonderry; as a complement to a new Irish Sea crossing, would extend and deepen the transformational effect on the Ulster economy. Similarly, enhancements though northern England will be that much stronger if the Northern Ireland market is added to the service mix. Key places such as Workington and West Cumbria as a whole would benefit from the extra rail network capacity and faster speeds needed to get full value out of the Northern Ireland-Britain fixed link. See [Connecting Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#).

The work noted earlier (question 7b – paper by James Barton dating from over 100 years ago) established a feasible sea crossing tunnel route that avoids the Beaufort trench. It is important that this review goes further than identifying the feasibility of such a facility and demonstrates that:

- *in strategic terms there is no better option*
- *that it carries the support of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament*
- *there is a feasible path to its funding from the UK Exchequer that does not adversely impact on other transport funding.*

We don't see reasons to exclude any mode from consideration but we would direct the Review's attention to the success of Eurotunnel as a good model.

We would also suggest that while a cross-Irish Sea tunnel would be costly, such considerations have been overcome in exciting and transformational infrastructure schemes in NW Europe, most notably in the Faroes Islands and in Norway and between Denmark and Germany.

With regards evidence to the cost, benefits and environmental impacts, it is too early to offer up key parameters from a strategic business case that remains to be developed.

10. Other than geographic, are there any other specific restrictions to improving connectivity between Northern Ireland and other UK nations?

Ireland has a 5'3 track gauge unlike the railways of Great Britain. Either the short connecting routes in Northern Ireland should be converted to GB (standard European) gauge or gauge changing technology should be deployed. This technology has now progressed such that China has manufactured a 400km/h high-speed trainset capable of changing gauge en route.

11. What else can be done to support greater transport connectivity between the nations of the UK?

HSRG has found high levels of interest internationally not just in progress with the HS2 project, but also with the HSR Group itself. As an open, non-partisan and informal group of businesses that are of course rivals in the commercial

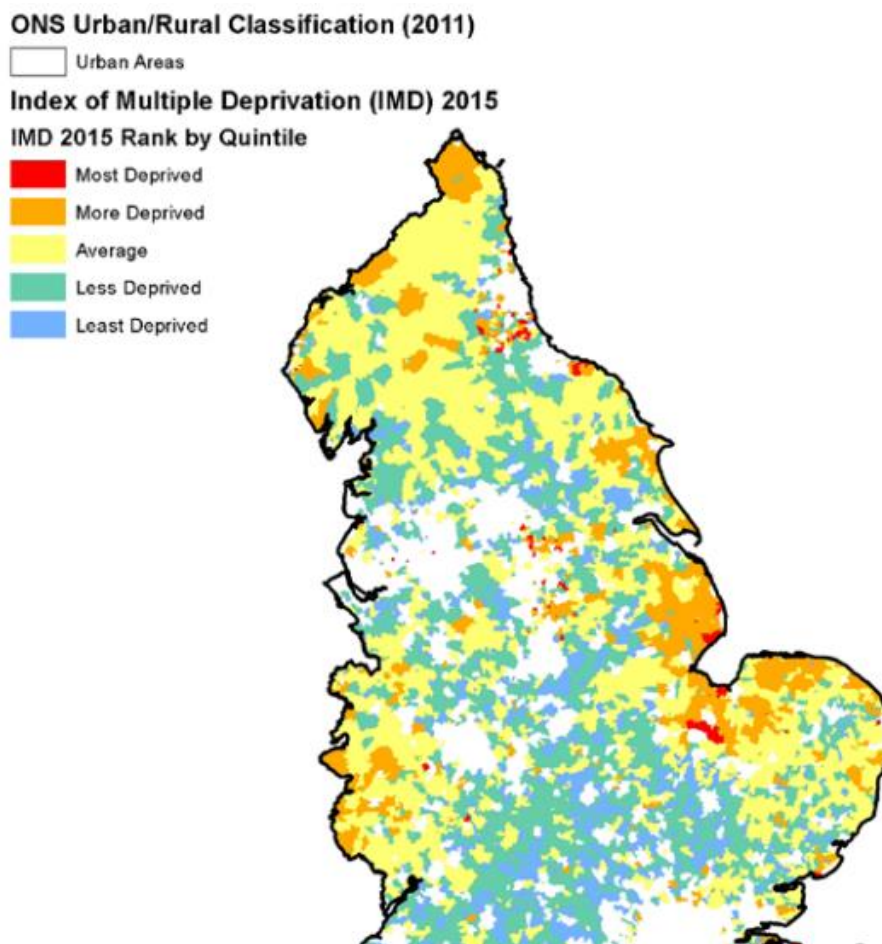
market-place, our ability to provide informed advice to those considering new developments in high-speed rail, for instance the Connect4 project across the nations of Eastern Europe, has been very welcome. In Scandinavia, Government transport officials asked us if we could set up a similar body there.

The UK is blessed with a large number of relevant multi-national companies having major offices – often serving the European/Middle East and sometimes African markets too, as well as major UK-based suppliers. This has been the bedrock of HSRG and we believe that an imaginative approach to development of these projects – which subject to the extensive, collaborative governance arrangements described above – should look for early (in fact ab initio) involvement of the private sector: the businesses that can and will deliver UK connectivity projects. HSRG stands ready to assist in relation to HSR/rail segment of the Connectivity Programme, which we hope lies ahead.

ENDS

Annex

Figure 1:



Source: <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/1.39 Health%20in%20rural%20areas WEB.pdf>