

Appendix: Item 18

Consultation questions

Assessing the need for cross-border connectivity

1. If you represent a place, what is your current strategy for growing the economy and improving the quality of life there?

The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) is the statutory regional transport partnership covering Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Orkney, Highland, Moray and most of the Argyll and Bute area.

We work with our partner Councils, Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (regional development agency), transport operators and other stakeholders. Our aim is to improve transport services and infrastructure in the north of Scotland and on routes to the Highlands and Islands. Our Regional Transport Strategy can be found at https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Draft_Regional_Transport_Strategy_2018.pdf.

a) What is necessary to achieve this strategy and what evidence do you have that improved connectivity is needed in this instance?

We expect that transport is not the only factor necessary to achieve regional strategies and would like to understand what else might need to be in place to see benefits from improvements in connectivity.

Our Regional Transport Strategy highlights the key role of UK cross-border air services from Inverness. These include not only flights to Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton but also to Amsterdam and a number of major UK cities (e.g. Manchester).

Our Strategy also highlights the direct day time and overnight sleeper rail services between Inverness and London. The sleeper is the only current means of arriving in either Inverness or central London before 0900-which is of importance to business travellers,

In recent years we have seen how improved air connections through Inverness airport to the major hub at Heathrow can help drive growth. That is not only through increased tourism. It has also benefited other sectors of strategic importance to the UK economy-e.g. energy, food and drink. These sectors are dependent on good UK and international connectivity. The reintroduction and subsequent increased frequency of the Heathrow route has also influenced business investment and location decisions in our region.

HITRANS and its partners have provided detailed evidence of how cross-border air services are crucial to the region's economy. That includes, first, the importance of suitable service frequency and timings set out in our response to the UK Government Aviation Strategy in 2019 <https://bit.ly/3h9G4ru>. Second, the very significant economic contribution made by flights from Inverness to Heathrow and to other cross-border airports. See <https://www.hie.co.uk/media/3002/economicplusandplussocialplusimpactplusofplusinvernessplusairportplus-plusreport.pdf>

This evidence base supports the case for improved air connectivity through:

- Showing the positive impact of increased frequency and business day trip opportunities on passenger numbers and economic impacts.

- Highlighting the fragility of some cross-border air services. That creates a lack of certainty about their future operation, reducing businesses' confidence in developing trade links based on the air routes from Inverness.

Other research commissioned by HITRANS has found that “Long distance business connectivity by air, road and rail is important.” See

https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Value_of_Transport_Study.pdf *The Value of Transport Peak Economics 2017*

2. Please provide any information you hold about current multi-nation journeys within the United Kingdom.

In your answer, please provide information relating to:

- current journey volumes or levels
- assessments of future demand
- journey reliability
- locations or corridors of particular strategic importance
- the reasons for importance

Cross-border air passenger numbers from Inverness are covered at <https://bit.ly/3h9G4ru> in our response to UK Government Air Strategy. Those for 2019 can be found at <https://www.caa.co.uk/Data-and-analysis/UK-aviation-market/Airports/Datasets/UK-Airport-data/Airport-data-2019/>

A key issue facing these air services is not reliability per se. Rather, it is the lack of certainty over their continuation at suitable frequencies and timings. Our region wants to avoid returning to the position where Government policy on hub access leaves us susceptible to airlines' decisions overriding the connectivity needs of the Highlands and Islands.

The air services and the overnight sleeper service are both important because of the remoteness of our region from other parts of the UK. That includes hubs which provide international connections (notably Heathrow and St Pancras rail station.)

Surface journeys are long. For example, a car journey from Inverness Airport to Heathrow Airport takes over nine hours. Inverness Airport also serves a catchment that may have a 3 hour surface journey to access the airport so the equivalent surface journey can be as much as 12 hours. Many parts of the UK are nearer and better connected to mainland Europe than they are to the north of Scotland.

Our region is also remote from the major Scottish airports which have more frequent flights and international routes than Inverness. Many of the drive times from Inverness Airport's catchment area to Glasgow Airport are longer than the equivalent road journey between Glasgow and Manchester.

The region's low and sparsely distributed population results in small scale local business markets and service provision. Thus, sustainable economic growth depends on accessing commercial opportunities and services elsewhere. The catchment area's key economic sectors are heavily reliant on interaction with businesses at a UK and international level.

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

If so, please:

- explain why and provide evidence to support your view
- ensure that your response relates specifically to multi-nation transport links and not to improvements in connectivity in general

The need for secure and improved transport links with other parts of the UK is because of the small size of population, internal markets and level of transport demand in the Highlands and Islands. The region requires better transport to fully:

- Trade in larger markets. For example, through adequate frequency and security of flights from Inverness to main UK cities. Also, good access to freight distribution hubs in major population centres such as the English Midlands (which serve a market of c40 million people).
- Make use of international air and sea freight services which are not available in Scotland. For example, the global access provided by Heathrow and freight sailings from Teesport.
- Sustain social links (e.g. visiting friends and relatives).

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

Please provide evidence relating to any specific challenges that prevent or hinder the development of additional or improved transport links. Please consider socio-economic, political, organisational and practical issues.

For air services these are principally issues of UK Government policy. For example, reluctance to intervene in the market to support regional air services, including to ensure adequate frequency and timings that suit business travellers and onward connections.

Compared to other European countries there is an unwillingness to use the PSO mechanism to guarantee appropriately timed slots for regional flights at Heathrow. Related to this has been a historic unwillingness to designate a PSO for a specific London airport that meets a region's connectivity needs (Heathrow in the case of the Highlands and Islands).

These issues have led to a lack of confidence in the future security of air links which makes businesses reluctant to invest and expand. Research has found that "In general, there are reasons to believe that regional business activities prefer predictable conditions, including the quality of transport infrastructure and transport services. Predictability is important because expectations can affect location and expansion plans" <https://bit.ly/3axWwAz> (*Wider Economic Impacts of Regional Air Connectivity Peak Economics 2018*).

For rail freight the issue is physical access. For example, sufficient gauge to accommodate deep sea containers; paths that will accommodate very long freight trains (775metres). Over time it may be that freight traffic gets increased priority vis a vis passenger trains given that its volumes have been little changed during the COVID pandemic (unlike passenger demand).

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

Please ensure that your answer:

- relates directly to transport connectivity between the nations of the UK and not to transport connectivity in general
- considers economic, social and cultural impacts
- provides documents or links
- highlights specific potential growth areas such as housing or wages

For air please see the evidence in <https://bit.ly/3h9G4ru> our response to UK Government Air Strategy and <https://www.hie.co.uk/media/3002/economicplusandplussocialplusimpactplusofplusinvernessplusairportplus-plusreport.pdf>.

The business case for investing in the East Coast Mainline (ECML) is set out in: http://www.investineastcoast.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2016/02/JMP_Consultants_ECMA_perspectus_Final_Report_with_Annexes_250914.pdf

This found that:

- Investment would bring specific benefits to all of the local and regional economies along the length of the line.
- GDP benefits from investment in the ECML corridor could be in excess of £5 billion.
- GDP benefits would be *in addition* to significant direct transport benefits to the economy from journey time savings and improved reliability.
- Investment in the ECML corridor is complementary to HS2.

Good connectivity within the ECML corridor will benefit collaboration in the strongly growing renewable energy sector. This is common to the Highlands and Islands, north east Scotland, the north east of England, Tees Valley and the Humber.

Tourism is a crucial part of the Highlands and Islands economy. Rail services in the ECML corridor provide a vital link on a tourism trail that encompasses a huge variety of tourism activities along the full length of the line.

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?

Please provide evidence such as links to existing reviews or analysis that may have already considered this.

We welcome UK Government's recognition that transport investment has for decades been driven by a model which reinforces regional imbalances. There is a recognised need to invest in regional connectivity to enable all regions to contribute and realise wider policy ambitions of inclusive growth.

Transport appraisal has traditionally focused on journey time savings (often minimal) as the key measure of the value of transport investment. This has meant an inadequate assessment of, for example, the contribution of security of provision, frequency and onward connectivity to air services' economic impacts. See also <https://bit.ly/3nG5QpQ> (*Value of Transport, 2016*, James Laird) for more critique of transport appraisal frameworks and in particular their failure to recognise the strong distributional implications on transport policy

Opportunities for improved transport connectivity between the nations of the UK

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

In your answer, please:

- identify 2 or more specific points within the UK for each journey
- provide details as to why each journey has been identified
- list these journeys in order of priority
- Ensure that these journeys traverse 2 or more nations of the UK.

If none then please go to [question 8](#).

Inverness-Heathrow air services.

Inverness-London rail services (ECML); and other Inverness-England rail services to ensure that the benefits of High Speed Rail are spread across Scotland.

Securing the continuity and sufficient frequency of flights between Inverness and major UK airports.

Direct rail services between Inverness and Manchester and Birmingham.

Upgrading of A1 between Edinburgh and Newcastle to benefit both car and freight traffic.

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

In your answer, please:

- provide evidence of the benefit that these proposed improvements would deliver
- consider wider economic, social and cultural benefits
- consider specific areas such as potential improvements in housing and productivity

Inverness-Heathrow air services. This vital link is to a global hub allowing international travel for businesses and inbound visitors to reach the Highlands and Islands. Secured links would increase passenger demand particularly from business travellers. The impacts of increased frequency are set out in <https://bit.ly/3h9G4ru> our response to UK Government Air Strategy. These include increased passenger numbers (both business and leisure) including connecting passengers.

As set out at <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/fast-track-scotland-making-the-case-for-high-speed-rail-connections-with-scotland> it is not envisaged that all areas in Scotland will be directly accessed by high speed rail services. However, the construction of high speed rail lines between the central belt and London will provide the whole country with greater connectivity to the rest of the UK and vice versa.

Investments will support the case for a high speed rail link to Scotland by allowing all of Scotland to share in the economic benefit of the network by providing onward rail connections from Edinburgh and Glasgow. For our region enhancements on the Highland Main Line between Perth and Inverness have been prioritised for delivery and will improve in journey time and frequency between Inverness and Edinburgh and Glasgow.

A high speed rail link to Scotland will also release train paths for freight services. This will address the current insufficient freight capacity north of Preston.

Direct rail services between Inverness and Manchester and Birmingham would improve business and inbound visitor travel between our region and a number of economic centres in north and mid England. They would mirror the daily direct service between Inverness and London via the ECML.

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?

Please provide evidence.

Issues around using the PSO mechanism to secure slots at Heathrow are covered in *Insert link to response to UK Government Air Strategy*. This includes suggested changes to UK PSO guidelines.

For high speed rail to Scotland see <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/fast-track-scotland-making-the-case-for-high-speed-rail-connections-with-scotland>

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

Please consider the economic, social and geographic distribution of these costs and benefits, and provide evidence to support this.

For Inverness-Heathrow flights the economic and social benefits would accrue to businesses and individuals at both ends of the route. In 2017, a majority of Inverness scheduled traffic (55%) was inbound to the Highlands and Islands. The Heathrow route was particularly strong in terms of inbound leisure passengers. Further detail is available at <https://www.hie.co.uk/media/3002/economicplusandplussocialplusimpactplusofplusinvernessplusairportplus-plusreport.pdf>

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

In your answer, please consider the:

- next 20 to 30 years in your response and set out the reasons why demand will change
- potential impact of COVID-19
- potential impact of the UK's departure from the EU

While continued investment in digital connectivity in rural areas is still essential, improvements in the last decade have already helped to make the Highlands and Islands a more attractive region to relocate and do business.

It is still too early to properly understand what the long term impacts of Covid-19 will be but evidence to date would suggest that it is likely to have accelerated this trend. However, for the region to fully capitalise, good domestic and international links are imperative with the need for more frequent links to hub airports (Heathrow and Amsterdam) with onward access to a wide range of global destinations all the more essential.

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

In your answer, please consider:

- specific transport modes such as rail, road, air and maritime
- details of any new infrastructure requirements
- whether there is an opportunity to promote active travel, such as walking or cycling, or environmentally friendly modes of transport

Inverness-Heathrow-secure guaranteed access to the hub with slots protected by the PSO mechanism. A frequency of at least three return flights per day. That would provide a 0900 arrival and departure after 1700 from each respective city centre This would address the current lack of a reasonable day trip for passengers originating at the London end of the route. In addition, the timings should enable good connections with flights at Heathrow.

Consideration should be given to connecting flights between Inverness and Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides. That would allow these island communities levels of access similar to those in the Inverness Airport catchment area.

Investment in infrastructure to enhance the ECML service and ensure that the benefits of High Speed Rail are spread across Scotland would include:

- Electrification north of Dunblane.
- Increased line capacity between Inverness and Perth.
- North of York-extra tracks to increase capacity and improved overhead wires to increase service resilience.

Securing the continuity and sufficient frequency of flights between Inverness and major UK airports. That would be through time limited funding support to rebuild services or, where required, use of the PSO mechanism.

Direct rail services between Inverness and Manchester and Birmingham through specifying their inclusion with the relevant concessions.

Upgrading of A1 between Edinburgh and Newcastle through creation of more dualled sections.

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

In your answer, please provide evidence and consider:

- positive and negative impacts
- possible mitigations of these
- the context of the UK's domestic and international targets for greenhouse gas and carbon emissions

An increase from a twice daily to thrice daily Inverness-Heathrow service would not have a significant environmental impact.

However, HITRANS are strongly aware and supportive of innovations to reduce the environmental impacts of aviation. We are involved in supporting opportunities to be a testbed for low carbon transport using innovative technologies based on the region's surplus renewable energy.

Current projects in Orkney highlight how electric and hydrogen solutions can offer alternative means of powering aircraft and ferries. This investment can not only reduce the carbon output of these services. It also has the potential to create high skilled employment and technology to the benefit of our region and the rest of the UK. We believe that this is an area in which the UK Government could usefully invest given the potential wide-ranging benefits.

Increased rail electrification as proposed above would mean that rail's environmental performance would be further improved compared to existing diesel operations.

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

In your answer, please:

- consider all relevant national and regional policies, and those set by devolved administrations
- provide your assessment as to how these policies may need to change to facilitate delivery of the identified improvements

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?

Please consider the specific strategic benefits of a replacement national network, which would connect strategically important regions and places in the UK in order to support economic growth and quality of life. View maps of the existing TEN-T [inland waterways and ports](#) and [railways and airports](#) network within the UK.

Yes. This would provide a structured and ring-fenced basis for strategic transport investments.

a) How should such a network be defined?

In your answer, please consider:

- which criteria should be considered when identifying transport links for inclusion
- how these criteria should be assessed
- which specific transport modes should be included

It is essential that the role of the network in facilitating freight and wider economic activity is considered rather than just passenger volume. Also, where the network performs a 'lifeline' function (i.e there is no viable alternative route or mode by which an area can be accessed) this should be prioritised.

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

In your answer, please consider possible economic, social and environmental impacts.

Ensuring that all regions of the country have a level of connectivity that allows them to be economically competitive

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

In your answer, please consider the role of:

- UK government
- devolved administrations
- local transport authorities

UK Government. Some of the Shared Prosperity funding could be used, again ensuring ring fenced funding for strategic transport investments.

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

Connections to Northern Ireland

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

In your answer, please:

- consider all possible transport options, including maritime, air and rail or road via a fixed link
- provide evidence as to the cost, benefits and environmental impact of these options

Consideration should be given to the feasibility of a Northern Ireland-Scotland fixed link with a landfall in Kintyre. Maritime options should consider possible reintroduction of the ferry service between Campbeltown and Ballycastle. That would offer a direct link between Northern Ireland and our region, while offering tourists a round trip option in conjunction with sailings from south west Scotland.

Rail options should consider a fixed link to Stranraer to connect with the existing rail network. That would also require upgrading the line between Stranraer and Ayr and/or restoration of the Stranraer to Dumfries rail line.

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

In your answer, please consider:

- legal, policy and practical restrictions
- set these out and provide evidence as to how they may limit opportunities for improved transport connectivity
- the above in the context of the UK's departure from the EU

Feasibility work needs to consider the restrictions imposed by the Beaufort Dyke due to the dangerous materials that have been dumped there.

Final questions

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

Please consider legal, political, structural and economic factors in your response, as well as other opportunities for the UK government to directly support improvements to transport connectivity.

To reiterate, a revision of UK Government's interpretation of PSO regulations is required to secure slots and guarantee suitably frequent and timed services between the Highlands and Islands and Heathrow.

Consideration needs to be given to the structure of cross-border rail concessions-i.e. West Coast Mainline, ECML and Cross Country. Joint DfT/Transport Scotland management would better reflect the shared nature of these routes and thus improve the benefits of investing in them. This would also help to ensure that the current direct ECML service to Inverness continues, and facilitate the introduction of direct rail services between Inverness and Manchester and Birmingham.

12. Do you have any further comments?

The consultation document asks for views on a fixed link between Northern Ireland and Scotland due to the former's unique geographical position, However, Scotland's islands are also uniquely positioned within the UK as they too are separated from the UK mainland. They would also benefit from transformational investments in fixed links.

As an example, cross-border UK journeys to/from Orkney (including fish exports from Scotland) are constrained by the existing ferry services. In contrast, a fixed link between Orkney and Caithness would reduce journey times, provide unlimited frequency and capacity, and remove the costs of ferry fares. This transport investment would help to increase Orkney's contribution to the UK economy.

UK Government should consider what role it could play in the introduction of such fixed links and how this would clearly demonstrate its commitment to developing all parts of the UK no matter how remote.