
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Union Connectivity Review
Author: Jonathan Brown, Strategic Rail Lead
Sponsor: Tim Foster, Strategy and Programme Director
Meeting Date: Tuesday 25 January 2022

1. Purpose of the Report:

1.1 This report discusses the final report of the Union Connectivity Review that was published in November 2021 and considers the implications and opportunities for Transport for the North.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Welcome the publication of the Union Connectivity Review.
- b) Agree to use the Strategic Transport Plan and its supporting evidence base as the basis for engaging with the Department for Transport as the Government develops its response.
- c) Seek an early discussion with Transport Scotland with a view to identifying how both organisations work on improving strategic connectivity.
- d) Seek an early discussion with Transport for Wales with a view to identifying how both organisations might build on joint working through the West and Wales partnership to improve strategic connectivity.

3. Main Issues:

Introduction

- 3.1 The Union Connectivity Review (UCR) was commissioned by the Prime Minister in October 2020 to undertake a detailed review of how the quality and availability of transport infrastructure across the UK can support economic growth and quality of life across the whole of the UK. Sir Peter Hendy was asked to lead the UCR supported by an expert panel.
- 3.2 The final UCR report was published in November 2021 and is informed by a call for evidence, social and market research and consultancy work. TfN made a submission to the UCR call for evidence in December 2020 along with many other organisations. The UCR final report reflects many of the key connectivity priorities TfN has proposed, including strengthened connectivity between the North of England, North Wales and Scotland. Appendix 1 summarises the key points of TfN's response with a commentary on how they have been addressed.
- 3.3 The UCR is particularly concerned with transport connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom rather than connectivity within nations and regions. Transport is a devolved matter, so involvement of the Welsh Government, Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive is important. The North of England has direct borders with Wales and Scotland and is a key route to Northern Ireland and is therefore important in union connectivity terms.
- 3.4 The UCR makes a total of 19 recommendations for how the UK's transport connectivity should be improved. The most important of these are:

- Design and implement UKNET – a strategic transport network for the whole of the UK, and commit to providing additional funding to improve the network, in particular, the parts that are not performing well;
- Plan improvements to the network using multimodal corridors, which should be reviewed regularly and appraised on a wider economic basis in order to support government objectives such as levelling up and net zero.

UKNET and Transport Corridors

- 3.5 UKNET, would serve the whole of the United Kingdom with improvements funded, particularly where the network is under-performing. UKNET is multi-modal so includes road and rail routes together with busier airports and seaports of importance for freight and passenger flows. Investment in UKNET should be considered on a multi-modal basis and appraised on a wider economic basis to support government objectives including levelling up and net zero. Data should be collected on a UK wide basis to inform decision making.
- 3.6 UKNET is intended as a consistent network serving all of the UK (see Appendix 2) with a programme of investment to improve connectivity. Whilst most of UKNET are within national funding envelopes such as National Highways and Network Rail, some of UKNET is comprised of local roads. In addition, ports and airports are operated on a commercial basis. Although UKNET is a strategic network, it is recognised that it needs to be integrated with local public transport and active travel schemes where appropriate, including the provision of electric vehicle charging facilities. The UCR notes the major regional variation in charging point provision, with London having nearly 4 times as many as Yorkshire and Humber and the North West per head of population.
- 3.7 The UCR sets out what UKNET could look like as a series of corridors (See Appendix 3), in a manner that is not dissimilar to the Strategic Development Corridors defined in the Strategic Transport Plan (STP). As in the STP, there are both north/south and east/west corridors together with welcome recognition of links between the North West and North Wales, and between the West Coast Ports and Northern Ireland. In the North, the ports of Grimsby and Immingham, Liverpool and Tees & Hartlepool are proposed to be part of UKNET together with Doncaster Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle Airports.
- 3.8 It is recognised that the West Coast Corridor plays a key role linking the Union, with the West Coast Main Line Railway (WCML) and M6 Motorway being its key arteries. The UCR recommends that WCML journey times be reduced, and capacity increased by upgrading the WCML north of Crewe.
- 3.9 The UCR and the Government's Integrated Rail Plan were published 8 days apart although both were substantially delayed. A key consideration for both is how and where does HS2 link to the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe. The IRP includes a Crewe Northern Connection enabling HS2 trains to serve Crewe then head north, as supported by TfN and local Partners.
- 3.10 The Golborne Link is the current plan to connect HS2 to the West Coast Main Line. The wording in the UCR on Golborne Link suggests a review of alternative northerly connections between HS2 and the West Coast Main Line. It suggests other options to connect to the WCML south of Preston could offer a two to three minute faster journey than the Golborne Link, however more work is needed to understand the case.
- 3.11 The East Coast Corridor includes the East Coast Main Line (ECML) and parallel major roads, principally the A1/A1(M). The UCR recommends "an assessment" of this corridor is carried out including road and rail improvements with the Scottish Government. The supporting analysis to the UCR recognises that capacity improvements to the ECML particularly between Northallerton and Newcastle and

improvements to the A1 between Ellingham and Edinburgh are important to Union Connectivity.

- 3.12 The North Channel Corridor includes links between the Tees Valley and North East to Cumbria and on to Northern Ireland via the Cairnryan Ports to Belfast and Larne. The UCR has carried out an assessment of a fixed link to Northern Ireland which finds that the benefits could not possibly outweigh the costs to the public purse and a fixed link should not be progressed.
- 3.13 The UCR suggests that instead, improvements to the single carriageway A75/A77 between end of the M6 at Gretna and Cairnryan should be funded. This route is entirely located within Scotland so is the responsibility of Transport Scotland, however, is also of importance to the North, as the key route for HGV traffic to/from Northern Ireland and the North of England. Although also within the corridor, improvements to the A66 and A69 are not shortlisted and the UCR does not mention road or rail connectivity across the North Pennines between the North East and Cumbria.
- 3.14 The strong relationship between North West England and North Wales is recognised in the UCR, which Growth Track 360, the West and Wales Transport Forum, TfN and others have stressed. The review also noted the economic disparities, e.g. in Cheshire GVA per head was £35,189 in 2019 compared with £27,593 in neighbouring Wrexham. The UCR recommends government to work with the Welsh government to undertake a multimodal review of the corridor and develop an investment package for the North Wales Coast Main Line including electrification and improvements to the M53, M56 and A55. The UCR notes the importance of the rail link with HS2 via Crewe.
- 3.15 A similar recommendation is made for the Welsh Marches Corridor which considers north/south connectivity in the England/Wales border area. The UCR recognises that Cardiff has the fewest direct connections of any major city, and the need for improved links to Manchester, Yorkshire and the North East including direct connections.
- 3.16 The UCR discusses aviation at length, largely in the context of connecting the four nations. It does however note the reduction in domestic connections at Heathrow Airport and suggests there may be a requirement for the Government to intervene in slot allocation processes, but only where the journey is too long for rail and road to be an alternative, which would not apply to the routes from the North to London. The UCR also recommends the development of sustainable aviation fuel plants in areas which are particularly dependent on this mode of travel.

Next Steps

- 3.17 The UCR was commissioned by the Prime Minister to provide independent advice to him on the connectivity needs between the four nations of the UK. As a result, the UCR is silent on next steps which are for the Government. The Prime Minister has referred to it as "an inspiring vision for transport" and invited the devolved administrations to work with him to achieve this. The UCR is independent advice to Government and the next steps are for it to consider and respond. To support this, the Department for Transport has established a Union Delivery team and the Government intends to respond to the UCR in due course.

Opportunities for Transport for the North

- 3.18 Union Connectivity is very important to the North, which forms much of England's border with Wales and all of its border with Scotland. Much traffic to Northern Ireland passes through or has its origin or destination in the North. The UCR notes the strong interrelationship between the North West and North Wales.

- 3.19 TfN has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with the both the Welsh and Scottish Governments. Both of the devolved administrations have been actively involved in TfN work, particularly the Strategic Development Corridors, for example the West and Wales corridor study extended to Holyhead. Both administrations have fed in to the TfN STP Development process. TfN supports the West and Wales Transport Forum which exists to promote cross-border dialogue and collaboration particularly in the North Wales/North West area. There may be scope to review and strengthen relationships with Scotland and Wales in the light of the UCR.
- 3.20 There are various other opportunities for TfN to contribute to the UCR process going forwards:
- By working with the Department for Transport intaking forwards the UCR recommendations, e.g. to provide analysis and findings from the Strategic Development Corridors. TfN has met with the DfT Union Delivery team and agreed to maintain close liaison. We will also continue to liaise with the other Strategic Transport Bodies in taking this agenda forwards.
 - TfN to date has no formal relationship with the Northern Ireland Executive or the government of Ireland. There may be opportunities to collaborate where appropriate, given that there are important air links from the North particularly to both Belfast and Dublin, ports on the west coast of England, Wales and Scotland are important in providing access to Ireland, there are important air links from the North to Belfast and Dublin and surface access routes pass through the North.
 - TfN could act as a facilitator and broker on several issues. Not all of the proposed UKNET is comprised of nationally-managed infrastructure, e.g. there are local roads which access ports and airports, and ports and airports themselves are generally operated by private companies. There may be a role for TfN to bring these diverse interests together, building on existing relationships. TfN can also facilitate greater integration, e.g. between UKNET and active travel modes, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and public transport where appropriate.

4. Corporate Considerations

Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Resource Implications

4.2 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

4.3 There are no apparent legal implications arising from this report.

Risk Management and Key Issues

4.4 There are no risks arising from this report.

Environmental Implications

4.5 The report provides the review of the UCR and therefore there are no environmental implications arising from this report itself. All activities undertaken by TfN as a result of the UCR will need to be align with TfN's published Decarbonisation Strategy and Decarbonisation Trajectory.

Equality and Diversity

4.6 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

Consultations

- 4.7 There are no consultations required at this point, however discussion with the Department for Transport, devolved administrations and TfN partners will be needed to clarify TfN's role in promoting Union Connectivity.

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 There are no background papers.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1 -Summary of TfN submission to UCR
6.2 Appendix 2 - UK Strategic Transport Network – UKNET
6.3 Appendix 3 - Transport Corridors

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used (*if applicable*)

Please include any technical abbreviations and acronyms used in the report in this section. (Please see examples below.) This will provide an easy reference point for the reader for any abbreviations and acronyms that are used in the report.

- | | |
|----------|---|
| a) UCR | <i>Union Connectivity Review</i> |
| b) UKNET | <i>United Kingdom Strategic Transport Network</i> |
| c) IRP | <i>Integrated Rail Plan</i> |
| d) SDC | <i>Strategic Development Corridor</i> |

Appendix 1 – Summary of TfN Submission to UCR

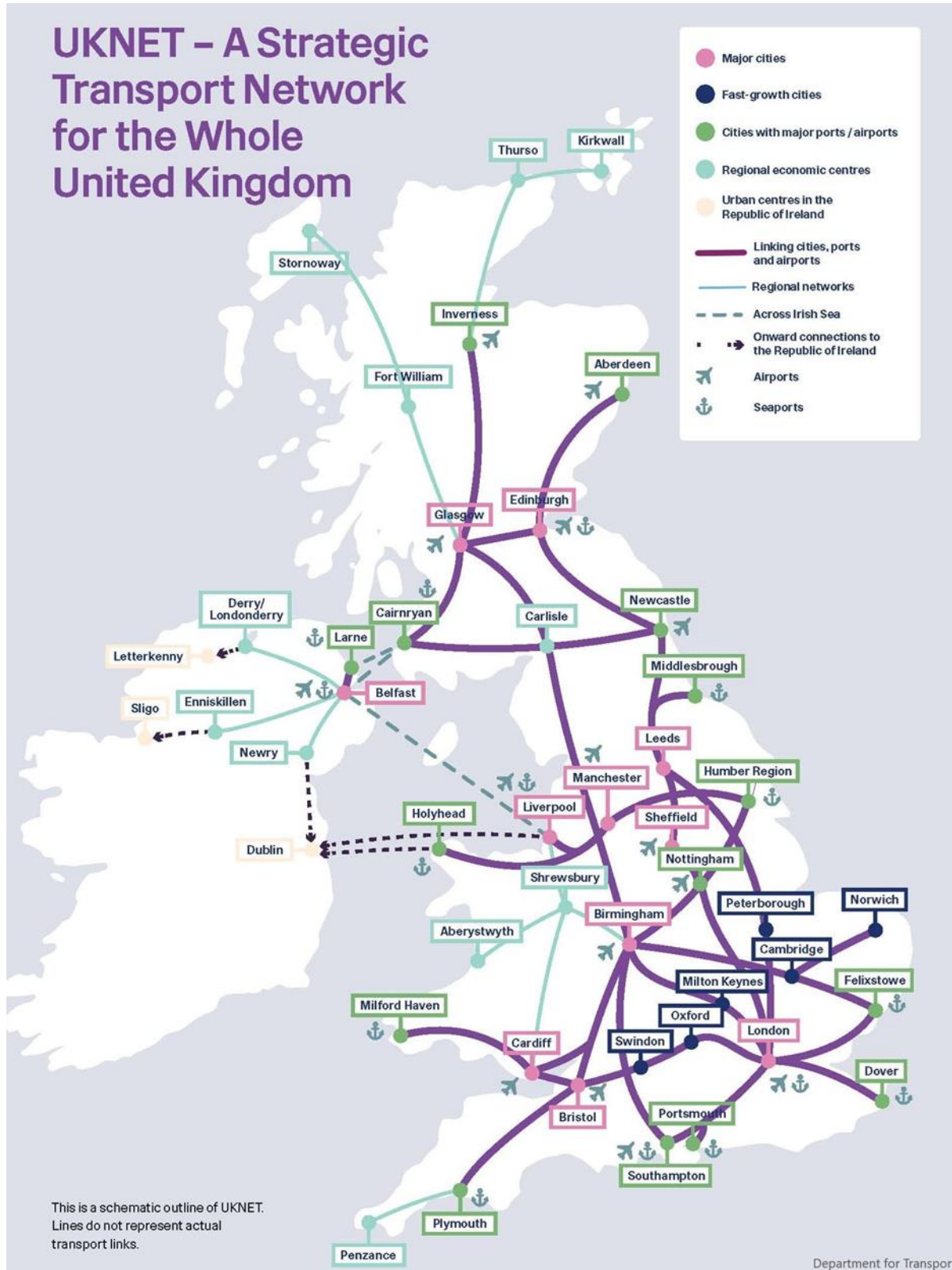
Summary of points in TfN submission	Summary of UCR response
<p>The vital importance of Northern infrastructure investment in connecting Scotland, Wales and England, as well as serving important local border communities. The North has some of the country’s most congested infrastructure and investment in this is important to improve union connectivity.</p>	<p>Northern Infrastructure is recognised throughout, and the five corridors on which pass through the North all extend to other nations. The UCR is generally not specific on actual schemes but the North is well represented. It should be noted that the specific schemes that are named in the UCR are those deemed to be of significant importance to Union Connectivity. There are other important schemes in the corridors that are recommended for the broader goal of improving connectivity across the whole proposed UKNET.</p>
<p>2021 must be a pivotal year for rail investment. Key priorities identified are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Early investment in the conventional network, creating capacity at key bottlenecks is across England, Scotland and Wales. b. - Early delivery of the East Coast Main Line upgrade between York and Newcastle through NPR, whilst ensuring the West Coast Mainline is upgraded and made “HS2 ready” c. - Early delivery of HS2 Crewe interventions, provision of a Warrington Bank Quay NPR station and upgrades to Chester Station to support better connectivity to Wales. d. - Upgrading the ECML in Scotland and extending NPR and HS2 services beyond Newcastle to Edinburgh. This will ensure that the key financial centres of Edinburgh, Newcastle and Leeds are fully served by fast services, and that rail provides a genuine alternative to the regional air markets (particularly Edinburgh to London), an essential step in achieving our decarbonisation objectives. 	<p>The UCR was published 8 days after the Government’s Integrated Rail Plan. That plan is the main rail investment method and although Northern Leaders have expressed disappointment with it through the TfN Board, there is an intention to invest in the North and Midlands. Commitment to Crewe Hub is welcome. The IRP refers to upgrades to the East Coast Main Line which is welcome however more detail is needed on what these are. The UCR supporting evidence recognises that “The delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail or an alternative scheme, offering better journey times, frequencies and capacity between northern English cities is crucial to delivering improvement on the proposed UKNET.” The IRP only commits to part of the TfN preferred NPR network leaving the Humber, Sheffield – Manchester and Leeds – Sheffield off the network. All of these are within UCR corridors. It is not clear what co-ordination there has been between the UCR and IRP authors, recognising that one is advice to Government and the other a Government policy document. There are some inconsistencies, particularly on Golborne Link where the UCR text seems to predate the IRP despite being published after it.</p>
<p>A clear investment plan in place for key road connections needs to be in place, particularly the key cross border routes of the M6 / M56 in the west, and the A1 in the east, as well as alternative routes across the Welsh</p>	<p>UKNET is important here in identifying the key road and rail networks and recommending investment in these. The corridors pick up the main routes identified</p>

border such as the A41, the A51, the A54, the A55, the A550 and the A5/A483 corridor from Chester to Shrewsbury.	by TfN and how the Government responds is important.
There are clear cross border freight opportunities – both east west connections from Northern Ireland via Holyhead and Cairnryan, and north -south via the North West and North East. A key example is the Northern Ireland to North East corridor which relies heavily on both the A75 in Scotland, the M6 and the A66 and A69 trans-pennine routes across to the North East, Tees Valley, Yorkshire and the Midlands.	Freight is considered in the UCR and its importance recognised, and proposals such as the A75 improvements would be beneficial to the North despite being in Scotland. The UCR does not describe other parts of the corridor in as much detail and improvements to the A69 and other routes are needed if the North is to fully benefit from better freight links to Cairnryan. The specific freight proposals identified in the UCR are for road proposals. The rail network also needs to be enhanced to carry freight, in terms of capacity, capability including gauge and suitable electrification including last mile capability.
The UCR needs to recognise the importance of our border communities which face different challenges in terms of local connectivity. Our work on the Wales /Cheshire /Liverpool economic area is referenced in detail in our submission. We also focus on the Scottish / English borderlands community of nearly 1 million people living away from the main transport arteries, with the principal travel to work areas straddling the border.	The UCR recognises the importance of the cross-border relationship between the North West and North Wales and the disparities that exist.
We should seek to strengthen cross border relationships. TfN has developed close links with Transport Scotland, and established a new forum covering strategic West and Wales issues. We can see a clear role for sub-national transport bodies in developing proposals for a UK replacement for the Trans European Transport Network after Brexit.	The UCR does not discuss the role that sub-national transport bodies could play or acknowledge their existence in the main report. STBs are well placed to advise on UKNET and on corridors and have experience of working with each other and with Transport Scotland and the Welsh Government on matters of mutual interest.

TfN’s full submission is available at https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Transport-for-the-North-UCR-Submission-Final_V4.pdf

Appendix 2 –UK Strategic Transport Network (UKNET)

UKNET – A Strategic Transport Network for the Whole United Kingdom



Appendix 3 – Transport Corridors

