



**North East  
All- Party Parliamentary Group**

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The Rt Hon. Lord Beith

**Vice-Chairs** Ian Levy MP, Julie Elliott MP

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McKinnell MP, Lord Wrigglesworth, Baroness Grey-  
Thompson, Lord Curry of Kirkcaldy

## MINUTES

### CONNECTING THE NORTH EAST

### WHY TRANSPORT IS THE KEY TO UNLOCKING GROWTH

18:00-19:30, 5th December 2023

Committee Room 10, House of Commons, SW1A0AA

#### 18:00 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

Kate Osborne MP, Co-Chair, North East APPG

- Thanks all for coming and appreciates that it is a journey for those who have travelled from the North East. Introduces our second session of the NE APPG and the first of our Manifesto series.
- Introduces the context of the North East APPG and sets out its purpose for providing a strong voice for the North East within Westminster.
- Ahead of the General Election next year, the APPG will be publishing a Manifesto for the North East which sets out the region's key priorities and asks for the next Government.
- At the APPG launch, transport and connectivity was the area that most people wanted to concentrate on as a top priority for the North East's key issues.
- There is a clear and present need to improve transport and connectivity in the North East, and the North as whole. Chronic underinvestment in transport is causing the North East to fall behind other regions, and there is stark evidence of regional disparities. Presently, for example, whilst it is



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possible to reach 164,000 jobs within 30 minutes by public transport within Greater London, only 43,000 jobs can be reached across Tyne and Wear.

- This session is to build consensus on North East's transport priorities, assess what Network North means, make the case for the reopening of the Leamside Line, and improving the bus network.
- The North East must attract and retain talent — connecting its people to skills, places, and opportunities to drive growth.

**18:05 CONNECTING THE NORTH EAST PANEL**

“What does the North East need to deliver a world-class transport system to boost growth, access to jobs and allow the region to reach its full potential?”

Lord Patrick McLoughlin, Chairman, Transport for the North

- Identifies the vast potential in the North East and the amazing opportunities a better transport system would provide.
- Recounts experiences as Secretary of State for Transport — big projects open up gateways for smaller communities.
- It is about what is there locally and available, but also what infrastructure elsewhere supports it. It isn't just what happens in a particular city, but how that city can extend its services, have better services, and more services. And this has to do with network capacity — and was disappointed with the scaling back of HS2 for the reason. HS2 was not about speed, it was about capacity.
- Transport is a great catalyst for growth and opportunity — having a Manifesto is very important.



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- There are some positive changes on the way — more powers for the North East and Combined Authority, and devolution is moving fast regardless of the result of the General Election. Local leaders can have much more of an impact.
- TfN can support and look at how this capacity issue unfolds across the whole region. What TfN has to do is analyse how it best serves the entire North — as they are about to launch their new strategic transport plan.
- The Leamside Line — and the Newcastle Metro — changed areas of Newcastle dramatically.
- TfN wants to work with the North East and hopefully provide the background information needed, Emphasising cross-body work to identify the most urgent priorities.
- Buses and bus routes can be changed quickly — rail infrastructure takes more time and is more expensive and is less ‘visible’.
- Key ask: the future of devolution and working with Metro Mayors to get the capacity right, and the importance of bus services to connect rural communities.

Julia Prescott, Deputy Chair, National Infrastructure Commission

- As well as being the Deputy Chair of the NIC, she is also Deputy Chair of the Port of Tyne, so today she comes here wearing two hats.
- From a North East perspective, there’s a lot of change going on — the green energy superport, a new Metro Mayor, and development of the North East Investment Zone. These are all key developments that we should all be taking interest in.



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- The green energy port is vital to see the increase in engineering, transport, and storage that is needed for massive wind farms.
- NIC recently delivered their 2nd National Infrastructure assessment. The NIC is conscious of city regions which have congested and inadequate transport networks that affect growth. Current commuting distances are constraining job opportunities.
- We also need to look at longer distance connections between places, which are essential for productivity.
- The North East has suffered with massive underinvestment in both of these areas.
- Stresses the importance of devolution — the Trailblazer deals in Greater Manchester and West Midlands should be rolled out to all Combined Authorities as fast as possible — flexible, funding, and easier to deliver integrated long term policy priorities. Pleased that the negotiations for the North East are on the way.
- NIC has recommended £8bn investment for a low carbon and resilient economy that supports economic growth and protects the natural environment.
- Relevant authorities should direct their attention — for the North East it is improving A690, the A1, and the A19 — this could help improve productivity in the North East by up to 10%, which has a big cumulative impact
- On Network North, the Government should urgently work with leaders to turn the collection of schemes into a rigorous positive portfolio.
- Looking at land value capture is interesting. Partnership between public and private sector helps get the best value.



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- Key ask: a strategic transport plan for the North East for an integrated rail system following disintegration to bring it all together — local leaders and national gov. The plan needs to have capacity and connectivity as a priority.

Lord Alan Beith, Co-Chair of the North East APPG:

- Capacity and connectivity on the East Coast Main Line and across the North West as well remains a real handicap to the economy of the North East.
- North East and North West communication needs to be improved — there are things that are being achieved in the North West that the North East also wants, and more dialogue will bring better practice.
- We cannot improve connectivity with such restricted capacity on freight also.
- The A1 is seen as an argument not to invest in Northumberland — it is not seen as a 'serious' road, and improving it would be an important signal for promoting connectivity.
- It is crucial to get goods in and out, not just convenience.

Heather Jones, Head of Bus Partnerships, Transport North East

- Supports the North East Joint Transport Committee. In the process of refreshing the North East Transport Plan, which will be put forward by the Mayor when elected in May. Covers all forms of transport, BSIP, rail and metro strategy, active travel, cars.
- BSIP funding has helped to offer cheaper and simpler fares for public transport across the region — and we have just launched a range of multi-modal tickets also.



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- Buses are crucial and cover the majority of the region. It is important to support the existing network and look at how to grow through BSIP funding — linking people in rural areas through on demand responsive schemes and altering bus times to capture all shift times.
- Supporting with capital investment through bus priority schemes throughout the region will make the bus more attractive by addressing congestion and improving trust in the network.
- A lot of funding will come in to play next year. City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS2) will help to deliver a lot of key transport asks for the region.
- We need long term thinking. Key ask: long term devolved funding — revenue funding over a long period of time, ideally in line with how Network Rail gets their funding.

Mark Morris, Local Engagement Manager, Campaign for Better Transport

- Introduces the Campaign for Better Transport — a charity that advocates for all public transport through research and advocacy work.
- CBT has done work on transport poverty that has a bearing on the North East — a number of towns in the NE are 'transport deserts' which suffer from the legacy of reduced bus services and train cuts.
- Highlights their report on 'left behind neighbourhoods' — 9 of the 20 most left behind wards were in the North East.
- What needs to be done? At a national level, there needs to be a transformation — sustained investment and thinking about benefits.



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- Economic opportunities — people that struggle to travel to places of work are deprived of job opportunities. Employers won't settle in places with bad transport links.
- Improving rail links in the North East is important, and reopening the Leamside Line is critical. CBT supports the creation of a fund for that purpose.
- Bus services are overlooked — especially for smaller towns, bus services can get the job done quickly and changes are very easy to implement. Government recognises this, but doesn't follow it through.
- Cancellation of HS2 highlighted opportunities to divert funding to bus routes.
- We need to do something specifically to change the way buses are funded. There are masses of variations per head in BSIP funding. Something is going wrong with how the money is being allocated — CBT would like to see guidance on statutory provision of bus services (which Government has promised but not delivered).
- Also agree with comments about HS2 and increasing capacity.
- Money on bus and bus 'subsidies' isn't money wasted — we need to think of the language we are using — it brings benefits!
- Key ask: The funding of local authorities and the end of the competitive funding pots and bidding process.

Sharon Hodgson MP, Washington & Sunderland West (*to comment specifically on developments from the Leamside Line APPG*)



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- So often, we hear about the North East being left behind. Despite constant conversations around Levelling Up, we are used to ingrained regional divides.
- For people trying to get to work, the Go North East strikes emphasise the need for proper alternative transport. Washington is the largest town in England without a rail link — which denies businesses and constituents of opportunities.
- Onward report said that poor transport is significantly impacting the region.
- Sharon is the Co-Chair of Leamside Line APPG.
- The Leamside Line connects with the East Coast Mainline. The new line would provide an alternative route for freight trains, freeing up capacity on the ECM, and provide opportunities for the economy and drive the growth of the region using existing infrastructure.
- Is optimistic about the campaign and wants to make it happen. However, it isn't in the Network North document.
- The Leamside Line will enable connectivity across the whole region — and employers such as Nissan and Amazon — with the potential to generate over £90m per year in economic benefits to the region.
- Has received encouragement from Minister for Rail Huw Merriman as to what they can do to make their case for the Leamside Line even stronger. The Minister listened to local businesses and agreed that's what needs to be done.
- Discussed how to bring more businesses in the mix — building a comprehensive cross region business case for the Leamside Line.





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- Key ask: securing ringfenced funding that we need for the Washington Metro Link and the Leamside Line — over two projects.

Lord Wrigglesworth

- Makes a plea for better investment to improve North/South connection, particularly improving rail services between the North and South — the Coastal route is being ignored and could really help with issues of capacity and freight.

## STAKEHOLDER CONTRIBUTIONS AND OPEN DISCUSSION

Turning to the audience for further contributions.

John Carr, Association of Transport Coordinating Officers

- If we look at outcomes and the people that use services, rather than looking at the services themselves and through a financial point of view, we begin to get different results.
- Key ask: to look at outcomes and personal benefits, not just specific project openings.
- Ask 2: to refocus from cars moving faster to making general traffic flow more smoothly through bus priorities etc. This requires good roads and good coordination.

Chris Lines, Councillor in Sedgefield

- Endorses Mark's comment about bus services. It is bad in urban areas, but even worse in rural communities which do not have bus services at all. They



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are becoming disconnecting and isolated — we need a bus service rescue plan rather than an improvement plan!

- We need a radical new approach — likes Mark's idea of funding through local government and making it a local government priority — but they need the money to do so.

David Clarke, RIA North

- There has been a lot of talk about business cases and benefits — there's also the cost side. As an industry, we can do things differently to lower the cost — using different approaches to access.
- Nexus have delivered projects at lower cost on the heavy rail network. We can do things more economically if the circumstances are right. If we understood the 'B' (benefits) part of the equation — we can calculate the cost part of the project. We should challenge the industry to say "what can we have for that value" and work in reverse.

Network Rail, Richard Ellis Hobbs:

- Linking bus and rail network has been really powerful. They are trying to continue that work. When lines open, buses need to be there.

Stephen Chaytow, Campaign for the Reinstatement of the Peaks and Dales

- The issues are understood for rail, but because they are so complex that not much tangible happens. There are connections between the reinstatement for freeports.



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**CLOSE: CHAIR'S SUMMARY**

Kate Osborne MP, Chair of the North East APPG

- Thanks all for coming.
- We all know how much investment is needed. Particularly around bus services, the importance of devolution and working with local leaders, investment into the North East coast mainline to increase capacity, reopening the Leamside Line, and investment into our roads.