

# Transport Secretary announces measures to improve transport connectivity across the UK

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Work on road improvements and rail upgrades will boost business and improve connectivity across the UK, Transport Secretary Mark Harper has claimed in his response to Lord Hendy's Union Connectivity Review.

Projects in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will explore options to improve transport links which strengthen connections across communities and the UK, helping to drive tourism and grow the economy.

The measures aim to lay the foundations for stronger UK connectivity and economic growth by increasing access to skilled labour and opportunities. The government says they will be supported by significant long-term work through other government investment including Network North.

The government's response includes actions to enable protection of "vital" domestic air routes, alongside a series of studies to explore options to improve rail travel in Northern Ireland and Wales and road travel in Scotland, and enhancements to overall connectivity between Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and

England.

Transport Secretary, Mark Harper said: “We are committed to delivering growth opportunities across the United Kingdom.

“Today we are announcing support for projects that will boost connectivity and enhance transport connections across the UK. These projects will identify schemes that can bring economic benefits to people across the UK.

“I’d like to thank the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive for working collaboratively with us on these projects and I look forward to continuing to work closely with them on improving UK transport connectivity.”

Initiatives across the UK announced today include:

- Providing £8m to the Scottish Government to kick start the development of options to improve the A75, in addition to the funding committed in Network North to deliver targeted improvements following the Scottish Government’s identification of a preferred option through the business case process.
- Providing £3.3m of funding support to Translink, to deliver a study on the cost, feasibility and value for money of electrification of the railway in Northern Ireland from Belfast to border.
- Improving domestic aviation route support policy by updating Public Service Obligation (PSO) policy to include routes that operate to and from different regions of the UK, rather than just into London as is currently the case. This means qualifying routes throughout the UK that are in danger of being lost, will be protected by the UK Government’s PSO policy – to ensure minimum levels of air services on routes that are socially and economically vital for the region.

These complement existing recent investments from Network North to:

- Provide £1 billion investment to fund the electrification of the North Wales Main Line, bringing parts of North Wales within an hour of Manchester and providing more punctual and reliable journeys on the 105-mile route between Crewe and Holyhead, alongside connections to Liverpool, Warrington, and Wrexham.
- Delivering the Midlands Rail Hub in full, by investing £1.75bn to improve journey times, increase capacity and boost frequency of services, including between Cardiff and Birmingham.

Lord Hendy said: “I welcome the government’s response to my review and the announcements in it. My recommendations outlined the next steps that the government should take to identify investments that will improve connectivity and support economic growth, job creation, house building, social cohesion and sustainability. The government’s response shows that they are taking the necessary actions to move this work forward and demonstrates their commitment to improving UK connectivity.

"I am also pleased to see that partnerships between the UK government, and each of the Scottish government, Welsh government, and Northern Ireland Executive have underpinned this work and I look forward to seeing them continue in the future."

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Chris Heaton-Harris said: "Improving connectivity across Northern Ireland and the UK is a priority of the UK government, and I am pleased that these feasibility studies will support that aim in Northern Ireland, for the benefit of businesses and people living and working here."

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said: "The UK Government is spreading opportunity and prosperity to all corners of our country and I'm pleased to see plans for delivering improved transport connectivity taking huge strides forwards."

"Hauliers, commuters, leisure travellers and communities will be delighted to see UK Government funding to kick-start work by Transport Scotland to identify improvements on the A75, the main artery linking Northern Ireland to the north of England through south-west Scotland."

"The UK Government is also committing funding to explore ways to boost rail connectivity between Scotland and England. And we're investing in upgrades to the A1 and protecting vital air routes throughout the UK."

"We look forward to continuing to work with the Scottish Government on this ambitious package of proposals to link up the UK much more effectively – boosting our economy, creating jobs and levelling up opportunities around the country."

Secretary of State for Wales David TC Davies said: "The UK Government has invested millions directly in Wales' transport infrastructure, speeding up journeys for travellers. Following the Hendy review we are committed to making further significant improvements, leading to better-connected communities and greater opportunity for people across the country."

"The planned £1bn electrification of the North Wales Main Line, £50m for Cardiff cross rail, £141m for the Valley Lines and £11m for the A4119 road upgrade are just some of the improvements the UK Government is delivering in infrastructure in every part of Wales."

Reacting to the news, Midlands Connect CEO Maria Machancoses said: "We welcome the Government's commitment to the Midlands Rail Hub at the heart of the Union Connectivity Review. The Rail Hub might be a vital, local scheme but will have a national impact and seeing that acknowledged today is fantastic."

"At Midlands Connect we are working hard push the Midlands Rail Hub forward but with the Prime Minister's support for the Midlands Rail Hub is something we are very thankful for."

"We also want to thank Sir Peter Hendy for his review and the collaborative way he went about it."

"In the Midlands, our relationship and deep connections with Wales matter to us and we will continue to work with the new Marches Forward Partnership to promote some of our road and rail priority schemes in the border areas."