



News Release - Friday, 26 November 2021

Growth Track 360 welcomes recognition by Union Connectivity Review of North Wales and North West England as a highly integrated cross-border economy and support for programme of transport improvements

Business and local authority leaders from North Wales, the Wirral and Cheshire West and Chester in the Growth Track 360 partnership today welcomed the publication by the UK Department for Transport of the Union Connectivity Review (UCR) chaired by Sir Peter Hendy CBE.

Sir Peter was asked by the UK Government to undertake a detailed review into how transport connectivity across the UK can support economic growth and quality of life in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and to make recommendations as to whether, and how best to improve transport connectivity between the nations of the UK. Growth Track 360 made a written submission to the UCR in January, welcomed the interim report in March, and made further written representations following the publication of the UK Department for Transport's Integrated Rail Plan for the North and the Midlands on 18 November 2021.

Today's final report makes 19 recommendations to the UK Government of which No. 7 is of most direct relevance to the North Wales and Mersey Dee cross border economic region served by Growth Track 360:

“Work with the Welsh Government to undertake a multimodal review of the North Wales transport corridor, and develop a package of improvements focused on the North Wales Main Line (including better connectivity with HS2, and electrification), the A55, the M53, M56 and onward travel to and from the island of Ireland”

Recommendation No. 18 adds a specific call for improved connectivity to seaports across the UK by enhancing railfreight connections.

The UCR accepts a major theme of all Growth Track 360's campaigning by acknowledging the existence of highly integrated cross-border economic areas of significant scale in the UK that have distinct transport needs with substantial numbers of cross-border commuters or regular regional freight flows (p.30). One such region is acknowledged as our own, embracing North Wales and the North West of England where, at the time of the 2011 census, 25% of employees were crossing the border for work and where access from North Wales to international gateways in England such as Manchester Airport is particularly important. In 2019, 1.9 million people and 5.3 million tonnes of goods moved via the port of Holyhead to and from the island of Ireland.

Sir Peter Hendy's report notes that Transport for Wales and Growth Track 360 have been developing plans for a multi modal North Wales Metro and improvements to the North Wales Main Line, including line speed and capacity improvements as well as upgrades between Wrexham, Bidston and Liverpool, enhancements to Chester station and a Crewe hub interface to maximise the benefits of HS2 (p.47). The UCR acknowledges the role of faster journey times and capacity to support enhanced cross-border economic links which will facilitate sustainable, increased growth, jobs, housing and social cohesion.

Growth Track 360 Chair and Leader of Cheshire West & Chester Council, Councillor Louise Gittins, said:

“In his report to the UK Government, Sir Peter Hendy has accepted the key underlying arguments for the Growth Track 360 campaign by recognising the existence of our cross-border economy and the role of enhanced, sustainable transport in unlocking its full potential for the people who live and work here as well as for the country as a whole.”

Growth Track 360 Vice Chair and Leader of Flintshire Council, Councillor Ian Roberts, said:

“It is essential that the Union Connectivity Review is not allowed to become yet another worthy report which gathers dust. Post-pandemic economic recovery in our cross-border region needs the boost that investment in our rail network will provide. We urge the UK Government quickly to release the development funds that Transport for Wales and Network Rail need in order to turn our priority projects into reality.”

ENDS

Notes for Editors:

1. Growth Track 360 is a public-private partnership established in 2016 uniting North Wales, the Wirral and Cheshire West and Chester. Its goal is improving cross-border transport connectivity with specific emphasis on rail.
2. Growth Track 360 works closely with key stakeholders, their policies and objectives including the Welsh Government, Transport for the North, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Mersey Dee Alliance, North Wales Economic Ambition Board, Transport for Wales, the West and Wales Transport Forum and the private sector.
3. The written submission from Growth Track 360 to the Union Connectivity Review may be viewed here: https://cogitamus.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UCR.Response.V2.11Jan21.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Growth Track 360- Union Connectivity Review&utm_content=Growth Track 360- Union Connectivity Review+Preview+CID_b986129438c1965ab9931748ce6c168b&utm_source=Email marketing software&utm_term=https://cogitamus.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UCR.Response.V2.11Jan21.pdf.
4. The final report of the Union Connectivity Review may be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-publishes-union-connectivity-review-proposed-transport-investments-for-stronger-and-better-connected-united-kingdom>.

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