

Transport & Energy Infrastructure planning news



OCTOBER 2017

Headline news

Government announces funding for transport improvements in the North

The Treasury announced on 2 October that transport improvements across the Northern Powerhouse are to receive £400m of 'extra funding'; however, as yet there is no detailed information about the allocation of these funds to specific schemes.

The announcement specifies that 'more than £100m' (from the £23bn National Productivity and Investment Fund) will be allocated to local road schemes, aimed at reducing congestion pinch-points; the announcement explains that the funds will go towards 33 schemes (13 in the North West, 10 in Yorkshire and the Humber, and 10 across the North East) that 'have been proposed by local leaders'.

The 'extra £300m' will support plans for the Northern Powerhouse Rail, and the Government's announcement provides some additional details; the extra funding will 'go towards ensuring HS2 infrastructure can accommodate future Northern Powerhouse Rail and Midlands Connect services', as this will 'make it easier and less disruptive to build Northern Powerhouse Rail in the future'.

The National Infrastructure Commission's chairman, Lord Adonis, gave his backing to the £300m investment announcement but reiterated:

'It is essential we improve transport across the North to secure economic growth for the region, and that's why we also want to see real progress on HS3, which

would do even more to improve connections between our great Northern cities.'

Lord Adonis urged Government to focus on long-term infrastructure needs

The National Infrastructure Commission's chairman, Lord Adonis, has urged the Government to maintain its focus on the long-term needs of the country in terms of infrastructure investments; Lord Adonis in particular referred to 'key projects in the pipeline' that need to progress, such as 'Heathrow's third runway, Crossrail 2 in London and HS3 connecting the major Northern cities'.

Lord Adonis highlighted how the Commission is currently working towards the UK's first-ever National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA), which will consider infrastructure needs up to 2050; interestingly, few details were provided on this first NIA, as it will build on the experience of the Australian Infrastructure Plan. The first phase will consist of a consultation published 'in the next few weeks', with the aim of issuing the final assessment next year.

National news

Environmental impact assessment screening checklist

On 8 September, an updated version of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Matrix that implements the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 was published by the Planning Inspectorate. ■

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



As Brexit negotiations dominate the political landscape, it's too easy to lose sight of the next projects in the pipeline, and what the country needs not just over the next five years, but to 2050. That's why we must make progress on major projects in the pipeline – a Crossrail 2 is needed in London just as much as HS3 in the North.

National Infrastructure Commission Chair, Lord Adonis, arguing for continued investment in infrastructure

THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

The Government is going ahead with its programme of incremental upgrades to road, railways and energy infrastructure across the UK. However, it is important not to lose focus on the most major infrastructure investments that are crucial to support the Country's growth in the coming decades, as highlighted by Lord Adonis and other stakeholders from all over the UK

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BEIS Oral Answers to Questions session at the Commons

On 12 September, an Oral Answers to Questions session on Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) took place at the House of Commons. Topics covered included the space sector, electric and autonomous vehicles, the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, and renewable energy and carbon budget targets.

Transport

National news

Research published on transport benefits from big data and the 'internet of things' in smart cities

The Department for Transport has published a scoping study which provides a framework to help understand the potential opportunities, challenges, enablers, needs and business models to support big data transport applications in smart cities.

Rail

Government highlights plans to improve TransPennine journeys

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has reiterated that the Government is working on plans to develop the first digital intercity railway in the north of England, as part of the Great North Rail Project (GNRP).

As part of GNRP, the Government is providing up to £5m to Network Rail in order to develop proposals for embedding digital signalling technology on the TransPennine route between Manchester and York, with the aim of making rail travel more reliable and safer; this would make the TransPennine route the first digitally-controlled intercity rail line in the UK.

HS2 Phase One Historic Environment Research and Delivery Strategy

High Speed Two (HS2) Limited has published a strategy which covers historic environment matters, including built heritage, archaeology and the historic landscape.

The Historic Environment Research and Delivery Strategy (HERDS) provides details on procedures for designing works, undertaking evaluation, delivering investigations, undertaking post-excavation assessment, and archive deposition; they will then be implemented in relation to Phase One of HS2.

HERDS (or GWSI:HERDS as it is also known) is the main framework document for all historic environment works; the aim is that it will ensure that HS2 and related works will appropriately manage and protect people, communities and the natural, cultural and built environments.

Roads

Highways England Strategic Design Panel progress report published

The first annual report of the Strategic Design Panel set up by Highways England has been published; the panel was set up 'to ensure the road network is in harmony with its surroundings' and its members are experts in the fields of architecture, environment, and heritage and design (amongst others).

In its Highways England Strategic Design Panel progress report, the Panel makes three key recommendations to Highways England on how 'to make a step change in the design quality of England's Strategic Road Network', these being:

- Publishing the design vision and principles recommended by the Panel, and working towards the development of a 'Good Design Guide';
- Ensuring that its design vision and principles are implemented effectively, and making the Good Design Guide a practical tool across projects and operations; and
- Establishing a specific objective with the aim of ensuring that a design-led approach is at the heart of the review of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB).

Government proposes to charge utility companies 'by the hour' for road works

The Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling, has announced new proposals that would allow local authorities to charge utility companies by the hour, when they choose to undertake works on selected routes; the aim is to encourage utility companies to avoid busy roads and peak times, and join together to carry out works when they have to intervene on congested roads.

Trials have been successfully implemented in London and Kent, according to the Department for Transport (DfT); in London alone, utility companies have joined together more than 600 times since the trials began (compared to just 100 before).

The consultation ends on 28 October and the Government aims to introduce changes by 2019.

Upgrade plans for A1 in Northumberland progress

Reflecting public opinion and following a six-week consultation (which closed in November 2016), Highways England is planning to upgrade a 13-mile long section of the single carriageway A1 in Northumberland, creating a dual carriageway between Newcastle and Ellingham. The chosen proposal for the stretch between Morpeth and Felton includes building a new carriageway to the west of the existing road between Priest's Bridge and Burgham Park.

Next steps include additional work to refine the ideas, and the launch of another consultation with more design details. Construction work for the £290m scheme is currently expected to start by 2019/2020.

Plans unveiled for M2 junction improvement

Highways England has announced major improvement proposals for junction 5 on the M2; the interchange between the M2 and the A249, where junction 5 is located, is heavily congested and thousands of vehicles use the junction each day, according to Highways England. ►►

The improvements are also considered crucial as they will add capacity to the junction, to 'support development in Kent and the Thames Estuary corridor'.

A consultation on the proposals was also launched alongside the announcement, and this will run until 17 October. Once closed, the next step will include the announcement of a preferred route (winter 2017), while construction are expected to start as early as 2020 (completion is expected some two years after construction starts).

Stonehenge tunnel DCO planned for submission next year

Details of the preferred route for the £1.6bn A303 upgrade near Stonehenge (part of the 'South West expressway') have been announced by Transport Secretary Chris Grayling.

As part of this road upgrade, a proposed tunnel will run underneath Stonehenge, alleviating congestion and reconnecting the two halves of the 6,500 acre World Heritage site, which are currently severed by the road.

A public consultation was held earlier in 2017 and following feedback analysis and further engagements with relevant stakeholders, Highways England has amended plans to minimise the impact of the proposed road improvements on the World Heritage site.

As explained in 'Moving forward – the preferred route', Highways England are now 'hoping to submit [their] development consent order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate in late 2018' in order to start works on-site in 2021.

Tram

Midland Metro extension approved

DfT has officially approved the extension to the Midland Metro system which will link Birmingham city centre with Edgbaston and the wider Westside area.

The 2km extension of the Midland Metro will comprise five new stops and will be served by up to 10 trams an hour (during peak times); the extension is expected to be completed by March 2021.

DfT has pledged to contribute to the overall project costs with almost £60m to complete the total £149m funding for the project.

Transport Minister Paul Maynard said:

'Midland Metro is already a success story, with passenger journeys up nearly a third this year compared to last year. This new extension will be a further boost to Birmingham businesses, and make travelling to work easier for commuters.'

Air

New consultation announced on Airports NPS

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has announced that there will be a further period of consultation on the draft Airports National Policy Statement (NPS) which will guide the planning decision on Heathrow's third runway, following the previous consultation which closed on 25 May this year.

As he explained in his Written Statement to Parliament on 7 September:

'[...] my department was clear that further work was underway to update the evidence base, including revised aviation demand forecasts and the government's final air quality plan. It was intended these documents would be presented for consideration during the initial consultation, but the timing of the general election meant this was not possible. I am therefore confirming that there is a need to conduct a short period of further consultation to allow this updated evidence to be taken into account.'

The new consultation is expected to be launched 'later this year', while the Government remains committed to laying the final NPS 'in the first half of 2018 for a vote in the House of Commons'.

The Written Statement to Parliament announced in addition that the Government's independent adviser, Sir Jeremy Sullivan, has published his report on the processes and procedures used in the Government's previous consultation on the draft Airports NPS; the Statement also confirms that Sir Jeremy Sullivan has agreed to oversee the period of further consultation.

Heathrow Airport received 121 construction hub bids

Heathrow Airport has announced that over 120 sites across all of Britain have applied to host construction hubs in relation to the £16bn third runway expansion scheme.

In April this year, Heathrow invited communities and companies to apply for hosting one of the four UK logistics hubs, a key part of the Airport's project to decentralise its supply chain and share the benefits of the expansion across Britain.

Heathrow Airport will be the first major UK infrastructure project to pioneer the use of logistics hubs on a wide scale.

Space

Lords Committee report on the Space Industry Bill

The House of Lords Constitution Committee has published a report on the Space Industry Bill; the Bill is aimed at establishing a new regulatory framework for UK-based spaceflight activities.

The Committee's report underlines how the Bill includes 'a large number of delegated powers' and 'broad catch-all regulation-making power'. The Committee has recommended that the 'Henry VIII' power in the Bill will include mechanisms to allow for the consent of the devolved institutions when these powers are used to amend or repeal legislation passed by those bodies.

Energy

National news

Record amount of renewable energy capacity secured

The outcome of the latest competitive auction for renewable technologies (Contracts for Difference) has been announced by the Government.

Eleven new energy projects, which are expected to generate over 3GW of electricity and are worth up to £176m per annum, have been successful in their bids; these projects combined will be able to power 3.6 million homes. Projects will be delivered across Great Britain from 2021. ►►

The Government has also highlighted that investments in clean technology and driving economic growth are detailed 'in our ambitious Industrial Strategy and upcoming Clean Growth Plan'.

Wales news

TAN 8 database 2017: review of on-shore wind farm development

The Welsh Government has published Technical Advice Note (TAN) 8 database 2017 which provides a summary of on-shore wind farm developments in Wales (of 5MWa or more) that are currently being considered, have been approved or are already operational.

The summary table distinguishes between schemes of up to 50MWa (determined under planning legislation), and projects beyond that threshold (which were the responsibility of the UK Government until March 2016).

Thresholds and criteria for 'Developments of National Significance'

The Welsh Government has published a report that compares new and existing categories of development to understand whether they should be included within the 'Developments of National Significance' (DNS) regime.

The 13 categories that the study considers span from open cast coal mining and new roads' projects, to large scale commercial, leisure or retail development, and new settlements.

The research has analysed evidence in the form of case studies of planning applications that fall within the selected categories of development from between 2006 and 2016. The objective of the case study research was to identify the key causes of delay in the planning process for developments which are considered of national interest.

The report makes a number of recommendations on the retention, amendment or removal of existing prescribed thresholds to the Welsh Government, as well as recommendations on the inclusion of additional categories of DNS projects.

Ambitious targets for clean energy announced

Welsh Secretary for Environment Lesley Griffiths has announced new ambitious targets for electricity generation from renewables in Wales, after this has trebled to 32% of the overall electricity use since 2010.

The Secretary for Environment has said that she wants Wales to generate 70% of its electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030:

'Firstly, I am setting a target of Wales generating 70% of its electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030. Secondly, I am setting a target for one Gigawatt of renewable electricity capacity in Wales to be locally owned by 2030. Finally, by 2020 I expect new renewable energy projects to have at least an element of local ownership.'

Energy in Wales debated in Westminster Hall

A Westminster Hall debate on energy in Wales took place on 14 September; the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales, Guto Bebb, took part on the UK Government's behalf.

The debate mostly focused on small module nuclear reactors (in relation to the Trawsfynydd scheme) and the tidal lagoon in Swansea; on the latter, the Under-Secretary of State said:

'It is important to deal with the issue of the tidal lagoon at the outset. People want a tidal lagoon to be developed at Swansea. They can see the potential of the technology, and that the lagoon offers an opportunity for economic regeneration in Swansea and other parts of Wales. All Members in this place should support that. [...] My point, as the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) conceded in his speech, is that the funding of a tidal lagoon is a complex calculation that must be done by Government. [...] The construction of a tidal lagoon has the potential to deal with those issues [i.e. floods], but I argue that flood defences are a devolved issue, not an energy generation issue.'

In advance of the debate, the House of Commons Library published a debate pack on energy in Wales.

Innovative solutions needed to resolve mobile 'not spots'

The Welsh Assembly's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee has published a report calling on the Welsh Government to take into consideration innovative ways to connect the last parts of Wales that do not have direct broadband access (some 4% of Wales), and to consider reforms to the planning regime with the aim of improving mobile coverage across the country.

On planning matters in particular, 'Digital Infrastructure in Wales' recommends that the Welsh Government reforms the planning regime, in order to allow the installation of telecoms masts that cover a wider geographical range.

Welsh assembly committee to examine progress on low carbon housing

The Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee has launched an inquiry into the Welsh Government's progress in relation to low carbon housing; the inquiry will also scrutinise whether a failure to increase the construction of energy efficient homes would result in missing key emission reduction targets, the potential barriers to transform house-building in Wales towards a low-carbon future, and whether the housing sector has the needed skills for such a move.

Committee Chair Mike Hedges said: 'We are keen to explore any barriers to Wales building low carbon housing on a mass scale as there are tens of thousands of new homes planned for Cardiff alone. Once they are built, they are with us for the next century, so it's vital that we design out inefficiencies before we bring in the diggers.'

The Committee is seeking views on these matters; the deadline for submitting contributions is 23 November.

Inquiry launched on the cancellation of rail electrification

The House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee has announced the launch of a new inquiry which will look into the cancellation of plans to electrify rail lines between Cardiff and Swansea. ►►

'The future of Welsh Rail' inquiry follows statements made in July by Transport Secretary Chris Grayling which announced the cancellation of these electrification plans.

Committee Chair David TC Davies said:

'Do their [UK Government's] claims of greater capacity and quicker journeys stack up, or could it be argued that electrification would provide better value for money? What impact will this decision have on the economy of south Wales? Does this strategy reflect the transport priorities for Wales and should we be devolving further powers on rail to the Welsh Assembly?'

The Committee is inviting evidence from interested parties; the deadline for written submissions is 6 November.

Scotland news

Scottish Government bans fracking

The Scottish Government has announced a decision to effectively put in place a ban on unconventional oil and gas (i.e. fracking) in Scotland, following a series of public consultation and engagement exercises with relevant stakeholders and the wider community.

The latest four-month consultation received over 60,000 responses, which widely opposed fracking developments (approx. 99% of the submissions). To put this decision into immediate effect, the Scottish Government has clarified to all Scottish local authorities that previous Directions that put in place a moratorium on fracking remain valid; this step will be followed by a parliamentary vote ('in the near future') and by a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The Scottish Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy, Paul Wheelhouse, announced the decision via a statement to the Scottish Parliament, including this summary of the decision:

'Having taken account of the interests of the environment, our economy, public health and the overwhelming majority of public opinion, the decision I am announcing today means fracking cannot and will not take place in Scotland.'

Innovation Fund launched

As part of its Programme for Government, the Scottish Government has announced the release of £60m of funding to support innovation in low carbon energy infrastructure by 2020.

The launch of the new Innovation Fund is part of the wider Scottish Government objective of ending the need for new petrol or diesel vehicles in Scotland by 2032.

The Scottish Government has also announced the launch of a consultation on proposals relating to the design, building and managing of Low Emission Zones (LEZs), ahead of the introduction of the first LEZ (expected in 2018); the consultation closes on 28 November.

Increase in renewable electricity generation

Figures released by the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) show that in the first half of 2017, Scotland generated 17% more renewable electricity than it did in the same period in 2016.

The figures also show that Scotland generated the equivalent of 54% of its gross electricity consumption from renewable sources in 2016; furthermore, Scotland contributed almost 25% of the UK's overall renewable energy generation in 2016.

More action needed if Scotland wants to meet its climate change plan, Committee said

In its latest publication, the Committee on Climate Change has argued that in order to meet its plan to reduce greenhouse gas emission into the 2030s, Scotland will need to introduce stronger policies in different sectors, including transport and heating.

Reducing emission in Scotland – 2017 progress report recognises that Scotland has made good progress towards reducing emissions, particularly when compared to other parts of the UK; Scotland's emissions have indeed fallen to 38% below 1990 levels (also meeting its emission target in 2015), while the UK average is 35%.

However, the Committee's report has also found that Scotland needs to increase its effort to reduce emissions from different sectors of the Scottish economy, particularly agriculture, transport and non-residential buildings, as 'little progress' is being made with reducing these sectors' emissions.

The Committee recognises that plans to further decarbonise the electricity sector are ambitious and are in line with the Committee's analysis; furthermore, the draft Climate Change Plan commitment to the development and implementation of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technology is also welcome, although the draft Plan contains limited new policy to deliver emission reductions to 2032 beyond existing commitments, according to the Committee.

Wind farm development approved despite fears over impact on Loch Doon

The Scottish Government has granted consent for the construction and operation of the Benbrack Wind Farm (to access the case webpage, search for 'Benbrack Wind Farm' at the previous link), in Dumfries & Galloway Council's area.

Dumfries and Galloway Council, neighbouring East Ayrshire Council and Scottish Natural Heritage all raised concerns about the effect of the 18-turbine scheme, which will have a generating capacity exceeding 50MW, over the nearby Loch Doon.

In granting consent, the Scottish Government concluded that the Company has put in place the necessary measures to mitigate any effect on the 'natural beauty of the countryside' in the area.

Active travel design competition's projects awarded funding

The Scottish Minister for Transport, Hunza Yousaf, has announced that five active travel proposals have been granted funding as part of the Sustrans Scotland's Community Links PLUS (CLPLUS) competition. ►►

The competition, funded by the Scottish Government and run by Sustrans, aims to deliver innovative projects which could inspire public bodies in Scotland to design better places and spaces for people to live, walk and cycle.

The five shortlisted projects, proposed for Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling and Inverness, have all been awarded a grant covering up to 50% of total project costs, totalling over £22.5m of funding.

Outline business case for Edinburgh tram extension approved

The outline business case for the expansion of the Edinburgh tram network to Newhaven has been approved by the City of Edinburgh Council; however, it is worth stressing that Edinburgh councillors will not make a final decision on the tram expansion until autumn 2018.

The project is estimated to cost £165.2m in capital cost, including risk and inflation, and its construction to last for three years.

London news

Mayor calls for increase in UK infrastructure investment

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has called on the Government to increase its infrastructure spending across the UK; the call came as the Mayor met the Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission, Lord Andrew Adonis.

The Mayor stressed that all parts of the UK need to see an increase in infrastructure and transport investment from Government, as these are crucial for the creation of jobs and for the future growth of the Country outside the EU.

The Mayor of London said:

'We cannot afford for new infrastructure investment in any one region to be seen as a zero-sum game - if Britain's economy is to succeed we need to see increased investment across the country. I will continue to provide any technical or political support I can to other mayors and local authorities across the UK in order to develop infrastructure plans in their areas.'

Mayor unveils plans for new cycle superhighways

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has announced plans for two new cycle superhighways in West and South East London.

Cycle Superhighway 9 will include almost 6km of segregated track which will link Kensington Olympia to Brentford; plans will also include five new traffic light crossings and more than 20 upgraded pedestrian crossings.

Cycle Superhighway 4 will connect Tower Bridge to Greenwich, providing more than 4km of segregated tracks; the route has been chosen due to the high demand for cycling already existing in the area (3,550 daily trips), and the related need for safety improvements as there were 93 collisions involving cyclists on this section of the A200 in the last three years.

The consultation for Cycle Superhighway 9 closes on 31 October, while that for Cycle Superhighway 4 ends on 19 November. Transport for London and Partners intend to start building both Cycle Superhighways 'late next year'. ■