

Move to boost transport connections across the whole of the UK

- Prime Minister sets out vision to boost connectivity across the UK with improved transport infrastructure at the heart of government's levelling up agenda
- consultation to launch this spring on reforming Air Passenger Duty tax in further step to boost transport connecting the whole of the UK, while we explore new requirements to offset emissions and in parallel continue to decarbonise aviation
- Sir Peter Hendy's interim report into transport connectivity outlines potential for a UK Strategic Transport Network, with £20 million committed to develop plans

Prime Minister Boris Johnson today (10 March 2021) sets out his vision to build back better from coronavirus (COVID-19) by boosting transport connectivity across and between the whole of the UK, as part of ambitions to level up across the country.

The government will also consult on cutting Air Passenger Duty (APD) on internal UK flights and will commit £20 million to develop plans for upgraded rail, road, sea and air links.

The measures were announced following the [interim report](#) of Sir Peter Hendy's [union connectivity review](#), published today. [In June, Sir Peter Hendy CBE was tasked by the Prime Minister with exploring ways in which transport can better connect all parts of the United Kingdom.](#)

Sir Peter Hendy's report sets out how a UK Strategic Transport Network would help deliver this ambition. Such a network would significantly expand and upgrade direct transport connections in the UK across road, rail, sea and air, helping to reduce delays and bottlenecks, and stimulate economic growth. Improving rail links helps cut carbon emissions and so, as well as considering how transport links can better connect the UK, the Prime Minister will consider their environmental and social impact – taking into account how they will improve the quality of life of the people that use them.

The potential network will now form the main focus of Sir Peter's continuing investigations, with his final report in the summer looking to identify specific transport upgrades that could form the backbone of the network's ambitions.

To jump-start some of the projects identified by Sir Peter, the government has today committed £20 million towards exploring the development of projects such as:

- improved rail connectivity between the north coast of Wales and England
- upgrading the A75 between Gretna, Dumfries and Stranraer – a key route for south-west Scotland and Northern Ireland but almost entirely single-

carriageway

- significantly faster rail links from England to Scotland, including looking at options to enhance the West Coast Main Line
- rail improvements in south-east Wales, building on ideas from the [Welsh Government's Burns Commission](#)

The government is also announcing that the consultation on aviation tax reform, announced at [Budget 2020](#), will be published in spring 2021.

The consultation will include options to change the APD treatment for domestic flights, such as reintroducing a return leg exemption or creation of a new lower domestic rate.

In addition to looking at the case for increasing the number of international distance bands, we will continue to decarbonise domestic aviation as part of our ambition to reach net zero, including through mandating the use of sustainable aviation fuels. All domestic aviation emissions are captured in carbon budgets.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

It's now time to build back better in a way that brings every corner of the UK closer together. We will harness the incredible power of infrastructure to level up parts of our country that have too long been left off the transport map.

This pioneering review by Sir Peter Hendy gives us the tools we need to deliver on our ambitions for a UK-wide transport network that encompasses sea, rail, and road – and I also want to cut passenger duty on domestic flights so we can support connectivity across the country.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

As we build back better from COVID-19, it is more important than ever that we level up every corner of our great country.

High-quality transport infrastructure is key to achieving that, which is why we are committed to boosting connectivity and bringing communities across the UK even closer together.

The government will work closely with devolved administrations on development studies. For example, the UK government will work closely with the Scottish Government on any feasibility study on the A75.

Sir Peter has spoken with over 100 organisations and received nearly 150 submissions to his [call for evidence](#). As a result, he has been able to identify some of the most pressing issues involved in connecting all parts of the UK.

Sir Peter Hendy CBE said:

Devolution has been good for transport, but it has also led to a lack of attention to connectivity between the 4 nations, due to competing priorities and complex funding.

A UK Strategic Transport Network could resolve this, with its core objective centred around levelling up across the whole of the UK.

The government will receive the final union connectivity review recommendations ahead of the Spending Review, where it will consider and confirm funding plans for delivering improved connectivity across the UK.

The review into boosting the transport options connecting the UK sits squarely at the centre of the government's levelling up agenda, with focus on providing high-quality transport infrastructure to communities that have been passed over for investment in previous decades a key pillar of the plans.

While the review looks to the future, the government continues to support current union connectivity measures and recently provided a further £4.3 million to fund a 2-year extension to the vital flight route between City of Derry Airport and London Stansted – beginning on 1 April 2021 – which will boost local economies on both sides.