

£2 BILLION FOR LOCAL RAIL PROJECTS

Halton Curve reopening, Cornish resignalling and more: there are over 30 rail projects in the first round of the Government's new six-year Growth Fund deal, reports **JONATHAN ROBERTS**

The coalition Government announced on 7 July 2014 the first winners for the six year Growth Fund (2015-16 to 2021-22) among the wide ranging-bids from the 39 English Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These are the more localised, business-led successors to the Regional Development Agencies.

Over 30 rail-related projects and another 18 significant public transport schemes (eight pointing to bus rapid transit - BRT) were given explicit support and funding in the six-year project decisions.

Bids were not just about transport links. Adding economic value, skills development and skills clustering, housing and development capacity including new lands earmarked for business expansion, and local bottlenecks including broadband, are the underlying key growth issues. With £12 billion to be allocated over six years, and half of that top-sliced from the DfT budget, the funds are being spread very broadly. July 2014 is only the first phase of announcements, more will come in succeeding years.

Some LEPs felt that their own growth agendas were unduly compressed during the negotiations into more 'standardised' departmental bidding formats, so that more roads schemes were authorised instead of alternative transport and connectivity options. The 'Group of 39' hope to

secure changes to the way that future bids will be handled by central government. The HS2 approach discussed below is more collegiate, while others look for an explicitly devolved 'single pot' arrangement.

The award details are summarised in Table 1, so far as they relate to public transport and sustainable transport, in the alphabetical order of each sponsoring LEP. An overall commentary is then set out. The descriptions are brief, with only limited details in the Government releases, which are in the following website link. That in turn links to each of the 39 LEP deals: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-growth-deals>

LEEDS A BIG WINNER

The largest Growth Fund rail deal by far is the 20-year commitment between the Government and Leeds City Region for over £800 million to be put into the area's railway, including inter- and intra-city services. Actual details are sparse in the agreement, but the funding should be viewed in the context of the January 2014 'Rail North' accord for the future of Northern and Trans-Pennine Express, where there is a mixture of Government 'carrot and stick' – transport efficiency requirements, and a balance of risk and reward, with the potential for revenue or profit-sharing and re-investment.

HS2 CONNECTIONS

There is a Growth Deal commitment to support accessibility to HS2 hub stations. This is a fundamental, given that the Government and the LEPs aim to stimulate economic growth.

There is funding for new access corridors within the Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP, which has HS2's Birmingham Curzon Street and Interchange in the Phase 1 Hybrid Bill. A total of £104.9 million is set out in the Growth Deal, for a Midland Metro extension to Curzon Street and Eastside, and two BRT schemes – Hagley Road to Curzon Street, and along the A45 from Central Birmingham to the NEC, Birmingham International and Birmingham Interchange. The schemes will have local benefits, but arguably some of the funding could be identified as an HS2 cost!

For HS2 Phase 2, where the Government has yet to announce its preferred route, the relevant LEPs are invited to participate with Phase 1 LEPs (mainly Birmingham) and the Government, to define a collegiate approach to getting the best from HS2 with relevant specific schemes, and more widely to achieve high economic leverage in the HS2 catchment area. Government has already established a package of support which will be provided to all HS2 station LEPs once the route is announced. The importance given

Coventry Arena station site: unit No 153366 passes the Ricoh stadium with a Coventry to Nuneaton service on 21 July 2014. Currently the owners of the stadium are in dispute with Coventry City FC concerning overdue rent owed by the football club, which resulted in the club playing its 'home' games at Northampton Town's stadium last season. The former Coventry colliery site surrounding the proposed new station has the stadium on one side and a retail/fast food park on the other. John Whitehouse



by Government to achieving positive results cannot be overstated. The list of official bodies committed to support includes: Cities and Local Growth Unit, DfT, HS2, CLG, BIS, Infrastructure UK, Treasury, and UK Trade & Investment.

CLASSIC SERVICES

Among classic rail projects, new and improved rail services are defined for:

- Cornwall, with accelerated re-signalling brought forward from Control Period 6 to Control Period 5, to permit half-hourly services Plymouth-Penzance, and refurbishment of the 'Night Riviera' sleeper train for visitors and

tourism (£39.6 million for investment and borrowing costs).

- Coventry & Warwickshire, with £49.4 million funding now confirmed for the Coventry-Nuneaton line, including two new local stations, more frequent trains, and new capacity at Coventry station.
- Restatement of, and more definite £50.5 million funding to top up the county's funding package, for the Croxley Rail Link in Hertfordshire, which will extend the Metropolitan Line to Watford Junction.
- Greater Bristol, with seven to eight new local stations and half-hourly cross-city services to

Portishead and Henbury, with the £79.4 million MetroWest Phases 1 and 2.

- Liverpool City Region, with the £13.4 million Halton Curve rail link to recreate Liverpool-North Wales connections.
- For Lancashire and Greater Manchester, more frequent Ribble Valley-Blackburn-Darwen-Manchester services (£29.4 million also includes parallel road improvements).
- Lincoln-Nottingham rail services are being reviewed to define a more frequent service between those cities. No costs are stated.
- The Humber LEP is to pay the £20 million borrowing costs of electrifying the East Coast

TABLE 1: LEP TRANSPORT INVESTMENT

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)	Funding £m (Gross/Govt Award/New)	Rail / Rapid transit schemes	Sustainable travel £m
Black Country	358.7/138.7/116.1	Wolverhampton interchange; Midland Metro extension	8.8 (across LEP)
Buckinghamshire Thames Valley	73.0/44.2/35.9	Modal shift for rail access	Sust. travel £ ind.
Cheshire & Warrington	192.7/142.7/123.7	HS2 Growth Fund start-up	Sust. travel £ ind.
Coast to Capital	442.4/202.4/178.2	Transport package will assist Crawley busway network	41.7 (across LEP)
Corwall & Isles of Scilly	198.9/48.9/40.0	Night Riviera upgrade; scope for ½-hourly Cornwall trains (resignalling); St Erth interchange	6.4 (Bodmin cycling)
Coventry & Warwickshire	104.1/74.1/58.8	North-South rail upgrade	7.0 (Coventry City access)
Cumbria	76.8/26.0/19.0	Windermere interchange	2.3 (Kendal)
D2N2 (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Derby & Nottingham cities)	554.3/174.3/131.5	Lincoln-Nottingham improved rail (with Greater Lincs LEP)	30.78 (Derby/Nottingham Cities cycling)
Dorset	596.4/66.4/54.2	-	-
Enterprise M3 (Hampshire, Surrey)	428.1/118.1/93.8	-	26.5 (across LEP)
GFirst (Gloucestershire)	142.5/62.5/38.7	-	-
Greater Birmingham & Solihull	437.4/357.4/322.4	HS2 access incl Midland Metro extension & BRT; HS2 construction skills; Snow Hill & University station upgrades; Cannock rail freight Interchange	8.0 (Cycling Birmingham) 8.0 (City centre connections) 7.0 ('One' stn link New Street-Moor Street-Curzon Street)
Greater Cambridge, Greater Peterborough	111.1/71.1/57.0	Study March-Wisbech links incl. rail option	-
Greater Lincolnshire	181.2/111.2/67.3	Lincoln-Nottingham improved rail (with D2N2); Lincoln Ctl Hub.	6.2 (Lincoln Tentercroft corridor), 8.0 (GO Skegness)
Greater Manchester	556.7/476.7/273.1	Transport interchanges at Ashton-Under-Lyne, Stockport; Metrolink extra vehicles; commitments for HS2 Phase 2	Schemes across area, no funding scale stated
Heart of the South West (Devon, Plymouth, Somerset, Torbay)	270.3/130.3/98.1	Taunton station upgrade	-
Hertfordshire	379.2/199.2/147.0	Croxley Rail Link; various station access improvements	Sust. travel £ ind
Humber	343.7/103.7/87.8	East Coast main line-Selby-Hull electrification	1.5 > 12.0 (Central Grimsby sust. tpt and road works)
Lancashire	373.9/233.9/133.9	Blackpool Tram extended to North station; more frequent trains Ribble Valley-Blackburn-Mancheste	5.89 (East Lancashire cycling)
Leeds City Region	912.9/572.9/295.5	'West Yorkshire Plus' inter+intra city services; separate 'Rail North' deal involving Leeds and other LEPs	Block scheme allocations
Leicester & Leicestershire	150.0/80.0/63.8	Great Central Rly link, Leicester-Ruddington	5.54 (Hinckley)
Liverpool City Region	262.3/232.3/188.2	Freight & logistics hub; Halton Curve rail; Maghull North station; Newton-le-Willows interchange	41.4 (across LEP)
London	357.0/236.0/236.0	-	-
New Anglia (Norfolk/Suffolk)	293.3/173.3/81.8	-	14.7 (Bury, Attleborough, Ipswich, Thetford)
North East	379.3/289.3/196.2	Investment next to Hitachi Rail; Newcastle Central Metro refurb	13.5+ £? LEP (cross LEP; + Nd.Ctl to Stephenson)
Northamptonshire	107.3/67.3/55.7	-	14.0 ('Smart' Travel)
Oxfordshire	208.5/108.5/97.9	Oxford Science Transit scheme (A40 Witney-Oxford); Didcot larger station car park	4.9 (Science Vale Cycle Network) 3.6 (EWR cycle/pedestrian crossing Bicester)
Sheffield City Region	707.3/297.3/234.6	Commitments for HS2 Phase 2	16.3 (across LEP)
Solent	484.8/124.6/99.9	-	-
South East Midlands	119.3/79.3/64.6	Bletchley station redevelopment	1.55 (Luton/Dunstable smarter to employment)
South East (East Sussex, Essex, Kent)	632.1/442.1/372.6	Thanet Parkway new station	Sust. travel £ ind.
Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire	101.3/82.3/61.7	-	7.0 (across LEP)
Swindon & Wiltshire	199.3/129.3/118.0	Chippenham station hub; Swindon rapid transit	4.4 (Swindon)
Tees Valley	190.3/90.3/72.0	Remodel Bank Top station as hub	8.3 (access to employment)
Thames Valley Berkshire	116.9/96.9/82.4	Reading Green Park new station; bus/'mass' rapid transit	4.75 (across LEP; Govt £ shown)
The Marches	95.3/75.3/34.6	-	-
West of England (Greater Bristol)	393.0/212.6/86.2	MetroWest rail Phases 1 & 2 (NB this is on top of BRT and Park & Ride schemes already authorised)	20.0 (across LEP; Govt £ shown)
Worcestershire	117.0/47.0/39.3	Worcester Parkway station; Kidderminster station access	Kidderminster station incl sustainable access
York, North Yorkshire & East Riding	210.1/110.1/82.1	-	-

main line – Selby – Hull railway (scheme cost £102 million), subject to DfT being satisfied by the business case. 'Medium' value for money will secure a go-ahead.

NEW STATIONS AND REOPENINGS

In addition to the new stations identified above, four new stations are given the go-ahead: at Maghull North (£8.2 million, Liverpool), Reading Green Park on the Basingstoke line (£9 million, Thames Valley), Thanet Parkway east of Ramsgate (£14 million, South East), and Worcester Parkway on the Cotswold and CrossCountry lines (Government contribution £7.5 million).

For freight, a new mid-Cannock railhead has the green light (£16.8 million, Greater Birmingham).

New lines and rapid transit schemes are more varied. The heritage Great Central Railway is to 'bridge the gap' across the Midland main line, to recreate a 19-mile North Leicester-South Nottingham tourist railway. Costs are £6.5 million, including £1 million from the Government – prompting some wry smiles among those remembering the GCR's 1960s closure.

March-Wisbech reopening to passengers is a possibility in the Greater Cambridgeshire Greater Peterborough LEP, though no funding is yet identified.

RAPID TRANSIT

Britain's only conventional tramway will be extended, from Blackpool Promenade to the Blackpool North station, to provide better rapid transit links for the Fylde Coast, at a cost of £25.4 million. Midland Metro's £109.9 million extension to Centenary Square and Edgbaston will be funded, while Wolverhampton Interchange (£96.1 million) will extend Midland Metro at its western end. 12 additional Metrolink vehicles will be acquired by Greater Manchester, for £44.4 million.

Up to eight BRT schemes are identified, though two are just options at this stage. Apart from

Major public transport investment, may be part of larger package (Project funds include previous commitments)

Wolverhampton Interchange (LEP £91.6m, Govt £4.5m + existing funding). Integrated multi-modal transport hub, with commercial floor space development for high value jobs, improved strategic gateway to the Black Country.

Modal shift for Crossrail stations in Taplow and Iwer, and for East West Rail at Winslow for links from Buckingham. Taplow: £0.2m LEP, £1.5m Govt; Iwer: £1.7m LEP, £0.5m Govt; Winslow: £0.5m LEP, £1.8m Govt.

Chester Central road+bus works (LEP £7.5m, Govt £13.5m). **Participate in ways to develop and deliver HS2 Growth Strategies.** C&W will work with Phase 1 LEPs and Government. Government wants to accelerate HS2 Phase 2 to Crewe, and "has established a package of support which will be provided to all HS2 station LEPs once the [Phase 2] route is announced".

Crawley Area Transport Package (LEP £25m, Govt £18m), includes junction improvements, bus priority schemes, modal interchange and improvements to walking and cycling. Separate to other sustainable transport funding.

Refurbished 'Night Riviera' carriages. Scope for ½-hourly main line services Plymouth-Penzance, Cornwall re-signalling moved from CP6 to CP5. LEP £32.6m, Govt £7m for 'Night Riviera'. **St Erth to be West Cornwall Transport Interchange** (Govt commitment £4.5m in 2016/17), with car/bus/rail interchange. **Bus Network Review,** LEP and partners to fund and deliver a Bus & Integrated Transport Strategy (Govt £8m plus existing).

North-South Rail and Coventry station project (LEP £29.4m, Govt £20m). **Connectivity to UK Central, Birmingham Airport & HS2:** Govt offer for later £19.6m of Local Growth Fund from 2017/18 onwards, to take forward road junction improvements.

Bowness-on-Windermere car/public transport/boat interchange, also A591 improved bus services for tourism (LEP £1.25m, Govt more general £2m transport allocation)

Increased service frequency between Lincoln and Nottingham via Newark, to be studied. If local funding (not specified) is provided to operate incremental rail services for three years and services prove successful, the Department for Transport commits to considering funding service levels thereafter. **Participate in ways to develop and deliver HS2 Growth Strategies.** D2N2 to be involved, as with other Phase 2 LEPs.

-
Also Guildford Sustainable Transport, Govt provisionally £3.7m

HS2 Curzon Street and Interchange local transport access: Midland Metro (1) to Centenary Square, Edgbaston (LEP £42.1m, Govt £67.8m); (2) to **HS2 Curzon Street, Eastside** (LEP £7.7m, Govt £35m); (3) **further extension to Digbeth and Addeley Park & Ride** to be reviewed. **Hagley Road BRT** (LEP £4.1m, Govt £8.1m). **A45 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Birmingham/NEC/International/HS2 Interchange** (LEP £15m, Govt £35m). **HS2 Construction Skills** (LEP £0.08m, Govt £0.1m) to improve facilities at South & City College. **Station upgrades, at Snow Hill** (LEP £5.4m, Govt 4.7m), and **University** (LEP £0.5m, Govt £2.6m). **Longbridge connectivity** incl public tpt (LEP £3.2m, Govt 4.9m). **New road/rail freight interchange at mid-Cannock on Chase Line** (LEP £15.45m, Govt £1.3m).

Ensure **Wisbech Access Strategy** is progressed on time to inform both capital bids in future Deal rounds and Network Rail investment planning (LEP to lead, no funding stated). **St Neots to Cambridge public transport project** from 2016/17 (likely BRT route) if business case, Govt £9m input identified.

Lincoln Central Transport Hub (LEP £11.3m, Govt £11m) integrated transport interchange. See D2N2 for Lincoln-Nottingham rail scheme.

Major transport interchanges at Ashton-Under-Lyne and Stockport, and other works (LEP £37m for major schemes, £8.5m for minor, Govt £32.7m Ashton, £41.8m Stockport Interchange, £73.1m Stockport town centre, £15.2m minor). **12 new Metrolink vehicles** (Govt £44.4m). **Greater Manchester LEP to set out proposals for local bus reform and local highway reform,** DfT to be closely involved. **HS2 Phase 2 commitments** as with other LEPs.

Taunton station improvement (Govt £4.6m), partly in support of Hinkley Point C power station project. Transport schemes are primarily road projects. Funding basis for Devon new station schemes not stated in this year's Growth Deal.

Croxley Rail Link £50.5m co-investment package (LEP/Govt). **Sustainable transport, station accessibility and major road schemes** throughout area in several packages: A1(M) East corridor, M11/A10 corridor, M1/M25 corridor. Govt element £3.8m (A1(M) East), £48.4m (M11/A10), £15m (M1/M25). WCML stations noted as Hemel Hempstead, Watford.

Electrification of East Coast main line-Selby-Hull railway subject to business case approval (only/medium VIM required for go-ahead, indicative £102m project, LEP to cover £20m PWLB loan, Govt starter allocation £7.5m).

Blackpool Tram to North station, and Town Centre sustainable transport (LEP £16.7m, Govt £8.7m). **Bumley Pendle growth corridor** requires business case review. **Rail & road corridor East Lancashire-Manchester** (LEP £15m, Govt £14.4m). Some £ on sustainable transport in Blackburn and Preston, but bulk is road schemes, eg Preston: LEP £16m roads, Govt wider £6m.

Large scheme block funding deals – a wide range of projects expected. Long term funding commitments 2015-16 to 2034-35: LEP £217m plus transport fund levies on top (min. £42.3m to 2020-21) & align previously-agreed £183m to 2025-26 to this new deal. Govt £180m at £30m p.a. to 2020-21, further £420m indicative 2021-22 to 2034/35, at £30m p.a.. **'Rail North':** see commentary, key is 'efficiency' plus risk and reward deal which can vary over the period. **Participate in ways to develop and deliver HS2 Growth Strategies.** Leads to be involved, as with other Phase 2 LEPs.

'Bridge the Gap' Great Central re-connection across Midland main line at Loughborough, creating Leicester-Ruddington tourist corridor (LEP £5.48m, Govt £1.0m)

Further support for 'Atlantic Gateway', not all defined (Govt. £15.1m), mainly road links & N Liverpool road improvements. **Halton rail curve upgrade for Liverpool-North Wales link** (LEP £ not yet defined, Govt £10.4m). **Maghull North station** (LEP £ not yet defined, Govt £6.2m). **Newton-le-Willows interchange** (LEP £1.4m, Govt £14.4m)

-
-
'Merchant Park 2' inward investment & supply chain location adjoining Hitachi Rail Europe (LEP not yet defined, Govt £24m including other business park investments). **Newcastle Central Metro station refurbishment** (LEP not specific, Govt £2.5m)

Oxford Science Transit Phase 2 for A40 Witney-Oxford corridor (LEP £5m, Govt provisional £35m). **Didcot station enlarged car park** (LEP £13.5m, Govt £9.5m).

HS2 Phase 2 commitments as with other LEPs. DfT to 'work more proactively' to improve the quality of rail services in the City Region. No funding set out.

Relocate ferry terminals in Southampton and East Cowes and refurbish ferries (LEP £15m, Govt £15m). **Develop Solent Transport Investment Plan** for 2015-20.

Bletchley station reconstruction (LEP £2m, Govt £1.5m). **Close local Northampton railway** to open up Waterside (no £ stated), subject to an independent regulatory process.

Thanet Parkway new station (LEP £4m, Govt £10m). Explicit sustainable transport schemes (walking/cycling) are described for Bexhill, Hastings, Thurrock (£13.8m). Many other schemes across the SE appear focused on junctions and links for road capacity. Eastbourne, Maidstone and Southend may offer more public transport/sustainable transport.

Chippenham station hub, £16m scheme. **Swindon Rapid Transit** (initial LEP £4.9m, Govt £5m). Later **Swindon Villages infrastructure project** could require rapid transit input (to create 8,000 homes, 40ha employment), business case by 2016, Govt indicative £46.2m, LEP no info).

Bank Top improvements (Govt £0.3m for GRIP study).

Relocating Green Park new stn (LEP £2.6m, Govt £6.4m). Slough Mass Rapid Transit works (LEP £1.8m, Govt £5.6m). **Maidenhead station access** (Govt share £6.8m). **East Reading MRT** (Govt share £15.6m). **East Reading Park & Ride** (Govt share £2.9m).

Relocate Telford Bus Station (LEP £0.6m, Govt £1.3m). Other Integrated transport packages (eg Shrewsbury, Telford, Hereford) are mainly new road links and junction schemes.

MetroWest Phases 1 & 2 ½-hourly rail services across Bristol and re-opening Portishead & Henbury lines and local stns (LEP £23.2m incl share of sustainable tpt, Govt £8.5m top-up to Phase 1 on top of LTB £44.5m already allocated, Govt initial Phase 2 funding £3.2m). **Local stations** at Pill, Ashton Gate, Ashley Hill, Horfield, new Shirehampton Park+Ride, possibly North Filton (Cribbs Causeway).

Worcester Parkway station on Cotswolds and Cross Country lines at Norton (LEP share not stated, Govt outline share £7.5m). **Kidderminster station access** (LEP share not stated, Govt outline share £2.5m).

ON THE NUCKLE

The Coventry 'North South' line upgrade is known as NUCKLE (Nuneaton, Coventry, Kenilworth, Leamington).

Phase 1 is from Nuneaton to Coventry. Buckingham Group is building two new stations – one at Coventry (Ricoh) Arena and one at Bermuda Park in Warwickshire, plus extending the existing platforms at Bedworth station and providing a new bay platform at Coventry station. Train frequency is set to double from hourly to half-hourly when Phase 1 finishes, provisionally in May 2015.

Phase 2 will extend the service to Leamington, with a new station at Kenilworth, with this section due to finish in December 2016. Leamington Spa to Nuneaton trains could eventually be extended to Leicester.



the Birmingham area, the other six, with over £100 million allocated, are:

- Definite: Oxford Science Transit on A40 Witney-Oxford corridor; East Reading + Park & Ride; Slough and Swindon;
- Possible: St Neots-Cambridge, and Swindon Villages.

INTERCHANGE

There are many stations targeted for better access and interchange schemes, with over £200 million allocated. Some are focused on sustainable access, such as Bicester Town (Marylebone and East West Rail), Winslow (EWR) and Iver and Taplow (Crossrail).

Others are a larger mix of transport access, as hubs: Ashton Under Lyne, Chippenham, Kidderminster, Lincoln Central, Maidenhead, Newton le Willows, St Erth, Stockport, and a range of Hertfordshire stations including Hemel Hempstead and Watford.

There is a large scale scheme for extra car parking at Didcot Parkway where £23 million is allocated. Presumably this is a substitute for a station at Wantage/Grove, still desired by locals. A further suite of schemes costing roundly £25 million involve

Midland Metro: an extension is already under construction from Birmingham Snow Hill to New Street (pictured with the latter station's new reflective cladding on 1 July 2014). The Growth Fund will permit the line to reach the HS2 terminus at Curzon Street. John Whitehouse



station upgrades, with a mixture of main line and Metro (the latter includes Newcastle Central).

STATEMENT OF FAITH IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

In gross terms, the projects set out in the table are over £2 billion of committed and prospective funding, though some of this is from pre-existing local transport budgets, not from the Growth Deal new money. Any government committing to this scale of investment is making a statement of intent that public transport including rail is a critical element in Britain's economic recovery and growth. The scale is the more surprising when one recognises that rail projects can be slow to be brought to approval and funding agreement.

There are also other fundamental shifts in relationships going on, with these Growth Deals. Government has committed its Departments to work closely in co-operation with the LEPs and other local stakeholders, for public transport and road projects, in order to promote economic growth. Standardised statements are attached to each LEP agreement:-

ROAD: (noting that the Highways Agency will become a 'Network Road' type of company under plans in the current Infrastructure Bill)

'The Highways Agency commits to developing more proactive and collaborative approaches to promoting national and local growth and commits to continue building strong relationships and working arrangements with LEPs and the Local Enterprise Partnership Network, in the same way as with local and combined authorities and the Local Government Association. Through its Route Strategies, the Highways Agency will engage the LEP in better understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with the network and to develop evidence based long-term plans to bring about much needed local economic growth and development, and commits to providing each LEP with a named contact, generally the relevant regional director. The Highways Agency commits to forming a Growth and Economic Development Group to support LEPs at a national and sub-national level, and a draft licence published on 23 June 2014 for the new Highways Agency company includes a requirement to co-operate, which will underpin the arrangements described above.'

RAIL: 'The Department for Transport and Network Rail commit to more proactive engagement of the LEP in the long-term rail planning process (eg Route Studies) and in rail

franchise specification through targeted local engagement of the LEP as part of an enhanced consultation process. The Department for Transport also commits to encourage bidders for franchises to identify and take into account the priorities of LEPs and other key local stakeholders as part of the franchising process, and will also encourage train operating companies to continue with, and enhance where possible, their engagement with LEPs as key local stakeholders.'

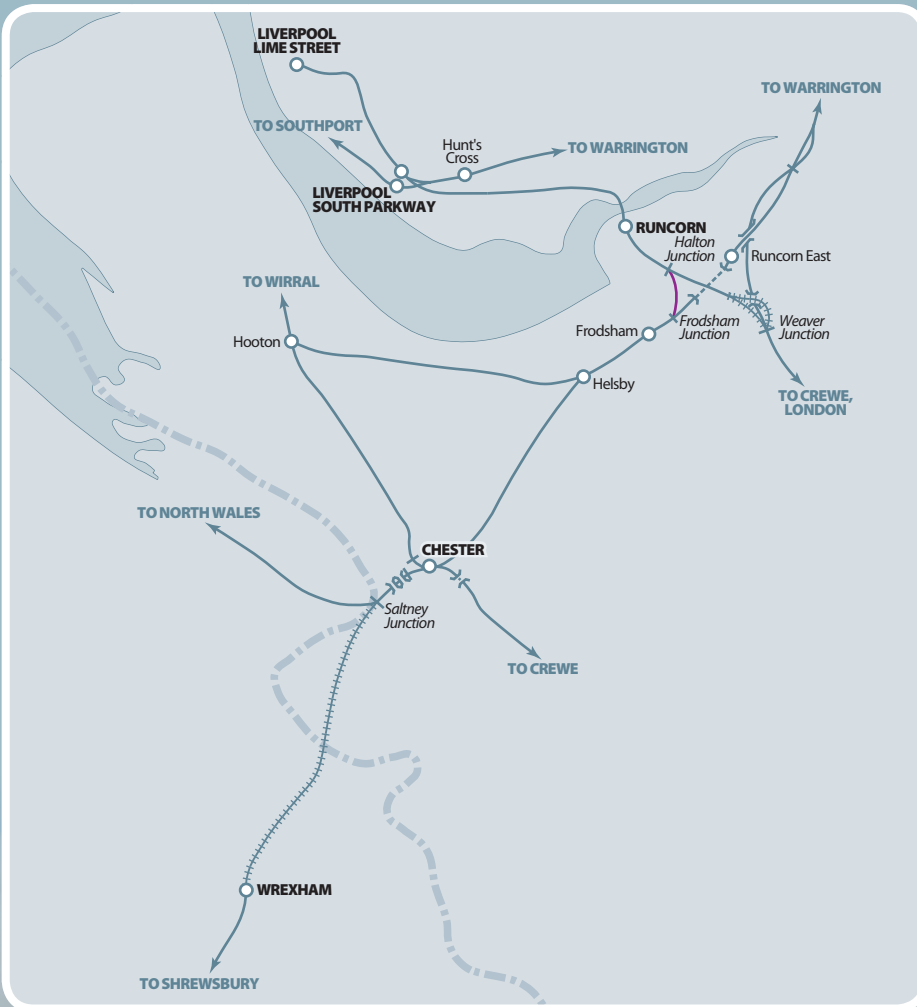
On the LEPs' side, there is a comparable suite of commitments:-

- 'The LEP and partners agree to the LEP to take a more proactive role in consultation on long-term strategic road network planning and provide a co-ordinating role between constituent local authorities.
- 'The LEP and partners agree to take a more proactive role in consultation on long-term rail planning and franchise specification; and provide a co-ordinating role between constituent local authorities.
- 'Progress on the development and delivery of the priority transport schemes identified by the Local Transport Body that are fundable within available pre-allocated Local Growth Fund resources.'



Cornish resignalling brought forward: unit No 150249 passes a semaphore at St Erth on 16 March 2011. New signalling will permit a half-hourly local service to interweave with London trains on the Cornish main line. Antony Christie





There are also separate funding streams acknowledged in the LEP agreements, such as the European Social Fund and, for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, European Structural Funds. An interesting business expansion scheme is identified next to Hitachi Rail's plant in the North East, to be marketed as 'Merchant Park 2' for inward investment and supply chain services.

PRESSURE ON EXISTING RAIL

All this sounds positive, but not all in the garden is rosy, on closer consideration. The London and Home Counties LEPs are being charged by Government with large scale expansion of housing stock (for example 4,350 new homes in the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP – and it says 7,000 elsewhere in the document – 1,350 in Surrey Heath, 1,400 at Basingstoke, and so on). Yet few successful LEP bids (if there were bids – the available funds were reportedly four times over-subscribed) make provision for uprating of commuter rail services, station capacities, additional trains or other improvements. It is not realistic to expect that all new homes will be populated by people working in the locality, and existing rail will come under greater pressure, as well as area roads.

London has different funding arrangements for transport investment, but the Home Counties railways may come under further capacity pressures as a consequence of the Growth Deal. This is particularly the case if LEPs succeed in increasing housing and employment numbers ahead of projections




Coton arches: the one major engineering structure on the Coventry to Nuneaton line has recently been repointed. Unit No 153366 crosses the arches on 21 July 2014. John Whitehouse

in franchise planning and in the Network Rail Long Term Planning Process. The budgetary impacts will fall directly to Government and the DfT.

Throughout the successful LEP bids (excluding London which is focusing on housing and skills) there is great emphasis on improved road links. Time will tell if this is the correct balance of spending to support economic growth. In the case of the York/North Yorks/East Riding LEP, even Haxby station (high on the City of York's previous wish-list) is not in the agreed Growth Deal.

Practical issues will also arise. In the case of the MetroWest rail schemes, 'the West of England LEP will take the lead in working with First Great Western and co-operating with the Department for Transport to identify ways in which rolling stock solutions for the additional train services envisaged in the MetroWest scheme might be procured and brought into service'.

There will be further Growth Deal announcements in the future, possibly after the next General Election. More, substantial funding has yet to be allocated, and to be confirmed rather than being 'prospective'. The Labour Party has said that if elected it would return a minimum of £30 billion to the city regions and LEPs to be spent by them, with explicit devolution of responsibility for allocating funds to locally-prioritised projects. Who is developing the public transport schemes that might be 'oven-ready' by mid 2015, for the next round of authorisations, whichever colour Government is returned next May? 



Freight on the NUCKLE: a Westbury-Bescot engineer's working passing Three Spires Junction on 21 July 2014, near the Coventry Arena. The line to the DHL terminal at Prologis Park on the right has fallen into disuse. John Whitehouse



Hull wiring: under study. A First Hull Trains Class 180 DMU (left) passes a '158' at Selby, 10 March 2010. Paul Bigland



Parliamentary service: Northern Rail's No 150148 along the Halton Curve – having just crossed over the M56 on the bridge in the background – when heading towards Runcorn on 26 June 2010 with the 07.53 from Chester, a once a week service in the summer to keep the line 'open'. Improving the junctions and increasing frequencies on this route will improve connectivity from Wales. Tony Miles