



Subject:	Call for Evidence: Union Connectivity Review
Date:	13 <sup>th</sup> January 2021
Reporting Officer:	Alistair Reid, Strategic Director Place & Economy
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	This report seeks the Committee's approval to submit a response to the independent review for the UK Government (Department for Transport) led by Sir Peter Hendy on how the quality and availability of transport infrastructure connections across the UK can support economic growth and quality of life, with a specific focus on NI connections.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Consider and agree to submit the draft response to the call for evidence and to note that the deadline for receipt of submissions is 14 January 2021.</li></ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>

3.1	<p>Belfast City Council senior officers were invited to participate in a discussion with Sir Peter Hendy and other NI local government officers on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 in relation to transport infrastructure connections across the UK. Arising from this, it was felt that the Committee may wish that a formal response be submitted to the Call for Evidence.</p>
3.2	<p>The terms of reference for the independent review are available at: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/union-connectivity-review-terms-of-reference/union-connectivity-review-terms-of-reference">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/union-connectivity-review-terms-of-reference/union-connectivity-review-terms-of-reference</a>. An extension to the deadline of 30 December 2020 has been secured to 14 January 2021, to enable the Committee to consider the draft response, attached at Appendix 1.</p>
	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p>
3.3	<p>The independent review covers transport connectivity between England, Scotland, Wales and NI via road, rail and air, and sea. It asks for details across three broad areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the current strategy for growing the economy and improving the quality of life</li><li>- information on the volume of current travel journeys and the need for/impact of improved transport connectivity</li><li>- information on improvements and restrictions to NI connectivity links with England, Scotland and Wales</li></ul>
3.4	<p>It will provide independent advice to the UK government on how connectivity can help support economic growth and quality of life post-COVID-19. The timeframe is for an interim report will be published at the end of January 2021, with recommendations due in the summer 2021.</p>
3.5	<p>The draft response, in Appendix 1, follows on from the 16<sup>th</sup> December discussions, providing additional detail and focusing on NI connectivity. It draws on the agreed Council position in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Council's response to the South West Scotland Transport Study, agreed by Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee in 2019. This recognises the importance of sea connectivity between Belfast and Cairnryan, along with the A77 road improvements to enhance connectivity links between Cairnryan and the rest of Scotland, which the Scottish government has approved.</li><li>- The importance of regional air routes for businesses and connectivity to other core cities; including the impact of the loss of Flybe from George Best Belfast City Airport, in line with the Council motion in March 2020.</li></ul>

- The opportunity presented by the Belfast-Dublin Economic Corridor and high-speed rail service to improve connectivity between the core cities on the island of Ireland.
- The Council's response to the DfI Call for Evidence on the Ministerial Advisory Panel for Infrastructure, considered by this Committee in November 2020.
- The importance of building in environmental considerations to support the transition to a zero carbon, sustainable and inclusive economy.

3.6 The responsibility for transport lies with the devolved Assembly. The draft response notes Belfast's role as the regional economic driver and transport hub with a reliance on sea and air connections to England, Scotland and Wales. It therefore highlights the importance of air connectivity for business and tourism, with the need to stabilise and sustain tourism and the criticality of transport connectivity for businesses in response to the impact of COVID. However, it also stresses the need for air travel to be delivered in a sustainable manner, which both secures long-term economic competitiveness and addresses adverse impacts upon the environment including issues such as air quality and climate change.

3.7 The specific transport links detailed in the draft response are the sea route between Belfast and Cairnryan; the road links along the A77 from Cairnryan to Glasgow/central Scotland; air connectivity between Belfast and London; and rail connectivity between Belfast and Dublin.

3.8 It highlights that a review of connectivity should consider NI's unique position with a land border with the EU, including the need to consider the Belfast - Dublin high speed rail link and noting that feasibility studies are underway.

3.9 In addition, the response notes that the role of local government in shaping transport and connectivity provision. As demonstrated through the Bolder Vision for Belfast, local government, working with central NI government, can influence the city's connectivity across economic, social and sustainable transport provision. This will also serve to increase and improve sustainable connectivity and infrastructure within Belfast and for the region as a whole.

3.10 Further information and updates on the review will be made available on the website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/union-connectivity-review-call-for-evidence>  
Members will be informed of any further engagement with local government on the review.

3.11	<u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u> There are no finance or resource implications attached to this report.
3.12	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications attached to this report.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b> Appendix 1- Draft Response: Call for Evidence