

**Empowering Scotland's cities:  
Connecting Scotland's seven cities together and to the world**

**Scotland's Seven Cities are the economic, cultural, social and intellectual powerhouses of our nation and operate in a global environment. By combining their strengths and celebrating their diversity, Scotland's Seven Cities can enhance their role in stimulating, sustaining and delivering Scotland's future economic growth. Working together, they share a long term 20 year vision of a successful Scotland as a place to work, live, innovate, study and visit.**

Cities for everyone

Scotland has world class cities. Around half of Scotland's population calls them home and celebrate them for the economic, educational and cultural opportunities they offer. Scotland's seven cities are places people come from all over the world to explore and enjoy. They are open to everyone who wants to contribute to and participate in the diversity and civility of urban life.

All around the world, the cities with the most competitive economies and best quality of life are characterised by many attributes, of which excellent connectivity is one of the most important. By their very nature cities are where the density of people and business is at its highest, and so connectivity between people, firms and places – both in terms of physical mobility and increasingly online – is crucial to economic success and social inclusion. Good connectivity “creates the utility of place”.

Reliable, affordable transport underpins economic activity and the flow of trade. Poor connectivity has socioeconomic costs and diminishes quality of life. Good access to public transport and the internet enhances participation in the urban economy and society.

Scotland's cities are increasingly recognised as an urban system in which each of the seven cities makes a distinctive set of contributions to national economic performance and social and cultural life. This means that being able to move between Scotland's cities efficiently is becoming ever more important. Businesses need to be able to access the customers and suppliers quickly and efficiently, and people coming to live in Scotland need to know that they can easily get to their next job. More visitors will come to Scotland if they can sample the cultures of more than one city on their trip. Better connectivity makes it possible for more of Scotland's citizens to experience all of the country's cities, deepening social and economic connections and broadening horizons.

A lot of effort has been made to improve the connections between Scotland's cities since devolution. There has been very significant investment in roads and railways, which is ongoing and there an aspiration to further enhance the customer journey and achieve substantial integrated ticketing. Digital connectivity has proved more difficult, in part because of the division in responsibility between devolved and reserved government activities. But at the same time, many of Scotland's competitors have been investing even more to improve their connectivity to match the best in the world. Many cities of continental Europe are now linked together by High Speed Rail, with more being added to an evolving network every year.

The public transport networks of most cities in Europe boast many more tram, metro and rail services than Scotland's cities, and often better bus services as well. In some places, the level of cycling is many times that of Scotland's cities, resulting in important gains for public health and the vitality of urban areas.

This document sets out the priorities for Scotland's seven cities as they seek to maximise their economic contribution as an urban system and at the same time offer the best possible quality of life for their citizens. Actions for improving connectivity are set out here; actions which will require the Scottish and UK Governments and the cities themselves to work in partnership to deliver so that Scotland's cities become more prosperous, more attractive places that offer the best possible shared experiences for those who live, work and visit them.

Connectivity challenges for Scotland's cities

KEY PRIORITIES OF SCOTLAND'S CITIES:

- Economic Growth, Innovation and International Competitiveness;
- Social Equality;
- Environmental Sustainability;
- Democracy and Community Empowerment;
- Culture and Liveability.

Scotland's cities are in a global competition for jobs, talent and investment. The quality of connectivity is an increasingly important ingredient of success: those cities with better transport and high speed, high capacity broadband have a distinct competitive advantage over those that don't. In Scotland's case, the structure of the urban economy, in a system or network of seven cities, poses particular challenges in terms of ensuring the consistency and quality of the connections between them. In addition to safe, comfortable roads and railways, travelers now expect to be able to remain reliably connected to voice and high speed data services on the move.

To meet these challenges, the seven cities have agreed a set of shared priorities focusing on the overall objective of establishing a set of Quality Standards for Connectivity so that transport and digital communications between each of Scotland's cities are at a consistent quality comparable with the best in the world. This can be facilitated by a set of specific infrastructure enhancements:

- Strengthening the seven cities system through the development of an all-electric, world class railway network as its backbone;
- Complementing the railway with a network of modern roads with targeted purpose;
- Blending the improved physical mobility achieved on rail and road with the best digital accessibility;
- Linking Scotland's cities to the world by the most appropriate high quality connections and gateways.

Scotland's economy is focused on a metropolitan core in the central belt. This region, with its major centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh, complemented by smaller nodes such as Stirling, is similar to other 'polycentric' regions in Europe such as the cities including the Randstad in The Netherlands, the 'Flemish Diamond' around Brussels and the trans-national Øresund Region bringing together Copenhagen and Malmö. Scotland's more northerly cities, which although smaller in scale to the central belt have internationally important specialisms and so are an equally essential part of the national economic structure, lie a distance from this core.

This geographical structure means that there are two specific challenges that must be overcome if the seven cities are to be connected as well as possible. The polycentric nature of the central belt means that investment in top quality transport links is necessary to create economic agglomeration benefits; that is the additional economic growth achieved through maximising the depth of the labour pool and the scale of interactions between firms. This is evidenced in the larger cities such as London. At the same time, longer distance connections to and from the north of Scotland must offer highly competitive journey times to reduce the effects of peripherality and to ensure all of Scotland's seven cities are tightly bound into a well-functioning urban system. Finally, all of Scotland needs to be effectively connected to the rest of the UK and internationally.

To achieve the enhanced economic prosperity that is possible, the seven cities have agreed on an outcomes-focused approach to prioritising connectivity investment. This is particularly important because improving transport and ICT links does not automatically improve economic performance: rather, better connections unlock the potential for other policies – support for inward investment, skills development and so on – to take full effect. We take as our starting point the existing policies of the Scottish Government, which have achieved highly significant improvements not only by developing the physical infrastructure on which inter-city connections depend, but also by enhancing the journey experience for commerce across Scotland's cities. The latter is becoming increasingly important as people seek to become more productive on the move.

To achieve this, the seven cities seek to accelerate the Scottish Government's existing plans for future development of the transport system. For Internal Connections between the seven cities, the first priority should be to bring forward the next phase of development of the rail network to provide a sustainable all-electric, world class railway binding the cities together. This vision targets the delivery as soon as possible of critical journey time thresholds, specifically a 30-35 minute journey time between Glasgow and Edinburgh, a 2 hour journey time between Glasgow/Edinburgh and Aberdeen and a 2.5-hour journey time on this corridor should also be achievable with concerted effort in the medium term. There is also a need for greater frequency of service to and between the north and north-east of Scotland.

The cities welcome the Scottish Government's current commitments to the Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvement Project (EGIP), which will provide a much improved electric train service between our two largest cities, and to the electrification of 100 track kilometres of the Scottish railway every year thereafter, but seek to accelerate this and to prioritise further development of inter-city connections across Scotland. This will require further investment in infrastructure in addition to electrification improvements to track and signaling such as the dualling of the Montrose Basin section of the East Coast Main Line

to/from Aberdeen, more trains to cater for growth and better stations that act as the best possible gateways to our cities. Work should also begin to explore how new sections of route, such as the Inverkeithing to Halbeath rail line and the major capacity enhancements around Glasgow outlined in the Strategic Transport Projects Review can be delivered as soon as possible.

Complementing a world-class railway, the cities envisage the application of common quality standards to deliver a network of modern roads with targeted purpose. The Scottish Government's current investment portfolio includes the completion of the M8 motorway link between Edinburgh and Glasgow and the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness to Expressway standard. We seek the development of a phased investment plan so that all of the road links between the seven cities are completed to deliver a consistently high level of service. Such a plan would include upgrading the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness and older, lower quality sections of the A9 between Stirling and Perth and the A90 between Perth, Dundee and Aberdeen including the Northern Relief Road (NRR) for Dundee.

In recognition of the urgent need to make road transport more sustainable, the strategy for road connections between the cities should prioritise public transport and freight. Specifically it should include targeted investment on city approaches and margins to priorities public transport. It should also develop the necessary infrastructure to support low carbon electric and hydrogen vehicles. Good progress has been made to date in providing electric charging points for vehicles but more could be done and there is also potential to provide induction lane technology on the road network. Further acceleration in adoption of Hydrogen fuel cell technology is a recognised opportunity for Scotland's Cities to provide low carbon public transport.

Genuinely world class connectivity in the 21st century requires blending the improved physical mobility achieved on rail and road with the best digital accessibility. In addition to safe, comfortable roads and railways, travelers now expect to be able to remain reliably connected to voice and high speed data services on the move. This is vitally important not only for business travelers so that they can remain fully productive whilst travelling, but also for commuters who choose to take the train and bus rather than the car, and tourists for whom access to the internet whilst travelling between cities helps them make the most of what Scotland's cities have to offer.

Improving the External Connections between Scotland's cities and the rest of the UK and beyond will require investment in rail, road and aviation services and infrastructure. The debate on rail connectivity between Scotland and England will be dominated by the delivery of the High Speed 2 railway and its possible extension north towards Scotland. London is Scotland's nearest world city and global commercial hub, and so connections to and from London will remain crucial so that Scottish firms can continue to do business with their clients and suppliers, and participate in international business conversations fundamental to Scotland's prosperity. Connections to the rest of England are also important and there is a need for shorter journey times to Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, West and South Yorkshire and the East Midlands.

The seven cities strongly urge HS2 Ltd and its Scottish and UK Government partners to commit to the goal of delivering a 3-hour journey time from Glasgow and Edinburgh to London as soon as possible. Although it is recognised that bringing new High Speed Rail infrastructure to Scotland may take some time, it is essential that there is continuous improvement of the existing links with the East and West Coast Main Lines so that journey times and experiences continually improve, and that maximum benefit from the first phases of HS2 is realised for Scotland from opening. Specifically we seek investment to address key issues including speed restrictions and capacity of the northern West Coast main line.

The cities also welcome the Scottish Government's new 10-year sleeper franchise and its focus on the quality of the journey experience and support its further development as a showcase of the best of Scotland's hospitality and tourism offer. Highways England's current development work on Trans-Pennine routes is particularly important to Scotland's cities as these roads provide crucial accessibility to ports for Scotland's exporters.

Although rail will serve ever more of the market south from the central belt, air services will remain important especially for connections between Aberdeen/Inverness and London, and for links with those regions of the UK where surface connections are more limited such as Northern Ireland, Wales and the South West of England. More widely, aviation remains Scotland's most important connection to the European Single Market of some 400 million people, and to the global marketplace beyond. The cities support longstanding efforts to increase the number of direct international flights to/from Scotland which both make Scotland a more attractive place to visit and do business, and also reduce the carbon impact of aviation by reducing the need to take more than one flight. Consistent with the overall approach to focus on the quality of connections, the seven cities support the further development of international flights ranging from long haul routes to/from Edinburgh and Glasgow to an increase in the number of connections from Scotland's smaller city airports to key international hubs. When pursuing opportunities for new hub connections, the quality of service and links to globally-important business locations should be regarded as of greater importance than the location within Scotland in terms of the impact on prosperity and connectivity.

### **What we ask and what it will enable**

What we ask of the Scottish Government:

- Enhance the current strategies for better connectivity by adopting a set of ambitious quality standards for rail, road and digital connections between Scotland's seven cities, the rest of the UK and globally;
- Deliver a world class inter-city railway for Scotland by accelerating the completion of electrification between the seven cities and also constant improvement in the quality of trains, stations and the journey experience;
- Complete the inter-city road network to deliver a consistent level of service between all Scotland's cities prioritising public transport on city approaches and with state of the art facilities for low emission vehicles;

What we ask of the UK Government:

- Use its reserved powers on telecommunications to deliver seamless high speed internet connectivity on all of the inter-urban routes connecting Scotland's cities to each other and to England;
- Deliver a 3 hour rail travel time from Edinburgh and Glasgow to London via HS2, additional stretches of new high speed line in England and improvements to the existing West Coast Line as required;
- Capture the economic potential released by better connecting Scotland to the cities and international gateways of the Northern Powerhouse as part of the developing rail and road strategies for the North of England;
- Safeguard and improving vital links from Scotland's airports (particularly Inverness and Aberdeen) to the hub airports in the South East of England.

What we will deliver in return:

- Renewed focus on improving the quality of the urban realm in all of our cities to rebalance the contribution of each mode appropriately for the 21st century and in particular maximise the quality of place and opportunities for walking and cycling for better wellbeing and inclusiveness;
- Redouble efforts to improve local air quality through targeted interventions including better planning, support for low emissions vehicles and better information and smarter signage and signalling for road users;
- Investment in the key transport hubs and gateways to spread the benefits of better connectivity between the seven cities to the wider urban regions;
- Work in partnership with local public transport operators to extend and expand the national integrated ticketing strategy to achieve coverage of as many journeys as quickly as possible.

### **Acknowledgement**

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