

Submission to the Union Connectivity Review

17 December 2020

Introduction

I have been the Member of Parliament for the Parliamentary constituency of Berwick-upon-Tweed since the 2015 general election. The constituency covers over 1000sqm, and the population is sparsely spread across the area. Berwick-upon-Tweed itself, England's most northerly town, is at the very north of my constituency and borders Scotland. The constituency also encompasses the towns of Alnwick and Amble, and villages reaching down to the outskirts of Morpeth in the south. The constituency is rural, and coastal, and contains more than 50% of the border between England and Scotland, which represents its own challenges.

Due to the large size of my constituency, and the sparsity of population, most people rely on road networks to travel for work, education and medical appointments. A great number of my constituents commute large distances for work, including to Newcastle in the south and Edinburgh in the north. Rail and road networks are vital to our area and form a large proportion of my post bag (covid-19 notwithstanding).

The need for improved road links up to and across the border

The A1 is the primary arterial road serving my constituency, and linking it with Scotland, as well as Newcastle to the south. When the road reaches my part of Northumberland, it becomes a single carriageway, emblematic of the sense of our area having been neglected for decades in terms of investment in infrastructure. I led a campaign to dual the A1, which was successful in acquiring a funding package of £290million to dual the road between Morpeth and Ellingham and to make significant improvements further north.

However, it is clear to me – a case I have begun to make with Government – that the dualling needs to continue to the Scottish border in order to fully “level up” my constituency, especially the most northern communities of England, especially Berwick-upon-Tweed. There remains 28 miles of single carriageway road which will need dualling once the funded 13 miles in the south of the constituency is completed.

The lack of a dual carriageway link makes the northern parts of my constituency less attractive for businesses to invest, and poses challenges to my constituents as they go about their daily lives. This is especially so for anyone who has the misfortune of requiring an ambulance to transport them the 60 miles south to our nearest A&E at Cramlington.

Tourism is one of the primary industries in this part of England, and again, our county would be an even more attractive prospect for tourists with improved road connectivity, especially over the border into Scotland.

The councils north of the border are also committed to campaigning for the remaining undualled A1 north of the Border up to Edinburgh, so that the A1 from London to Edinburgh is, at last, a modern fit for purpose dual carriageway or motorway between our capital cities.

The need for improved rail links across the border

The East Coast Main Line serves England relatively well, however there are only two stations – Berwick and Alnmouth – from which my constituents can travel to Scotland or Newcastle for work or leisure.

I fully support proposals by Northumberland County Council to improve connectivity from Belford Station, but the links between England and Scotland would also be strengthened by linking stations such as Acklington and Chathill to more frequent ECML services with station lengthening.

I understand there will always be reluctance to increase journey times by adding in additional station stops, but occasional stops at peak times would really strengthen our rural communities, and encourage people working in Edinburgh or Newcastle to consider Northumberland as their home. This would also assist in our climate change challenge of changing travel patterns by providing viable train opportunities for my constituents.

Our rural communities are warm and inviting places, but they require new families to choose to live here to ensure their survival. We have seen from the recent announcement that the UK's first Gigafactory will be based in Northumberland, that companies are looking to this part of England to grow their businesses and create employment opportunities, however, the good transport links to Blyth were cited as one of the reasons for the location of this new factory, something which is lacking in the north of the county and the border regions in Scotland.

Transport infrastructure is fundamental to the prosperity of every area, but improving the connectivity between this English border region and Scotland would be an enormous boost for my constituents, and our neighbours in Scotland.

Best wishes

Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP

Member of Parliament for Berwick-upon-Tweed