

2 November 2017

NECA Transport Activity

Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief overview of the transport activity undertaken by the North East Combined Authority (NECA).

Background

2. The North East Combined Authority (NECA) was established in April 2014 as a legal body that brought together the seven councils which serve County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland.
3. NECA was created to assist with the coordination of economic development, transport and skills across the seven authorities, with the aim of creating better conditions for economic growth.
4. The legal Order creating the new combined authority conferred upon NECA the statutory role of 'Transport Authority' for the whole area. This had the effect of transferring certain transport functions from the County Council to NECA. These functions primarily related to public transport (bus services) and the duty to prepare a Local Transport Plan.

Delegation back to DCC

5. Under the Constitution and Operating Agreement of the Combined Authority, the operational delivery of public transport was delegated back to both Durham and Northumberland Councils; with Nexus retaining responsibility for delivering public transport across Tyne & Wear.
6. The above delegation allowed Durham to retain control over its budget and the delivery of public transport functions; with a requirement to make an annual report to NECA covering its activity in this area.

NECA Transport Activity

7. NECA provides a role both in relation to strategic transport issues and also in the coordination of local transport, ensuring that transport decisions are joined up across the NECA area and are aligned to the wider economic strategy.

Strategic Transport

8. Acting as a single voice for the region, NECA can provide a useful advocacy role on key strategic transport issues, helping to influence investment decisions at a national or sub-national level.
9. NECA provides representation on the board and working groups of Transport for the North and Rail North. Key issues for Durham in these agendas include:

Strategic Roads

- Confirmed scheme - dualling of the A66 to improve trans-pennine crossing
- Study – improvements to A19 (Dishforth to Tyne Tunnel) upgrade to ‘expressway’ standard with junction improvements, smart technology and gap closures
- Support for Darlington northern relief road – which would improve access for N Aycliffe/Hitachi etc to Teesside/Teesport

Northern Powerhouse Rail

- Leeds to Newcastle rail corridor – study looking to improve East Coast Mainline capacity and line speed (including option of reinstating the Leamside Line)
- Durham Coast Line – study to improve journey times (signalling and line speeds)
- Maximising the benefits of HS2, making stations HS2 ready, and influencing further investment in high speed rail
- Support for the development of Horden Rail Station

Freight

- Study looking to improve ‘Rail freight’ across the north, including access to ports and addressing capacity issues

Integrated and Smart Travel

- Development of joined-up ‘Smart Ticketing’ for travel across the Northern Powerhouse area
- Improved information / integration / journey planning / real-time etc

North East Rail Management Unit

10. The North East Combined Authority together with Tees Valley Combined Authority, Cumbria and North Yorkshire have established a unique partnership with Northern Rail, the first of its kind in the country, to co-manage the rail franchise in the North East. The North East Rail Management Unit (NERMU) was developed to provide oversight and management of the Northern Franchise, looking at performance, marketing, development and investment decisions to improve rail travel across the north.

Local Transport

11. At a local level, NECA have published a Transport Manifesto setting out the wider transport ambitions for the area and continue to develop a full Transport Plan. The NECA Transport Plan will set out the high level objectives and a framework for transport investment decisions. It is anticipated that there will also be a need for local delivery plans for each of the constituent authorities.
12. Progress continues in developing a ten year NECA Cycling and Walking Strategy and a five year Implementation Plan for the area, which will become a daughter document to the Transport Plan.
13. The three public transport delivery areas of Nexus, Northumberland and Durham are working with the Bus Operators to develop a joint bus strategy for NECA. The Bus Strategy will also be a daughter document of the NECA Transport Plan and aims to provide a strategic framework for improving bus services.
14. Work to improve the ticketing offer for young people continues to be a focus for NECA. A task and finish group has been established with a vision to develop a more consistent and attractive ticketing offer for young people travelling by bus across the NECA area.
15. Nexus, working on behalf of NECA, have developed the business case for replacing the Tyne & Wear Metro fleet and upgrading the Metro infrastructure. A parallel workstream has also been looking at the future of Metro and local rail services, including options for potential Metro extensions.
16. NECA is committed to tackling poor air quality and provided a detailed response to government's recent Air Quality Plan consultation. NECA's response emphasised the need for clear guidance from government, introducing measures at a national level, rather than passing all of the responsibility to Local Authorities.
17. NECA working with Newcastle University have successfully secured grant funding to deliver two Electric Vehicle Filling Stations and up to eight Rapid Electric Vehicles Chargers across the NECA area. Work is also ongoing with the local authorities to construct a model for the management, operation and enhancement of the existing estate of EV charging infrastructure to encourage further take up of electric vehicles across the North East.
18. NECA are also coordinating bids on behalf of the region for car clubs and clean vehicle technology. In addition, they coordinate a NECA wide freight partnership, bringing together public and private sector operators to raise standards, improve safety and cut the costs of moving freight.
19. The NECA transport team work closely with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) in relation to programme management and developing a forward pipeline of major transport capital investments funded through the Local Growth Fund and other funding streams. Horden Station is one of the prioritised major schemes attracting £3.34m from regional funding.

Recommendations

20. Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided during the presentation of this report.

Background Paper(s)

NECA website: <http://www.northeastca.gov.uk/>

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – DCC make a contribution of £68k pa towards the running of the NECA core transport team.

Some funding streams, such as the Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding are channelled through NECA. In addition, there are a number of government's competitive funding initiatives where it is necessary to bid through NECA as the statutory transport authority for the area.

Staffing – None

Risk – None

Equality and Diversity – NECA has the same statutory duties as other local authorities in relation to considering equality and diversity

Accommodation – None

Crime and Disorder – None

Human Rights – None

Consultation – None

Procurement – None

Disability Discrimination Act – None

Legal Implications – None