

SOUTH WEST

TRANSPORT



Transport is an issue that is continually raised by Government but the reality is that there is a mismatch between long-term planning and delivery. Five-year political cycles are not conducive to effective transport management and there is a need to ensure that all political parties are working to an agreed overarching strategic plan.

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

ICE has compiled State of the Nation reports each year since 2000, drawing on expertise across its membership and beyond to stimulate debate and to highlight the actions needed to improve the UK's infrastructure.

ICE's State of the Nation: Transport 2013 UK report presents a series of detailed recommendations – for the short, medium and long-term. While all are important, we believe that three are particularly critical to our success:

- 1. IMMEDIATE ACTION TO IMPROVE ROAD CONDITIONS, PLANNING AND FUNDING**
- 2. ENSURING CLEAR NATIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGIES FOR ALL PARTS OF THE UK**
- 3. CONTINUING AND EXTENDING DEVOLUTION TO FULLY-INTEGRATED TRANSPORT BODIES**

Our emphasis is on making best use of existing assets and achieving the most with public money. The headline recommendations are backed by a series of further points requiring rapid action and a suite of detailed changes by mode and topic. The report concludes with a proposal to create the capacity to address the major social, economic, environmental and technological change which ICE anticipates through the 2020s.

The UK report, with the full detail behind our recommendations, can be downloaded at ice.org.uk/SoNTransport. This briefing sheet highlights how ICE's UK-level recommendations impact on business and communities across our region.

INTRODUCTION

Five-year political cycles are not conducive to effective transport management and there is a need to ensure that all political parties are working to an agreed overarching strategic plan. The South West is the largest of the English regions, with the longest coastline. It is also a peninsula, a fact that is commonly remarked upon but frequently forgotten. Internal interconnectivity within the region needs to be addressed, as there are poor interfaces between train, bus and air connections, discouraging use of public transport. These need to be more efficiently integrated.

Connectivity between the economic centres of the region and the rest of the UK also needs to be made more efficient in terms of journey times and more resilient in terms of viable alternative routes. Rail line speeds and journey times need considerable improvement and air links between regional airports need to be utilised effectively.

With extreme weather events, particularly flooding, expected to become more severe and more common because of climate change, it's clear that as well as doing more to protect homes and businesses, more needs to be done to protect our vital transport infrastructure. It's not just the nuisance and inconvenience suffered by rail travellers but our future economic prosperity that is at stake.

BEN BRADSHAW, MP FOR EXETER (LABOUR) – THE EXETER DAILY, 22 JANUARY 2013

1. THE SOUTH WEST CHALLENGE

In the 2011 Census, the population of the South West totalled 5.3 million people, an increase of 7% on 2001¹. However, the effective population is significantly greater, with a large number of second home owners and tourists putting extra strain on our already over-used and struggling transport infrastructure. In 2008 (the most recent statistics available), the South West welcomed around 21.2 million staying visitors, providing an estimated spend of £4.6 billion². This is a very welcome source of income to the economy, but it puts significant strain on our transport infrastructure.

There is clear evidence that economic output, measured as Gross Value Added (GVA), reduces with distance from London³ (as shown in chart 1). This is a factor in the recognised 'north-south divide' and, whilst it is a generalisation, it has a major impact on the more peripheral areas such as the South West.

More frequent bad weather in recent years has exposed the fragile state of parts of the South West transport infrastructure. In severe conditions, areas of the region can be cut off. Road and rail closures disrupt key routes, as well as the local networks, resulting in a significant economic impact by constraining travel into and out of the South West.

The Government has identified poor transport infrastructure as one of the key barriers to inward investment and economic growth. Transport infrastructure is an area in which the South West is struggling and therefore it needs to be urgently addressed.



REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY AND RESILIENCE

Interconnectivity is vital: cities, towns and villages must link up. Buses need to be regular and affordable. Equally, effective transport links to airports, railways stations and ports are necessary to boost and support our regional economy. Investment is required on strategic routes such as the A303, and the Pinch Point improvement projects implemented by the Highways Authority (HA) are welcomed. It is essential to maintain the resilience of our South West network, including continued investment in flood prevention and asset management. Parts of the population will become marginalised over time if services continue to be cut back; the South West's rural communities also need effective transport links.

2. NATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity between the economic centres of the region and the rest of the UK needs to be made more efficient in terms of journey times, and more resilient in terms of viable alternative routes. Rail line speeds and journey times need considerable improvement and air links between the various regional airports across the UK should be utilised.

3. LONG-TERM PLANNING

At a strategic level, there is a mismatch between long-term planning and delivery, and five-year political cycles. The issues might be familiar but until the political parties can be persuaded to agree on the underlying strategic delivery required, then a proper change cannot take place. Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships must be prepared to work together for the good of the area.

ROADS

There are just two main routes from London into the South West: the M4/M5, which is the only motorway route, ending at Exeter; and the A30/A303, of which much is a single carriageway trunk road. Both routes are prone to disruption, due to road accidents (especially in the tourist season), adverse weather and congestion, making travel times unpredictable and unreliable. The A30 Exeter-Penzance is the key spine route through Devon and Cornwall, with little viable alternative. Its single carriageway lengths cause long delays at peak times, deterring tourism and industrial development, and affecting public transport times and reliability. These pinch points need to be removed as a priority. An obvious answer would be to make the A30/A303 a dual carriageway from beginning to end, a project that many of those living or working in the west of the region consider to be vital. There are currently proposals for dualling the A30 at Temple in Cornwall while a multi-agency group of partners is working to identify a programme of improvements on the A30/A303/A358 between Exeter/Taunton and the M3.

Equally, we also need to maintain and adapt the transport infrastructure that we already have. For example, the Pinch Point projects taking place across the region will bring welcome improvements to the network, and the M4/M5 managed motorway project is already underway to help manage congestion.

RAIL

Even without bad weather, rail journey times across the South West are a source of constant frustration to travellers, with travel times to London such a strong issue for Cornwall, Devon and Plymouth that local cross-party MPs have led a campaign to highlight the problem. In May 2013, rail travel time leaving at 4pm from London to Penzance (280 miles) was typically 5hrs 25mins, compared to 4hrs 22mins from London to Edinburgh (400 miles) (as shown in chart 2). Rail journey times and reliability have been seriously affected during the winter of 2012/2013 by river flooding, landslips and related engineering work. This is unacceptable on a major national route.

Although the Great Western main line from Paddington to Bristol and South Wales is to be electrified by December 2016, resulting in faster journey times and higher passenger capacity, the recently announced delay of the new Great Western franchise until July 2016 is a further source of frustration to regional rail users.

AIR

There are currently four main airports in the region – Bristol, Bournemouth, Exeter and Newquay. There is also a smaller airport at Land's End, serving the Isles of Scilly.

In recent years, air travel in the South West has come under the spotlight with the closure of Plymouth airport, operations by Air South West ceasing, and a drop in passenger numbers at Newquay. Plymouth and Newquay airports operated as a pair, providing a critical mass of passengers for Air South West to a variety of UK regional airports. The closure of Plymouth airport and loss of Air South West has affected Newquay airport, with an obvious effect on regional connectivity. This is exacerbated by the announcement of closure of the Flybe Newquay-Gatwick route after March 2014.

Directly linked to Newquay Airport is Aerohub, England's only aerospace focused Enterprise Zone. Over the next few years many businesses will choose to locate here and a significant number of jobs will be created. Improved connectivity to the A30 and the rail network is therefore essential for the airport to realise its potential.

Air links are vital in order to maintain connectivity with off-shore populations linked to the South West, including the Channel Islands and the Isles of Scilly. The closure of the all-year helicopter service from Penzance to Scilly has left the Scilly population with only a weather-sensitive light aircraft service during the winter (with flights from Exeter, Newquay and Land's End), when the ferry service does not operate. This threatens the long-term viability of Scilly as a settled community.

Bristol Airport has, in contrast, experienced significant growth with a 3% rise in people passing through the terminal in 2012; it was the only airport in the UK top 10 to have seen growth since 2009.⁴ With planning permission in place to expand to handle 10m passengers a year, there is capacity for Bristol Airport to carry more passengers, creating jobs, delivering economic growth and relieving pressure on the congested London airport system.

4. <http://www.bristolairport.co.uk/media-centre/news-releases/2013/01/passengers.aspx>



CHART 1 - GROSS VALUE ADDED PER HEAD

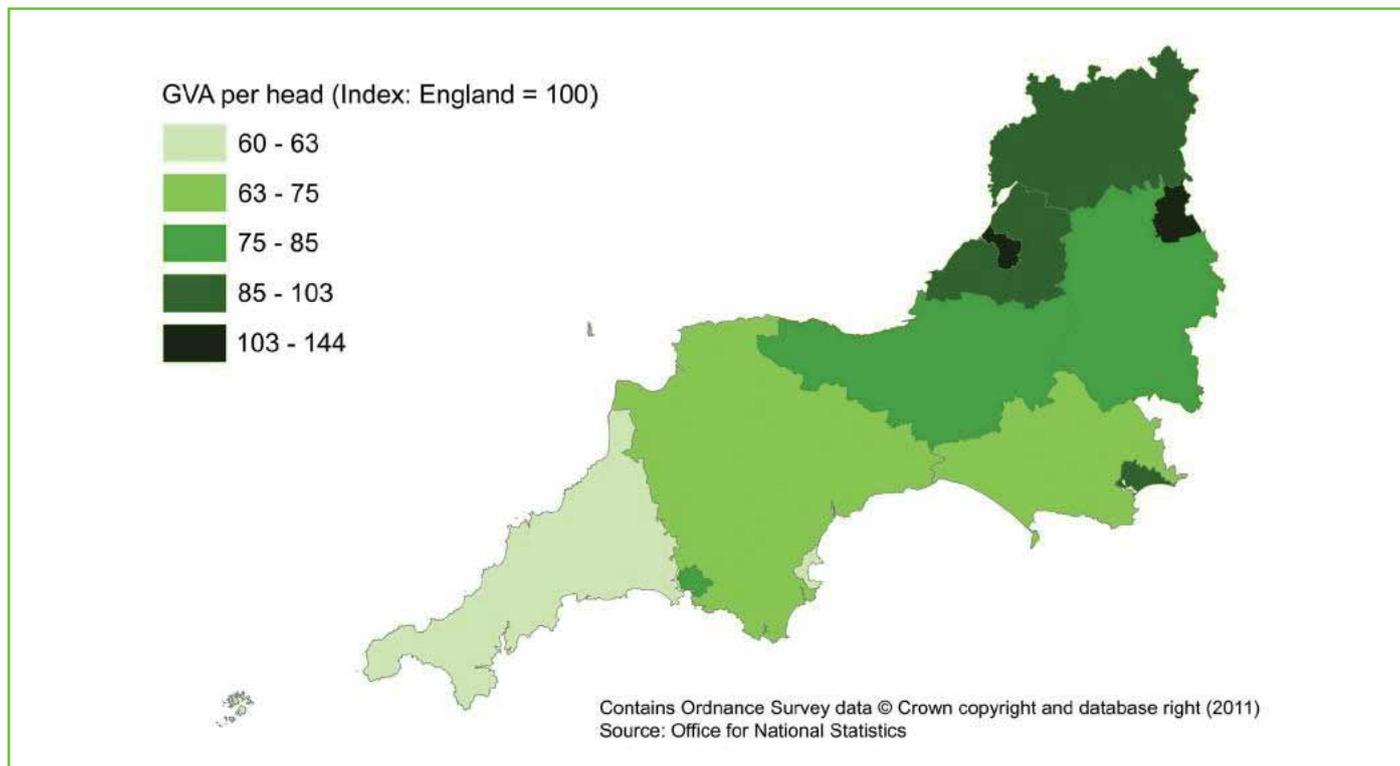
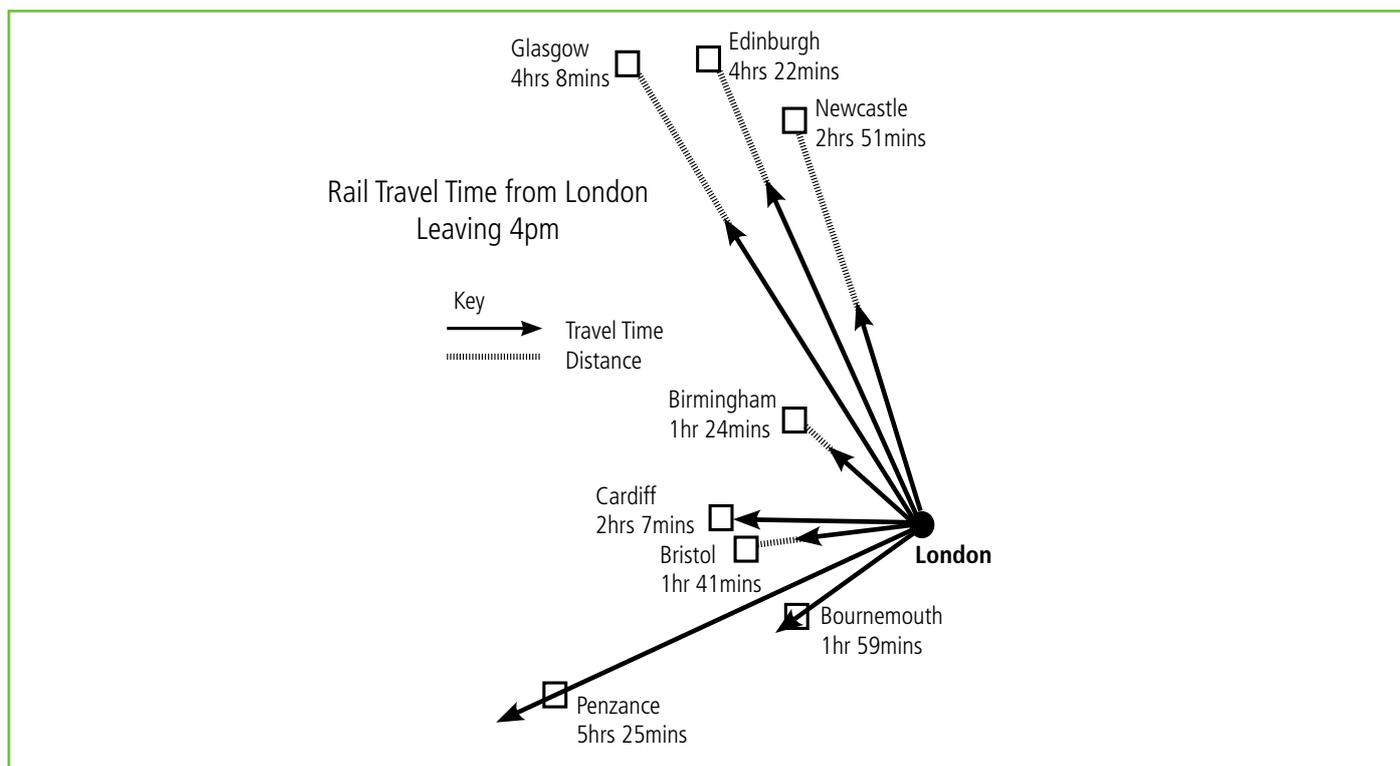


CHART 2 - RAIL TRAVEL TIME FROM LONDON



2. ASSET MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT IN EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Most assumptions about the current transport network start with the premise that what we have now will go on forever and all investment should be centred on improvement and expansion. But maintenance of existing networks is an essential and often overlooked requirement. The public and politicians need to be made aware of the importance of road and rail maintenance operations, rather than see them as evidence of poor management. For example, Devon has around 12,800km (8000 miles) of roads,⁵ more miles than any other UK county; all of these roads need to be maintained.

INVESTING IN OUR EXISTING ASSETS

The 18th Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) Survey results, released in March 2013, call for more and longer-term funding from Government in order to manage our 'crumbling roads'. The report highlights that rural local authorities are the worst affected by an increase in potholes, which clearly infers that there will be higher cost implications in regions such as the South West, which is largely rural.⁶

FLOOD PREVENTION

Parts of the South West are regularly cut off from the rest of the UK by extreme flooding. Continued investment in flood defences is vital, as flooding and landslides have forced roads and rail links to close causing delays and cancellations, particularly during the winter of 2012/13.

A fully integrated approach to flood risk management, ensuring that the right skills are available to decision makers and operational leaders, and covering everything from coordination, partnerships, communication and data sharing to project management strategies and operational decision making, is essential in order to protect our vital infrastructure links.

CASE STUDY

COWLEY BRIDGE



Image © Environment Agency

Railway tracks at Cowley Bridge, near Exeter, were repeatedly flooded in November and December 2012, causing a political storm with MPs and business leaders backing the need for investment in South West railway lines in order to improve resilience and help safeguard the regional economy. Network Rail is currently considering how best to protect this vital link, including raising the embankments and improving tracks and drainage. It has also raised the signalling system to prevent water damage. As local MPs have demanded, it is essential that improvement works are supported by Government, so that the South West is no longer at risk of becoming isolated during periods of heavy rainfall.

Transport is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Regardless of whether the present economic model is the best way of doing things, we are where we are and must recognise that the present emphasis on long distance transport with very tight delivery margins is the way in which the UK operates

RICHARD FISH, ICE COUNCIL MEMBER

3. REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

RURAL AND URBAN CHALLENGES

Transport services in rural areas are very different from those in cities and towns. Communities outside the larger cities range from urban conurbations to villages. Villages surrounding the cityscapes are not just dormitories for commuters; all are communities in their own right.

Rural areas tend to attract a higher demographic of retired or elderly people, who at some point will need medical and social care services. Such services require transport and the balance to be struck is between 'people to services' and 'services to the people'. Examples of the latter are still effective and are extensions of the traditional mobile shop concept, with initiatives of mobile post offices and banks not uncommon. But under the overarching heading of accessibility, transport in rural areas requires a balance of high quality and reliable public transport and recognition that high levels of car dependency must be embraced. Transport subsidies need to be focused onto provision of frequent and reliable services on key link routes, rather than dissipated into irregular transport networks not geared to working hours.

We need to consider how all of our transport links fit together to support those in rural areas; the high dependency on the car requires an effective, well-maintained road network, but it is essential that the road network also supports good bus links for non-drivers and our elderly population. These public transport links should also offer people access to onward travel by rail, so bus routes require clear integrated planning.

There are two clear concerns with the urban transport infrastructure in the South West: the roads and rail lines were not generally built for the high levels of traffic that they are currently carrying; and the infrastructure that exists is not successfully linked together. In Bristol, for example, there are congested but good roads, a good rail link (especially once electrification arrives) and an expanding airport; but it is not easy to get from one to another.

Interconnectivity must be prioritised, and this includes offering provision for sustainable methods of transport such as cycling. In particular, our younger generation is looking more to public services and sustainable transport in preference to using the car. We need employers to encourage use of public transport, such as car-sharing and alternative travel arrangements for staff (e.g. facilities for cyclists).

NATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Good links to international gateways such as ports are crucially important, offering a high rate of return, and should be a priority area for future Department for Transport (DfT) investment.

The South West ferry ports are vital for regional connectivity to the Channel Islands and the Isles of Scilly, with Condor Ferries operating from both Weymouth and Poole to the Channel Islands, and ferries operating in the spring/summer months between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly. Ferry services offer an alternative to flights and support the vital connections between our offshore populations and the mainland.

Ports are equally important for the movement of freight, with Bristol Ports dealing with an annual tonnage of 13 million tonnes which equates to around £75 million turnover per year, bringing much needed goods to the UK. It is vital that the surrounding transport infrastructure such as rail links (50% of cargo is transported by rail) and road (M4/M5) are maintained and/or improved to help sustain the ports and enable growth which will protect existing jobs and the port's standing as a vital part of the South West economy.

CASE STUDY

BRISTOL AIRPORT

Bristol has the ninth largest airport in the UK. Bristol airport currently handles around 5.9 million passengers per annum and has planning permission for development capable of handling 10 million passengers per annum. But six million passenger journeys from the South West currently use airports outside the region.

One of the biggest challenges for the airport is surface access, an issue that is being addressed through the delivery of the West of England's £244 million Bus Rapid Transit scheme.

There is a need for Government policy to support the opportunity to make the best use of the spare capacity available at airports such as Bristol, to relieve congestion in the South East, claw back passenger 'leakage' and rebalance the economy at the same time.

Image © Bristol Airport





4. LONG-TERM PLANNING NEEDS FOR REGIONAL TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

MAIN CHALLENGES

Cornwall Council is a large unitary authority with around 532,300 people living in the county.⁷ The most densely populated local authority is Bournemouth with around 4,000 people per square kilometre.⁸ These figures are significant because Cornwall and South Dorset are two of the most difficult areas of the South West in which to travel, generally served by single-carriageway trunk roads. With our ferry ports to the Channel Islands and Europe located in Bournemouth, Poole, Weymouth and Plymouth, this also creates problems with connectivity.

One of the main challenges to transport infrastructure is political change; with each new government or leader there are new policies, causing uncertainty and delays. There is a clear need for regional integration of transport systems, meaning that there is a requirement for regional, not just local, strategies. Authorities need to work together on schemes approved by DfT, providing a clear strategic leadership and the political will that is missing.

It is essential to the South West that all political parties not only recognise, but act on the need for both adequate regional connectivity and national connectivity. The South West should not be the poor relation compared with the rest of the UK, as its current transport network suggests.

Ultimately, our regional and national connectivity needs improving by: ensuring adequate investment in our mainline railway track, so that we are not cut off from the rest of the UK; investing in our roads to ensure that they can cope with capacity, particularly during tourist seasons; and ensuring that our regional airports and ports are able to realise their potential – under-used capacity is a missed opportunity.

CASE STUDY

M5 JUNCTION 16 PINCH POINT SCHEME



Image © The West Briton/The Cornish Guardian

The M5 J16 Northbound Pinch Point scheme is one of 123 essential road improvements being delivered by the Highways Agency across the UK. The schemes are designed to reduce congestion, boost the economy and improve safety.

This project will reduce congestion by widening the northbound exit slip road, creating a lane for traffic turning left towards the A38 North. It will improve vital access to Bristol airport and port, and the improved system should also support growth in places such as Filton Airfield, Patchway and Cribbs Causeway, with the potential to create 6,350 jobs and 2,990 homes by 2020.

The project will be completed to a low budget of £0.3m, with works due to take place in 2014.

7. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/census-shows-increase-in-population-of-the-south-west-as-it-tops-5-million/census-southwestnr0712.html> 8. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/census-shows-increase-in-population-of-the-south-west-as-it-tops-5-million/census-southwestnr0712.html>



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