

Merseytravel written submission to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee's inquiry on airport surface access

1. This submission of written evidence to this inquiry on airport surface access is from Merseytravel, the transport executive body for the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.
2. Key issues raised in this submission include:
 - There is low awareness of through ticketing and a lack of information provision and promotion by train operators and the rail industry generally. Train operators need to provide more information and promotion in regard to through ticketing options. For example, requiring information and promotion for through ticketing to be coordinated on behalf of the train operators via a central body such as Journey Solutions (managers of PlusBus).
 - There should be more incentive in rail franchises for train operators to develop rail air partnerships and codeshare agreements with airlines to encourage more seamless travel.
 - There is a role for Government and their specification of rail franchises to assist with delivery of new rail connections and services to airports.
 - Government, through its policy frameworks, should actively encourage modal shift to sustainable modes for access as this can help reduce both congestion and air quality impacts.
 - Government should encourage airports to have Airport Surface Access Strategies to outline a clear, evidence based strategy to improve surface access. These strategies should be regularly reviewed to ensure surface access keeps pace with changes to the airport's needs and catchment as it experiences growth.
 - Consideration should be given to ring-fencing an element of Air Passenger Duty (APD) monies for re-investment in surface access interventions to improve access to airports.
3. Liverpool John Lennon Airport (LJLA) recorded some 4 million passengers in 2013, with a catchment covering the Liverpool City Region, its hinterland and Northern England, Scotland, Midlands and North Wales. The airport makes a substantial contribution to the city region and UK economy; *directly* through employment and generating inbound tourism visits, and *indirectly* through making the Liverpool City Region an attractive location for investment. The airport forms a key component of the Liverpool City Region LEP's growth priorities including SuperPORT and the Visitor Economy.
4. At LJLA 16% of UK travellers travelled to/from the airport using public transport; lower than Birmingham (24%) but a higher proportion than at other airports. The overseas leisure visitors were the group most likely to access LJLA by public transport – 30% of this group, a proportion broadly in line with that seen at other airports. Overseas business travellers also showed a higher tendency to use public transport; 20% of this group flying to/from LJLA used public transport.

5. To understand the role of transport in assisting the growth of LJLA, a comprehensive research package was undertaken in 2014, led by Merseytravel, in partnership with the airport. This research will inform the Airport Surface Access Strategy review and the Airport Master Plan, and is intended to provide a strong and robust evidence base to underpin proposed future strategy and interventions to improve surface access to the airport.
6. The research highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of surface access to LJLA, including the important role of Liverpool South Parkway rail station and it identified a number of specific challenges. More than 5% of the airport's "non-user" catchment doesn't use Liverpool Airport because of issues relating to public transport and more than 4% because of issues relating to the road network. This represents a sizeable market for growth and justifies making improvements to surface access. Improved surface access not only helps the airport expand its "reach" to UK passengers, but also makes the airport more attractive as an entry gateway for inbound overseas passengers – who tend to have a higher need for good public transport links.
7. The research found that access to the airport is poor from a number of locations; necessitating lengthy journeys or many changes from locations including Wirral, Lancashire, Wigan, Cumbria, Chester and North Wales. It is therefore important that the public transport availability matches the catchment area from which its passengers come. As this will change over time, as the airport grows, transport links need to be regularly reviewed. And given the growing Visitor Economy in the Liverpool City Region there is a need to improve travel information provision, particularly the availability of multi-lingual options and braille or voice options to assist disabled people.
8. Strategic rail connectivity is a particular area for improvement. The reopening of the Halton Curve will provide a major opportunity to significantly improve access to Liverpool Airport from Chester and North Wales. This opportunity will only be realised if the service patterns, ticket options, branding and marketing and interchange at Liverpool South Parkway adequately meet the needs of users. If the service is to maximise benefits for North Wales then the service specification needs to be included by the Welsh Government in the next Wales & Borders franchise.
9. Following the completion of the Northern Hub it is possible that the TransPennine Express services from Liverpool may shift entirely to the Chat Moss Line. This would mean that the airport would lose rail services to Yorkshire which currently serve Liverpool South Parkway. There is a need to ensure that any rail service changes take into full consideration any impact on the rail connectivity to Liverpool South Parkway and the airport. To mitigate this, focus may need to shift to enhancing the bus links from Liverpool Lime Street to the airport or to develop a new bus link from an appropriate rail station on the Chat Moss Line. There would need to be appropriate branding of the bus service, to identify it as an airport link. The buses would also need adequate luggage space. We are working with partners to resolve this.

10. LJLA has an express bus link to Liverpool City Centre, although our research indicated that it has low levels of awareness, and inadequate luggage space. The service needs an attractive end-to-end journey time and its hours of operation need to more closely match flight schedules. This service currently serves Liverpool ONE bus station but not Liverpool Lime Street rail station – a major transport gateway to the city. We are working with partners to resolve this.
11. There is a bus link to the rail network via Liverpool South Parkway, although the research has found that satisfaction levels are lower than for most other transport options. Again there is poor awareness of this service and enhanced branding of the service is required. Inadequate luggage space has again been identified as a problem, as has a need for shorter journey times and better coordination with flight schedules. We are working with partners on this.
12. In the longer term, the research indicates that consideration of light rapid transit to the Airport from Liverpool South Parkway and Liverpool City Centre would be beneficial. This would help deliver better, faster more reliable services to the airport. There would again need to be appropriate branding of the service and adequate luggage space.
13. Through ticketing is necessary to ensure seamless transfer; increasingly contactless payment is opening up the opportunity to greatly enhance ticketing options and enable seamless travel across transport modes. A particular concern with through ticketing is the need to have a product that is easily understood and usable by inbound travellers, as well as those living in the airport catchment already familiar with the products available.
14. A through ticket to LJLA from the National Rail network via Liverpool Lime Street is available, valid on the express bus service, with another valid via Liverpool South Parkway, although there is also no facility to collect pre-booked bus/rail tickets on arrival at LJLA. There is also low awareness of through ticketing options, coupled with a lack of information provision and promotion by train operators and the rail industry generally. Train operators need to provide more information and promotion in regard to through ticketing options. Information and promotion of through ticketing may be better coordinated on behalf of the train operators via a central body such as Journey Solutions (operators of PlusBus).
15. Car parking at the airport overall is seen as good value. The recent introduction of the £2 drop-off charge caused an increase in levels of dissatisfaction and was prominent in the local media at the time the research was being carried out. However it is anticipated that satisfaction should improve over time, since such charging is routine among UK airports. There also needs to be clarity about what has to be paid, how and where, to minimise confusion for the users. Signage is vital in this regard. More needs to be done to highlight the value of the long stay car parking offer, which tended to attract good levels of satisfaction.

16. The research has highlighted a number of specific weaknesses relating to signage on the strategic highway network (motorways and trunk roads). Signage needs to be regularly monitored, maintained and reviewed to ensure that it isn't obscured, is well positioned and suitable for motorists unfamiliar with the local area. We have raised this with Highways England and are working with them to review current signage provision.
17. The next phase of the research will include further analysis of the local and strategic gaps and demand, to include geographical mapping highlighting the main surface access gaps. It will also benchmark against comparator airports, competitor airports and airports that serve cities similar in size and economic background to Liverpool. It will consider existing academic research into what interventions are most effective in terms of surface transport provision at airports to inform proposed interventions to improve surface access to LJLA in the future.
18. Liverpool John Lennon Airport in conjunction with Merseytravel are re-constituting the Airport Transport Forum (ATF) with a responsibility to deliver customer focussed, integrated transport services and with ATF members it will work in partnership to own the Surface Access Strategy, and drive through the improvements with the goal of enhancing the public transport offer.
19. Additionally, Transport for the North (TfN) is investigating international connectivity, specifically international links for passengers including airports, ferry ports and cruise terminals. Northern England has many international airports and seaports, but people and goods need to be able to access them from across the country quickly and easily. There are extensive scheduled intercontinental flights from Manchester and Newcastle, and other regional airports such as Liverpool perform a key role in providing short-haul and other links.
20. We need to ensure that the North's airports attract the highest possible levels of international connectivity, therefore allowing more passengers and air-borne freight to enter the country nearer their destination, rather than using options centred on the South East which necessitate further travel on an already overcrowded rail and road network in that area. The Northern Transport Strategy aims to create comprehensive surface access on all modes to airports across the North to ensure the North is a competitive location for multi-national businesses. This strategy is due for completion in March 2016.
21. Strategic access by surface access modes from Liverpool to major airports such as Manchester, Birmingham and London Heathrow is also important. There is a direct rail service from Liverpool Lime Street to Manchester Airport. Rail access to London Heathrow is more difficult from Liverpool as a number of changes in London are required. Rail access to Birmingham Airport (via Birmingham International) from Liverpool is possible with one change at Birmingham New Street. Trips to/from airports account for around 1/3 of all National Express Coaches journeys. National Express Coaches operate

direct coach services from Liverpool to a number of major airports including Manchester Airport, Birmingham Airport and London Stansted Airport.

22. The better the surface access transport provision is to a particular airport, the more attractive it will be to its users and airlines. This will help maximise its growth and air route network. In turn this will maximise its role in the local economy to promote economic growth, tourism and inward investment. An attractive airport to users and airlines will be better placed to play an increasing role within the UK transport system and maximise its capacity. Each airport thereby maximises its role within the network of airports, helping to relieve congestion elsewhere in the airports network.
23. High speed rail and intercity train services have the potential to complement or (for certain locations) replace short haul domestic air travel. Ticketing plays a vital role in enabling seamless, integrated travel and will encourage through ticketing between the rail network and airlines. In recent years there has been a rise in rail air partnerships creating intermodality between the two modes of travel. Some countries have introduced codeshare agreements between rail and airlines which in effect turn the rail services into “flights” with airline codes. Airlines and railways see benefits to not only their business but also to the overall passenger experience. There should be more incentive in rail franchises for train operators to develop rail air partnerships and codeshare agreements with airlines to encourage more seamless travel. National Express Coaches have also introduced a number of coach air partnerships including codeshare arrangements with particular airlines.
24. The ownership structure for airports in the UK is quite different from the rest of Europe. UK airports are mainly privatised (except for a few notable exceptions such as Manchester Airports Group) while those in Europe tend to be publicly owned. Generally funding of transport infrastructure projects is “packaged” from a wide variety of both private and public funding sources. Where the airport is the prime beneficiary then there is a case for an intervention to be funded primarily by them; where there is wider benefit for the airport’s catchment in terms of the local economy, tourism and inward investment, there is a case for funding input from public sources alongside private sector partners.
25. Where interventions to improve surface access relate to transport services, particularly rail, then there is a role for Central Government and their specification of rail franchises to assist with delivery of new rail connections and services. Government, through its policy frameworks, should actively encourage modal shift to sustainable modes for access as this can help reduce both congestion and air quality impacts. Government should also encourage airports to have Airport Surface Access Strategies to outline a clear, evidence based strategy to improve surface access. These strategies and interventions should be regularly reviewed to ensure surface access keeps pace with changes to the airport’s needs and catchment as it experiences growth and attracts more air services and passengers.

26. Much of the DfT's guidance on Airport Transport Forums and Surface Access strategies is archived, dated (particularly in the context of devolution and Transport for the North), and not readily accessible. The guidance is not prescriptive and so open to interpretation. These factors limit the extent to which they help to support the effective delivery of the Government's objectives. A set of national objectives and performance targets cognisant of regional context may help focus Airport Surface Access Strategies. Including examples of best practice in such guidance may help to deliver better consistency of approach in the UK across airports.
27. The Department for Transport also has a role in ensuring that surface access infrastructure is planned and built in a joined-up way where different parts of the infrastructure are funded by different parties. Given TfN's strategic agenda to improve strategic connectivity between the airports, consideration should be given to DfT devolving responsibility and funding to enable TfN to better pursue this objective.
28. The HS2 proposals currently do not include a direct high speed line into Liverpool which may compromise Liverpool Airport's ability to connect with the national transport network, and as a result its ability to fully contribute to the TfN strategic agenda. Ensuring that Liverpool is adequately connected directly to the High Speed Rail network including both HS2 and the TransPennine "HS3" would bring major benefits to the region and its economy. This proposed High Speed Rail network should also be directly connected to HS1, the Channel Tunnel and the wider European high speed rail network.
29. The aviation industry has regularly raised concerns about Air Passenger Duty (APD) and its impacts on regional airports. In light of potential devolution of APD to Scotland and Wales these impacts on England's airports will only increase. Government are presently undertaking a review of APD in light of these changes, and that there may be merit in ring-fencing an element of APD monies for re-investment in surface access interventions to airports. The Government has already set a precedent for this by ring-fencing Vehicle Excise Duty monies for re-investment in the strategic road network.