How does the city connect to the rest of the world?

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What is this topic paper about?

How does the city connect to the rest of the world?

This topic paper has been published as part of Plymouth Plan Connections. It is one of a series of topic papers that are being published to provide information and support the Council’s ongoing discussions with local people and organisations about the future of the city.

The topic paper looks at connectivity; it discusses transport between Plymouth and other conurbations that play a key role in the prosperity of business and tourism.

To view all the topic papers and find out more about the Plymouth Plan go to www.plymouth.gov.uk/pptopicpapers
Introduction

Plymouth’s connections to its markets are key to a prosperous local economy that competes on a national and international stage. Road, rail, air and water transport provides businesses with access to markets, goods and services as well as leisure travel. The nature of these strategic networks means that events or disruption a significant distance away from Plymouth can have a direct financial impact on businesses in the city. The indirect impact is the perception of a city that’s difficult to get to. This can have a more profound effect; discouraging businesses from operating here and deterring the most skilled and talented people from wanting to live and work here.

Plymouth’s Third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) sets out the justification and aspirations for the strategic connections to the city. Since the adoption of LTP3 in 2011 a number of factors have changed, particularly regarding funding for transport projects. This means the strategy set out in LTP3 needs to be updated. The Plymouth Plan will serve to update the strategic objectives of LTP3 where necessary.
Strategic Connectivity

Road

For road transport, Plymouth is reliant on the Trunk Road Network managed by the Highways Agency to connect to the rest of the country. In particular, the A38 connects the city to Cornwall via the Tamar Bridge in the West and through Devon to the M5, which is part of the national motorway network. Currently the M5 and M4 motorways form the only high speed road link to London from the South West.

Long distance coach travel has experienced a resurgence in recent years, mainly by presenting travel options between towns and cities that compete with rail travel. The existing coach station at Bretonside is of poor quality and presents a poor welcome to people arriving in the city. This facility is subject of a development proposal which will see the site transformed and a new, modern, state-of-the art coach hub provided on the site of the former Mayflower West car park in Plymouth City Centre.

Rail

Rail connections to Plymouth provide key business, commuter and visitor links as with many other cities. Plymouth’s distance from key markets such as London, the Midlands and cities further north means that businesses rely upon the connection so that essential journeys can be more productive. The reliability of the rail network continues to be compromised in some locations due to its inability to cope with extreme weather events.

Damage to the railway at Dawlish in February 2014 picture courtesy of Network Rail Media Centre

Whilst Plymouth has a number of stations on the rail network the station at North Road East in the City Centre is the primary gateway for long distance rail travel. In recent years investment has been made in the station and on the approaches to it. Through the City Centre
and University Area Action Plan, the long term aspiration to make better use of the area around the main station was adopted and this change would provide a new, more welcoming gateway to the city and a stronger relationship with the City Centre and university.

In 2008 14 Strategic National Corridors (SNCs) were set up by Department for Transport (DfT) to recognise the national and international significance of transport links between the largest urban areas, ports and airports. The corridors identified provide connectivity between the most important strategic destinations in England, and links with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, using the routes carrying the most strategic traffic. As they are currently defined the SNCs do not cover routes to Plymouth, they stop at Exeter.

**Sea**

Plymouth is a busy port which includes one of the England’s two naval bases, a commercial port handling over 2 million tonnes of goods a year, an international ferry terminal, one of the busiest marine leisure centres. The city is important for commercial fishing and in 2012 over £16million of fish was landed which represents the highest value fish landings of any English port. The city houses one of the country’s highest concentrations of workers employed in the marine sector and is a centre for marine related research.

**Air**

Up until late 2011, Plymouth City Airport provided air links between Plymouth and a number of destinations including London Gatwick, Glasgow and Manchester, and carried 128,000 passengers (CAA 2010) every year to destinations across the UK and Europe. The adopted Core Strategy (adopted 2007) included a policy aspiration to widen the role of the airport and provided policy support for a number of measures designed to improve the airport infrastructure, including support for a runway extension which would allow larger planes to land and take off.

However, in 2010 Plymouth City Airports, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sutton Harbour Holdings (the leaseholder of the site and airport operator) served a notice of non-viability to the Council (the freeholder of the site) setting out that they believed that the airport was no longer commercially viable. After detailed scrutiny of the case put forward by the operator, the Council accepted the non-viability notice and the airport closed in December 2011.
What changes are needed to ensure the strategic connections are able to support Plymouth in 2031?

Road

The Highways Agency has been collecting evidence to develop route strategies that cover the entire Trunk Road Network of England. The evidence demonstrates there is scope for improvement on the networks connecting Plymouth to London and Birmingham. The route strategies will be developed in the coming year and will set out how some of the issues will be addressed. Existing published evidence demonstrates the need for improvements on the trunk road in order to achieve safe and reliable journeys to and from Plymouth. The particular areas where delays impact journey reliability are -

- A38 through Plymouth
- M4 around Bristol
- M4 between Chippenham and Swindon
- M4 between Reading and M25
- M4 inside the M25
- M5 near Bristol
- M5 near Gloucester
- M5 between Worcester and M42

In addition the routes have a number of sites which are in the top 250 collision locations across England, these are –

- One site on A38 at Plymouth
- One site on A30 at Exeter
- Three sites on A303
- 15 sites on the M4 with most inside the M25
- Three sites on M5

While the vast majority of the collisions will be shunts and fortunately only cause slight injuries to those involved even these have a detrimental impact on reliability of the road network. With only one high speed route available any issue that causes disruption to or the closure of the route has a major impact on the connections to the city and increases the cost of travel. The enhancement of the A303 route to the region could provide a suitable alternative for travel to and from London and the South East.

Rail

In 2011 LTP3 outlined the need for improved rail services. As an active member of the Peninsula Rail Task Force and as part of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership Plymouth has been working hard to articulate the needs of the area in the Strategic Economic Plan and pursue these through the Growth Deal process with Government.

The strategic issues which have been identified through this process are shown in the table below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainline rail journeys from London to Plymouth are slower than all other English cities with &gt;100,000 population. Plymouth requires under 3 hour rail journeys from the capital.</td>
<td>Productivity decreases by 6% for every 100 minutes journey time from London, current average journey time to Plymouth is 202 minutes. Detrimental impact on inward investment and retention of businesses. Figure 1 shows how rail journey times and early arrival times vary across the country. It is quicker to get to Paris from London than it is to get to Plymouth, and you can arrive there 2 hours earlier making it possible to carry out a full days work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth requires a pre 10am train arrival from London to enable a full days business in the city.</td>
<td>From December 2014 the earliest arrival from London will be 1035, currently it is 1117. Figure 1 displays the disparity of journey times and earliest arrival times across the UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic infrastructure prone to catastrophic failure from extreme weather events (e.g. Dawlish rail line, Cowley Bridge, Somerset levels etc.)</td>
<td>Repeated disruption at Cowley Bridge, Bridgewater and most significantly the Dawlish / Teignmouth Sea Wall collapse in February 2014. Unreliable journeys to Plymouth creates a perception of poor connectivity and has a detrimental impact on inward investment and retention of businesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic National Corridors do not extend as far as Plymouth</td>
<td>Plymouth is the largest urban area not connected to strategic corridors whilst many smaller conurbations are connected; this contributes to the perception and peripherality problems. The significance of Plymouth’s port means that the road and rail networks to the city are an obvious omission.</td>
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Diagram showing rail journey times and earliest arrival times from London

Plymouth’s main railway station currently presents a poor sense of arrival and doesn’t support the aspirations of the city. In 2010 the City Centre and University Area Action Plan proposed redevelopment of the railway station and surrounding area in order to remove the shortcomings of the existing facility. Although the wider regeneration plans to create a new business services sector for North Cross and the Railway Station may need to be revisited, the aspiration to see an improved station presenting a more welcoming first experience of Plymouth for travellers remains. In 2014 the Council produced a 10-year delivery plan for a redevelopment of the Railway Station, and we are working with Network Rail and other stakeholders to explore the options for delivering this change.

Sea

The 2010 evidence base made a series of recommendations – many of which have been followed up. These help define the needs for Plymouth’s ports. The key recommendations included:

- Preparation of a masterplan/Coastal Action Plan / Supplementary Planning Document to identify the best way forward.
- Safeguarding marine employment sites: further refine the way in which the ‘Marine Employment Site’ policy is applied (see the Employment Land Review and Economy Topic Paper)
- Raising the profile of the port: raise the profile given to the marine and maritime sector in all spatial development and promotional plans for Plymouth and its sub-regions through the identification of a dedicated ‘champion’.


• Cruise market feasibility/action plan: production of a market study and action plan which identifies the most appropriate location for a new cruise facility in Plymouth.
• Skills and training investment and sector support: delivering integrated training programmes which are targeted on meeting existing and emerging market needs with more employer-led training initiatives.
• Planning for climate change: evaluating the potential effects of sea level changes on the port and marine operations.
• Safeguarding Cattewater branch line track bed and protecting transport links: safeguard the line from change of use and ensure effective transport links to the port.

Continental ferry passengers arrive at Millbay ferry port, the area around the ferry port is undergoing radical change with significant redevelopment and this should help to improve the welcome to visitors. More information on the requirements for cruise ships is set out in the Waterfront topic paper.

Air

The Council has made clear that it sees the Plymouth Plan as the most appropriate place to set out the future of air travel in Plymouth and its approach to the future of the airport site itself. The Plymouth Plan will be able to set out a balanced and long term approach to the airport site, in the context of the wider growth aspirations of the city and the requirements of that growth agenda.

To this end, the Council has been working with consultants to understand the full picture regarding the case for an airport in Plymouth, and all the potential options for the future of the airport site. The Airport Study is published alongside this Topic Paper, and its findings will be evidence for the approach to be set out in the Plymouth Plan. The key findings of the study are:

• If the airport site is redeveloped for non-airport uses, the city would lose the only airport infrastructure it currently has. Once the facility has gone, the opportunity to make use of the site for air transport uses at some point in the future will no longer exist. The study suggests that a city of the size of Plymouth and with aspirations for transformational economic growth should have some form of air connectivity. The challenges of finding a different site for air transport in the future are so severe that if the airport site were to be redeveloped, it is unlikely that an alternative site could be found.
• An operator could gain a Category 3 CAA licence which would allow general aviation uses at the airport site. This would mean that the city would retain air connectivity, and that the airport site could again be used for air services. In order to achieve a Category 3 licence, there would need to be very considerable investment made to infrastructure on site to meet safety requirements, and a reconfiguration of existing airport infrastructure to create enough space for the Runway End Safety Areas (RESAs) at either end of the runway. A detailed analysis of these alterations, their costs and their impacts on the

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1 A Runway End Safety Area (RESA) is defined by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) as an area symmetrical about the extended runway centreline and adjacent to the end of the strip primarily intended to reduce the risk of damage to an aeroplane undershooting or overrunning the runway.
operation of the airport – in effect a detailed and complete business case now needs to be prepared, but this finding demonstrates that the airport site could be safeguarded for airport uses in the Plymouth Plan.

- There is insufficient demand throughout the Plymouth Plan period to 2031 and even beyond then to sustain a commercial airport. This means that it is not realistic to plan for a reopened airport flying scheduled flights by recognised airlines. It does, however, confirm that there would be interest in general aviation at the airport site – i.e. the ability for chartered flights to operate from the airfield, and the facility for private aircraft to land and take off.

- The consultants looked in great detail at the Civil Aviation Authority requirements for allowing flights from a general aviation airfield, including contacting the CAA to understand the position they would take. This has revealed that:
  - The airport site is in a congested zone – meaning that it is surrounded by residential and commercial development. Flights are not allowed to take place at altitudes of less than 1000ft over built up areas, unless flights are taking off or landing from licensed airfields. This means that any aviation uses – even general aviation, taking place at the site would need to secure a new licence from the CAA.
  - When the airport was operating, the CAA licence contained a number of dispensations within the terms of the licence. This means that some of the requirements for an airport which the Plymouth site does not meet, e.g. the size of the RESAs were relaxed. Those dispensations ceased when the airport uses ceased, and the CAA would not reinstate the dispensation – not least because legislation has changed in the meantime.
  - Any aviation use would therefore need a new licence from the CAA, but as set out above, the study finds that it would be possible to meet the CAA licence conditions enabling a Category 3 airport to reopen.

The Airport Study as it stands is evidence to inform the development of the Plymouth Plan. The Council will use the study to decide the best approach to the future of air services in the city.

**Question 1**

Have the right strategic improvements been identified?

**Question 2**

What else needs enhancement?
What opportunities are currently available?

Road

A multi-agency group of partners including Wiltshire, Devon, Somerset and Cornwall Councils as well as the Highways Agency are working closely to identify a set of improvements on the A30/A303/A358 corridor. The project aims to identify a package of measures that could be delivered to ensure that current issues with journey time, safety and consistency/reliability are addressed. The delivery of enhancements to the A30 will provide essential journey time savings.

One of the aspects highlighted in previous work as a priority for progress towards improved economic performance and productivity was improvement to transport networks - noting that ‘journey times from parts of the region to major markets represent a significant brake on productivity.’

Rail

Addressing the issue of journey times by rail to London aims to achieve £4bn additional Gross Value Added and 81,000 extra jobs by 2030 in the Heart of the South West, through:

- Reducing journey times from Plymouth to London by 45 minutes could add £1bn per annum to the peninsula economy;
- Improving the A358/A30/A303 could create £41.6bn (over 60 years) for the UK economy and 21,000 jobs.

Improvements to rail connections don’t just benefit Plymouth, they benefit the economy of the whole South West peninsula. Plymouth has been working hard with other stakeholders from around the region on the Peninsula Rail Task Force to develop strong evidence that can be used to demonstrate the potential for improvements to rail links.

The work of the task force has established a three point plan for a great South West Peninsula railway –

1. **Resilient and reliable**

   Solution: An additional inland route West of Exeter, a long term solution for Bridgwater including a barrage for the River Parrett, and increased capacity including more passing loops on the Exeter to Waterloo line (Exeter – Yeovil – Castle Cary) would provide greater resilience and reliability.

2. **Fast journey times and better connectivity**

   Solution: Upgrading signalling, improving line speeds and more modern diesel trains with greater acceleration and automatic doors will cut journey times, and more trains to London from Exeter creating faster journey times further west with better calling patterns. Research indicates electrification could boost the peninsula economy by an extra £73 million a year.

3. **Sufficient capacity and comfort**
Solution: Thames Valley’s existing rolling stock transferred to the South West to provide sufficient trains for our local services once electrification is complete in 2016, with more trains on overcrowded routes.

Sea

Opportunities exist to increase port traffic, both for the movement of goods and people. Five key activities are needed in order to support port growth -

- Improving land access to the ports
- Encouraging and enabling increased use by cruise ships
- Encouraging increased freight handled through the ports
- Supporting the delivery of the recommendations from the 2010 port study
- Supporting increased port-related freight movement by rail

Question 3

Are there other opportunities that could be exploited?
### What are the alternative strategies?

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<th>Do minimum</th>
<th>Do Something</th>
<th>Do maximum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Road</td>
<td>Continue to work within agenda set at national level, input into consultation activities</td>
<td>Drive agenda forward by producing evidence that makes a clear economic case for improvement in the strategic road networks that connect Plymouth to wider markets. Work with DfT and partners to develop the case for A303/A358/A30 improvements and lobby for funding to deliver them.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rail</td>
<td>Agenda for rail set at a national level with input from the Council via consultation activities.</td>
<td>Input into national decision making based on strong, locally developed evidence.</td>
<td>Lobbying for the three key asks at every opportunity.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increasing level of evidence to support lobbying activities and clearly set out the economic case for improvement in rail infrastructure.</td>
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<td>Joined up responses from organised stakeholders presents a consistent message.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use the Plymouth and South West City Deal as a catalyst for improving the attractiveness of the maritime sector and ports.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Motivate stakeholders to deliver the recommendations of the 2010 ports study.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consider opportunities to improve land transport to the port facilities for all users.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>Allow market forces to decide the future of the airport site – probably leading to the airport site</td>
<td>Safeguard airport site for general aviation airport uses with the precise details of an operation to be set out, costed and tested for viability in a detailed business plan.</td>
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</table>
The preferred approach is the “do maximum” strategy. It is only by providing leadership to take forward improvements in partnership with the local and regional stakeholders that Plymouth will be able to ensure timely delivery to support growth, increase opportunities and improve quality of life. Taking a less involved approach may mean the outcomes take longer to deliver or have a different focus.

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<tr>
<th>Do minimum</th>
<th>Do Something</th>
<th>Do maximum</th>
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<td>being redeveloped for non-airport uses.</td>
<td>Introduce ‘meanwhile uses’ on the site.</td>
<td>Strengthen links to Exeter and Bristol airports and put in place high quality public transport links.</td>
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</table>

**Question 4**

Is this the right approach to take?

**Question 5**

What other approaches are there?
How do we realise the opportunities?

The Peninsula Rail Task Force has produced a detailed plan to deliver the three key improvements set out in the table at the end of this topic paper. This plan is included at the end of this document and demonstrates the work that is needed in the next 17 years.

The city needs to continue to work closely with the Highways Agency / DfT and other partners on the route strategies for A38, A303/A358 and M5 to set outline operational and investment priorities for all routes in the strategic road network for the period April 2015 – March 2021, and give an indication of the priorities beyond March 2021.

Work with stakeholders in the maritime sector to bring forward the recommendations of the 2010 Port of Plymouth Evidence Base Study.

Work with partners to bring forward a proposal for the delivery of the redevelopment of Plymouth rail station.

Lobby central government for funding to deliver improvements to connectivity in the South West peninsula.

Question 6

What else should we be doing?
What happens next?

Any comments received on this topic paper will be considered in the preparation of the Plymouth Plan. You can make comments at www.plymouth.gov.uk/PlymouthPlan or by email plymouthplan@plymouth.gov.uk. Alternatively, please post your comments to:

Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Department
Plymouth City Council
Ballard House
West Hoe Road
Plymouth
PL1 3BJ

The closing date for consultation responses is 25 October 2014.

Evidence Documents

- The Peninsula Rail Task Force 3-POINT Plan for a great South West Peninsula railway, Peninsula Rail Task Force, 2014