

**NEWS RELEASE**

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Marches joins with Mid Wales to launch joint freight vision

Potential benefit to freight industry stands at £149m

A vision for how freight transport across the Marches and Mid Wales could be improved to support economic development and operational efficiency, as well as realise financial benefits worth £149m, was launched today at an event attended by dignitaries in Welshpool.

The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and The Growing Mid Wales Partnership, together with the Welsh Government, Midlands Connect and councils on both sides of the border, jointly commissioned the new strategy. It includes recommendations on how to improve the experience of businesses moving freight within and through the region, whilst enhancing the quality of life for residents near to key freight corridors and reducing environmental impacts. Both rail and road options are included.

If fully implemented, it is anticipated the strategy could provide benefits to operators of heavy goods vehicles (HGV) worth at least £149m. This would be achieved through a series of highway enhancements focused on increased opportunities for safe overtaking; improvements to alleviate bottlenecks; and changes at certain key locations to allow 44 tonne HGVs to operate across the whole of the freight network.

The launch of the strategy marks a high point in an on-going collaboration between the two regions which started in 2016. Vice-Chair of the Marches LEP, Paul Hinkins commented:

“It’s easy to think that the experience of businesses here in the Marches is unique to us, but our neighbours in Mid Wales share many very similar challenges, as well as opportunities.

“When we first examined how the Marches and Mid Wales could work more closely with one another, improved transport links and cross border supply chains were both key considerations. We share several essential road links as well as an important rail infrastructure. It is, therefore, with much anticipation that we’re now here to launch this strategy.

“With a lot of work having gone in to this, we hope to influence the UK and Welsh Governments and look forward to the more efficient movement of freight; reduced costs for businesses and reduced negative impacts to both people and the environment.”

As a collaborative process, the commissioning and development of the strategy has been

managed by a steering group of officers from both sides of the border. Ellen ap Gwynn, Chair of the Growing Mid Wales Partnership, added:

“Whether we’re considering a largely single carriageway road network and its impact on journey times and reliability; the effect of agricultural vehicles on the network; or the high levels of congestion experienced in many of our towns and villages, the picture is very similar on both sides of the border. Simply, good road and rail links are necessary for our businesses now and to support future growth both here in Mid Wales and in the Marches.”

“It, therefore, made perfect sense to take a co-operative approach, consulting our businesses including freight operators, and our local communities, to better understand the shared barriers to economic growth and how we can work together to overcome them.”

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, also commented: *“Ensuring the efficient movement of freight whilst minimising negative impacts on the environment and residents is vital to our economic prosperity and connecting Wales with the world. I am pleased the Welsh Government has been able to co-fund this Freight Strategy and support the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and the Growing Mid Wales Partnership in taking forward this work.*

“The Freight Strategy rightly highlights the importance of the transport network for businesses and I will continue to work to identify opportunities which will build on our aspirations for economic growth.”

The consultation process involved input from a wide range of businesses and local councils via online surveys; business workshops in Ludlow and Newtown; and telephone interviews with key shippers, road hauliers, infrastructure managers and policy-makers.

Chris Rowland of MDS Transmodal, the specialist freight transport consultancy that ran the consultation process and developed of the Freight Strategy, added:

“With both the Marches and Mid Wales experiencing highly dispersed patterns of freight activity; and both relying heavily on a predominantly single carriageway road network, their shared economic and geographic contexts made a cross-border strategy a sensible approach.”

“The involvement of a wide range of key stakeholders makes this a robust and positive vision for the future.”

Alun Jones runs a major road haulage business based in Welshpool. He concludes:

“It is with great pleasure that we welcomed many of the dignitaries to our depot here in Welshpool as we wanted to be involved in this important event. Operating at the coal face of road transport across Wales, the Marches and beyond, we recognise only too well the positive effect that adopting this strategy could have on allowing businesses in the region to grow and become more competitive.”

A full copy of the Marches and Mid Wales Freight Strategy can be found at:
<https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/download/Reports/reports/Marches-and-Mid-Wales-Freight-Strategy.pdf>



Left to right: (1) Councillor Phillip Price, Herefordshire Council (2) Alun Jones of T. Alun Jones Ltd (3) Paul Hinkins, Vice Chair of Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (4) Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn, Chair of Growing Mid Wales Partnership and Leader of Ceredigion County Council (5) Rhodri Griffiths, Welsh Government's Chief Regional Officer for Mid and South West Wales (6) Rosemarie Harris, Vice Chair of Growing Mid Wales Partnership and Leader of Powys County Council.

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About the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership

- The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is driving accelerated economic growth through investment in innovation, higher level skills, housing and business sites across the region. It aims to deliver 70,000 homes and 40,000 jobs by 2031
- The Marches region, which includes Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, is a dynamic business region where entrepreneurs flourish alongside global players. Covering 2,300 sq miles and with a growing population of 666,700, it is home to 29,800 businesses and a £12.3 billion economy
- Bordered by the West Midlands to the east and Wales to the west, the Marches' key centres of population and employment are the city of Hereford and thriving towns of Shrewsbury and Telford. A network of 25 smaller market towns and a large rural area make up the rest of the settlement mix – with the Marches recognised as being one of

the most enterprising regions in the UK

- High profile businesses which have chosen to base operations here include BAE Defence Systems; GKN; Westons Cider; Grainger & Worrall; Stadco; Caterpillar; Müller Dairy UK, Doncasters Aerospace, Denso, Capgemini, Ricoh, Cargill, Heineken, Grocontinental, McConnells, Kerry Ingredients, Special Metals, Kingspan and Makita
- The Marches is also home to centres of excellence and institutions which promote and foster the transfer of knowledge including Harper Adams University and its National Centre for Precision Farming, University Centre Shrewsbury, the University of Wolverhampton campus and e-innovation centre at Priorslee, and Food Enterprise Centre in Shrewsbury
- The designated Enterprise Zone of the Marches LEP is in Hereford, at Skylon Park. It is the only Enterprise Zone in England with a unique defence and security sector focus, drawing on the city's heritage as the home of the SAS
- The LEP area is home to some iconic places of interest. The Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, the Shropshire Hills and the Wye Valley Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Offa's Dyke, the rivers Severn and Wye, and places of national renown including Ludlow and Ross-on-Wye make it a highly popular place to both visit and relocate to
- The Marches has a diverse business base and is recognised for its sector strength in advanced manufacturing and engineering; agri-food and drink; automotive and defence & security
- Business support in the Marches is offered via the Marches Growth Hub, a business-friendly website at www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk and helpline on 0345 6000 727, developed by the LEP
- You can learn more about the Marches LEP at www.marcheslep.org.uk and contact the LEP by emailing enquiries@marcheslep.org.uk

About the Growing Mid Wales Partnership:

- The Growing Mid Wales Partnership is a strong regional partnership comprised of representative bodies from across the private, public and voluntary sector in Mid Wales. It was established in early 2015 working in partnership with the Welsh Government -
http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/cpd/CeredigionStrategicPartnerships_Public/4.12.3%20Growing%20Mid%20Wales_Framework%20for%20Action.pdf
- Our Connectivity and Infrastructure group (TraCC) not only works across the Counties of Ceredigion and Powys, but also with Gwynedd, as this reflects the needs of the wider Mid Wales Area to connect for transportation for economic opportunities
- Accessibility and infrastructure is an issue common to both strategic land use planning and economic development and is seen as a major barrier to business growth. Dramatic improvements to road infrastructure are needed to reduce time and cost; provide a more attractive proposition for companies and benefit staff recruitment. Our English counterparts also view improved connectivity with the Mid Wales region as vital to their local economies. This is supported within the Marches Strategic Transport Corridor Report produced by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership
- Mid Wales has over 14,000 businesses with over 89% of these being micro businesses dominated by the agriculture sector
- Mid Wales is at the centre of Wales and shares a 120-mile border with the Marches to east. The region's key centres of population and employment are Aberystwyth and Newtown with a network of smaller market towns with large rural hinterlands. We have an area of high landscape value offering quality of life, with low levels of recorded crime

and high-quality environment with the Cambrian Mountains, Beacons National Park Snowdonia National Park all nearby. Our environment holds significant assets including water, timber and potential energy resources and 36% of all farmed land in Wales

- The Growing Mid Wales Partnership aims to:
 - Accelerate the Digital Economy by exploiting regional assets in the manufacturing and education sectors as well as the wider development of a knowledge-based economy
 - Advance materials and manufacturing by building on the established manufacturing base within the region and our niche clusters and expertise. We have the significant potential to contribute to the overall success of the Welsh economy and support our regional strategy in a number of fields; key examples include supporting manufacturing excellence in the Severn Valley and fostering the development of downstream services and earth observation technologies highlighted in the Wales Space Sector Strategy
 - Support the development of innovation around existing businesses and commercialisation of the research and innovation excellence at Aberystwyth University, including in plant and animal science, biological, veterinary science, environmental and rural science and defence and security.
- Our tourism sector reflects the region's diverse rural landscapes and coastline where there are opportunities for significant impacts on the regional economy. The national context is expected to see increases in tourism spend by 10% by 2020. We will increase the volume and value of tourism in this region, which has the highest proportion employed in the sector