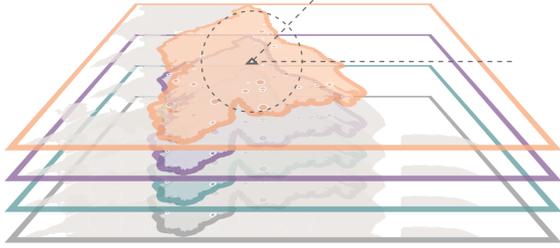


# blueprint for a GREAT NORTH PLAN



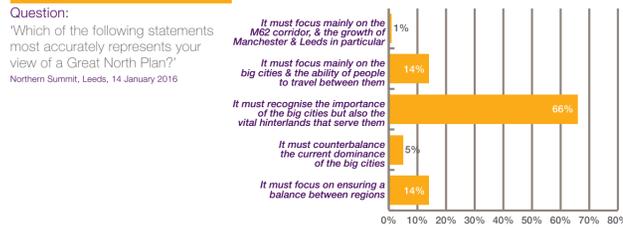
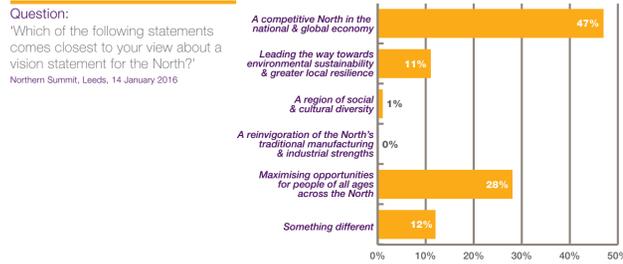
Institute for Public Policy Research

*'Improving connectivity between the cities of the North will not be sufficient to create the northern powerhouse, but is necessary. Transformations in transport connectivity should form part of a broader strategy incorporating improvements in education, workforce training, research and innovation, spatial planning and wider infrastructure investment.'*  
National Infrastructure Commission, *High Speed North*, 2016

## BACKGROUND

In 2015 IPPR North and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) issued a call for evidence, and organised 11 roundtable discussions in six northern cities. We also held a Northern Summit in January 2016, with further plenary debates and interactive voting (see [www.greatnorthplan.com](http://www.greatnorthplan.com)).

Through all of these activities we asked the question, 'Do we need a Great North Plan?'. The response was an overwhelming 'yes' (93 per cent); and, when asked about their more specific attitudes towards the Great North Plan, 58 per cent of respondents said that, 'We need to get on and do it'.



**ABOUT IPPR NORTH**  
IPPR North is IPPR's dedicated thinktank for the north of England. See [www.ippr.org/north](http://www.ippr.org/north).

**ABOUT OUR PARTNER**  
The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is Europe's largest organisation seeking to advance the science and art of town, country and spatial planning for the benefit of the public. See [www.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.rtpi.org.uk).

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WYG is a global project management and technical consultancy. See [www.wyg.com/](http://www.wyg.com/).

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## WHY 'THE NORTH'?

Some commentators have argued that the former government office regions of the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber should be viewed collectively as a single interconnected metro-region – a region with buoyant cities, thriving rural areas and diverse physical, economic and social geographies. In the past two years, this idea has captured the imaginations of politicians and policymakers – not least the chancellor of the exchequer, who has galvanised government behind the concept of a 'northern powerhouse'.



Lord Heseltine speaks at the Northern Summit, 14 January 2016

This has spawned a number of pan-northern initiatives, the most significant of which has been Transport for the North – a new administrative body for transport that will soon gain statutory powers as it advances its Northern Transport Strategy. Central to the narrative about the northern economy is the ambition that it might once again punch above its weight within the global economy.

## 'POWERHOUSE PLUS'

In the course of our Great North Plan discussions, many stakeholders argued that our economic planning processes need to be more joined-up.

Transport for the North has already recognised that planning for transport infrastructure requires a more sophisticated understanding of the northern economy in order to ensure that road and rail connections are connecting the right places in the most effective ways. Its *Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review* (2016 forthcoming) identifies some of the major economic sectors and assets that are vital for the North's future prosperity.

However, beyond this, many have argued that we need plans to cover the North's energy and green infrastructure; our tourist and cultural assets; our population dynamics; and the roles played by those places in the North that sit in-between our big cities.

There is also a sense of unease about the *concept* of the northern powerhouse – not that it isn't an excellent *idea*, but that, unless it is properly owned and directed by and for the North, it risks ultimately going the way of many past government programmes: consigned to the scrapbook of history as ministers change and policy priorities move on. There are also concerns that the economy of the northern powerhouse needs to be a fairer and more sustainable one than that of the powerhouse in the South.

## A BLUEPRINT FOR A GREAT NORTH PLAN

This blueprint is not the Great North Plan itself – although its centrefold spread is illustrative of what part of the Great North Plan could look like. Instead, it represents the best of the ideas of the more than 350 people who have fed into our thinking on the issue so far. It sets out a series of principles to guide how the Plan should be developed; identifies the suite of documents that might together comprise the Great North Plan; suggests the different themes or 'layers' of planning that need to be fitted together through collaborative action involving many stakeholders; and proposes a process for the next steps in moving from blueprint to plan.

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## PRINCIPLES: WHAT SHOULD A GREAT NORTH PLAN BE?

Our Great North Plan consultations made it clear that getting buy-in from diverse stakeholders requires some clear principles for collaborative action. There was broad consensus around the following four pairs of principles about what a Great North Plan should be, and what it should do.

### 1. High-level, strategic and brief...

A plan for an area as big as the North must be large-scale and long-term. It should be clear enough to be distinctive and to gain buy-in and leverage, but too much detail will make it unwieldy and liable to be derailed by minor issues. Brevity will also help to maintain focus and win engagement. Its authors need to work out exactly what *must* contain, and what would be more usefully set out in other, related documents. A key task is to demonstrate why a *regional* approach, and a specifically *northern* view, are needed. The framing of 'the North' must be ambitious: it must set the region in its national and global contexts, and avoid any sense that it is peripheral or isolated.

### ...neither statutory nor bland

While there is little enthusiasm for a statutory plan, the Great North Plan must have sufficient traction to wield influence and drive change. To achieve this it needs to be recognised alongside the National Planning Policy Framework, and to have a bearing on other statutory plans. It should not contain detail on a particular theme or area that can be more appropriately dealt with at a smaller geographical scale – issues such as housing allocation and land-use, for example. Finally, the demands of brevity and consensus must not lead to a bland document, and it must not descend into a name-checking exercise for every town in the North.

### 2. An ambitious, long-term vision...

A Great North Plan must present a vision that is distinctive and ambitious – one that demonstrates faith in its own potential to make a difference and improve lives in the North. If it simply endorses developments that would have occurred anyway, or articulates only piecemeal and modest goals, an opportunity will be lost. The timeframe of a Great North Plan should reflect this ambition. A 'horizon' of 2050 has much to recommend it: it would allow time for genuinely transformative change across a range of areas, and also for the shifts in culture, attitude and engagement that will support different ways of working and collaborating. Given current developments in policy towards the northern powerhouse, in devolution more generally, and in the global economy, the next 35 years offer a unique opportunity for the North.

### ...but supported by clear actions in the short and medium terms

However, a long-term vision should be supported by a series of clear, concrete steps to be taken in the short and medium terms. These will demonstrate the achievability of the overall vision: as well as building buy-in, they will help to maintain momentum, and give regular milestones against which progress can be measured. Some of these interim actions may mirror developments elsewhere – such as the establishment and evolution of mayoralities, and of ways for mayors to work together. Regular communication – through annual or biannual Northern Summits, for example – will ensure that progress is communicated and that stakeholders have an opportunity to feed back in.

### 3. Evolutionary and collaborative...

To remain effective throughout its lifespan, a Great North Plan must accommodate regular updates. It should be conceived and constructed in a way that enables it to 'survive' changes of national and local government, and of policies across its thematic range. Its evolution must be active rather than reactive: the Plan's goal should be to produce change, and so should encapsulate ways to recognise and build upon ongoing developments.

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This evolution must be informed by a strong and regularly updated evidence base, so that changes and their impacts can be identified and measured.

A Great North Plan must engage a wide range of actors in the North – including mayors, combined authorities, local enterprise partnerships and other business and voluntary groups – who will need to work together and accept compromise. This in turn demands effective and impartial leadership. The Great North Plan itself should include an outline framework for supporting collaboration and resolving areas of conflict: effective collaboration, both formal and informal, will not only be an important starting point, but will be the crux of the Plan's success throughout its lifespan.

### ...but a framework and reference point for all

A Great North Plan should add value to existing documents (such as local plans, strategic economic plans and city-regions' strategic spatial frameworks) by, for example: identifying common themes in plans for different geographies or different policy themes; co-ordinating potentially complementary or conflicting visions for neighbouring or connected areas; and reducing duplication or incompatibilities. It must 'join up' other initiatives so that they can eventually amount to more than the sum of their parts.

### 4. Inclusive, speaking to all places across the North...

A genuinely pan-northern approach must recognise the *complementary* contributions of different parts of the region, and an acceptance of the need for compromise so that these contributions can be maximised and combined as effectively as possible. An approach focussed only on competition would risk losing out on the advantages of combining strengths and working together. The major cities will play an important role, but cannot be treated as islands: the contributions and needs of smaller cities, towns and rural areas must also be considered (not least because they 'add value' to cities). The Plan's narrative should identify the distinctive strengths of and contributions made by different places, and the links between them.

### ...but asymmetrical in its treatment of places and themes

At the same time, where specific locations are named their inclusion in the Plan must have a clear and well-supported rationale: name-checking alone is not helpful and must be resisted. The content of the Great North Plan should be driven by the relative importance of different places and themes to its vision. This may lead to some apparent asymmetries in the extent to which different places and themes are discussed, and the way in which they are handled.

### The 'P-word' ('plan')

*The Great North Plan consultations have generated a lot of discussion about the word 'plan'. Some love it, some hate it, and many sit in-between. In this blueprint, we value planning broadly as a creative and positive opportunity to shape the places where people will want to live, work, invest and relax. We think that developing a plan for the North is part of a wider process of reducing risk for investors and signposting new investment opportunities.*

*We have stuck with the word 'plan' for the simple reason that it strikes a chord with the public. In a debate that so often uses jargon that excludes and disempowers the majority, it is good to use a word that does what it says on the tin. We mean 'planning' in a very distinctive sense: one that privileges vision, collaboration and flexibility in its efforts to respond to ever-greater social complexity, rapid technological and economic innovation, and the global challenge of climate change.*

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## THE PURPOSES OF THE GREAT NORTH PLAN

The Great North Plan has four main 'purposes', which might be best set out as a suite of four interlinking documents.

1. A vision for the North.
2. A set of collaborative strategies.
3. A prospectus for investment.
4. A programme for action.

### 1. A vision for the North

The Great North Plan must have a clear, strategic and long-term vision of what the North can become, and how northern actors can own and drive change towards this vision. The vision should be stated in accessible and easily understood terms, and should appeal to, and be capable of winning buy-in from, both key stakeholders and the general public. It should establish the distinctiveness of the North, and indicate the pathways by which vision can be made reality.

In the course of our consultations, stakeholders suggested three interrelated aspects of this vision that will need to be held in tension.

- **Economic growth is fundamental to improving prospects for the whole of the north of England.** A vision for growth must challenge and change established views of the North and its position within the national and global economy, and will be grounded in comprehensive analyses and forecasts of economic trends, strengths, weaknesses and threats. However, the approach to growth should itself be distinctively 'northern'.
- **There was a strong feeling that the kind of growth – and the purpose of that growth – should also be distinctive.** There is real enthusiasm for the idea of 'good growth' that is distributed more equitably across places and communities, and which has clear benefits for social and community wellbeing as well as conventional economic indicators. In short, the North needs growth that improves the lives of all who live and work here.
- **Environmental sustainability and resilience are key elements of a practical long-term vision.** Growth should take longer-term impacts on both people and the environment, in terms of both local issues (such as flooding) and global concerns about climate and carbon, into account. With such rich natural assets in the North, this is a further area for distinctiveness: a 'sustainable North' could offer alternatives to an increasingly 'unsustainable' London and south east.

### 2. A set of collaborative strategies

The Great North Plan must encourage vertical and horizontal co-ordination between national and local policymakers, delivery agencies and businesses. Some of these will be groups 'traditionally' considered part of the planning process, while others will be brought in as a result of the wider remit of the Great North Plan.

We have identified four broad areas for strategic collaboration and mapping.

- **Economy:** Building on the Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review, further work must elaborate on the primary and enabling capabilities it identifies, including innovation hubs, supply chains, infrastructure sites and plans.
- **Transport and connectivity:** The current Northern Transport Strategy and the work of Transport for the North offer a starting point and model for pan-northern collaboration.
- **Environment:** The North's natural environment affords it some vital 'green' infrastructure (energy, water, waste and so on), but we need a compelling strategy for making the most of the associated opportunities. This strategy must also consider areas of flood-risk and wider environmental concern.
- **Population and place:** A strategy in this area must set out some of the key places within the North, including: current and future population growth hubs; labour market geographies; and the distinctive attributes of particular cities, towns and areas within the North. This might also cover quality-of-life issues such as culture, recreation and tourism.

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Each of these themes could be sub-divided into more detailed planning processes, as in the Northern Transport Strategy; each of these will require supporting processes that spell out different levels of technicality and specificity. However, it is important that strategies within each theme or sub-theme are able to identify their high-level priorities and overall direction, and that they cohere both with the wider vision and with other plans.

Elements of these different co-ordinated plans could also be combined to provide a broadly defined 'northern infrastructure plan' that includes scenario modelling and indicative costs and benefits. These different 'layers' of planning could also be set out in a series of layered maps – a possibility illustrated in the centrefold spread of this publication.

### 3. A prospectus for investment

The Great North Plan should include the first pan-northern 'prospectus' for investment, in which the economic, social and environmental opportunities that will arise from the vision and co-ordinated planning described above are presented to potential investors. A Great North Plan offers a unique opportunity to put forward a dynamic and timely representation of the North and its 'offer'.

This element of the Plan should aim to attract investment that will help the North to achieve its geographical and social vision, while also providing clear benefits to investors. The prospectus should be straightforward, targeted and attractive, and its authors can learn from successful and less-than-successful examples of regional marketing from the UK and elsewhere. Marketing and inward investment experts will have a key role to play in this work, which will be highly visual: maps, photographs and visualisations will all add to its impact, and an online version will be essential. The prospectus should be updated regularly to reflect ongoing investment and the emergence of new opportunities: a two-year review period would allow it to remain up-to-date and effective.

### 4. A programme of action

Finally the Great North Plan must be supported by a clear action plan that brings together a wide range of stakeholders and designated resources, with clear workstreams, leadership, and timeframes for the completion of actions; it must also set out clear accountability mechanisms. The action plan itself will also need to be regularly updated – for example, through annual reviews and a three-year cycle of revisions.

The action plan should include baselines, drawn from a strong evidence base, and specific milestones for development. These should be overseen by a strategic planning group, the selection process for which should prioritise democratic accountability and visibility. An important element of the action plan will be regular updates to the wider northern community, both through events (such as a regular Northern Summit) and through other channels, including digital and social media.

### Case studies

*There are opportunities to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of previous approaches to regional planning in the UK and further afield. Our consultation found no appetite for a return to regional spatial strategies, but many recognised that some aspects of the Northern Way initiative remained relevant to existing work. There may also be valuable learning opportunities arising from the Scottish experience, and internationally: there are numerous examples of effective cross-thematic planning for very large, complex, polycentric regions in places like the South Netherlands and Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France. However, rather than 'lifting' a model from elsewhere, the Great North Plan should use the best features of professional planning and current practice in the field to forge an effective model that meets the specific needs of the north of England.*

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## HOW TO TAKE FORWARD THE GREAT NORTH PLAN

Developing a plan of such scale and complexity requires commitment, capacity and long-term collaboration. Our consultation, the Northern Summit event and this blueprint document itself are little more than first steps that process. However, if the Plan is to move forward, some concrete next steps, and clear milestones against which progress can be measured, need to be identified.

### Seven workstreams

We propose establishing the following seven broad workstreams, each of which could be subdivided as necessary.

1. A vision for the North that sets the broad direction for the North and its economy up to 2050.

The four broad collaborative strategies:

2. A northern transport strategy (which is already being undertaken under the auspices of Transport for the North [TfN]).
3. A northern economic strategy to build upon the work that has been undertaken as part of the Northern Independent Economic Review, around the prime and enabling capabilities that it proposes.
4. A northern natural assets strategy that incorporates a northern energy plan, an environmental strategy, and rural and recreational assets.
5. A people and place strategy – an analysis of the current and future demographic dynamics of the North, including detailed consideration of the roles of different cities, towns and rural areas.

Together, these workstreams need to feed into:

6. A prospectus for the North, which draws from each of the above workstreams, but is presented as an investment plan for national and international investors.

And finally, one further workstream is needed:

7. A governance and delivery workstream, to oversee the development and implementation of the overall plan, and to consider the governance and delivery arrangements required to make the Great North Plan successful and accountable.

With the exception of the Northern Transport Strategy, work on which is well under way, each workstream will need to be developed by a 'taskforce', headed up by a lead organisation but carried out through a collaborative partnership approach. Each workstream will need to move through a series of phases: from initial concept, to strategic plan, to technical specification and an action plan.

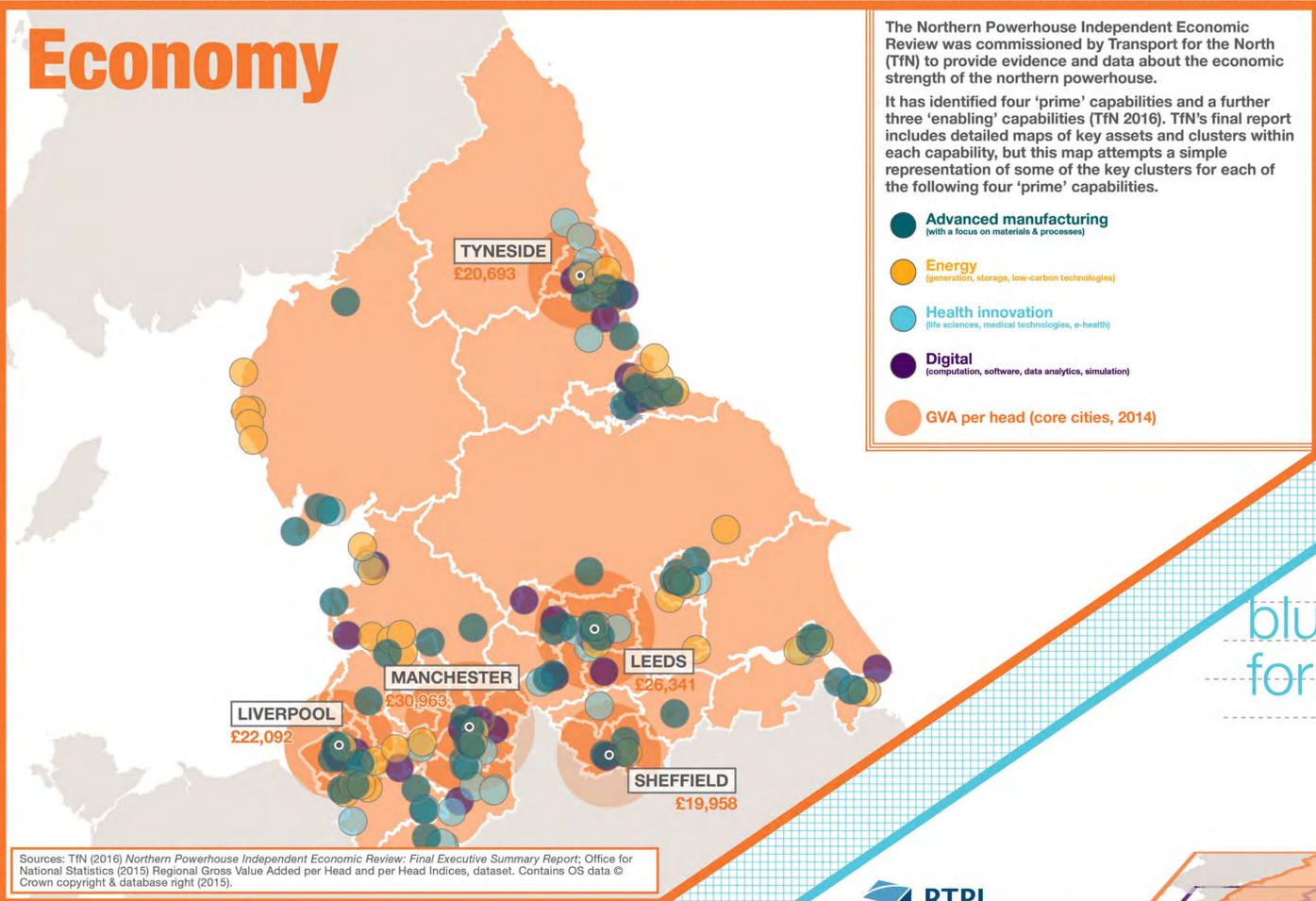
### Next steps

We do not believe that producing a Great North Plan must be a long or complicated process. The key issue is the will to do it. In order to move the process forward we make the following three recommendations.

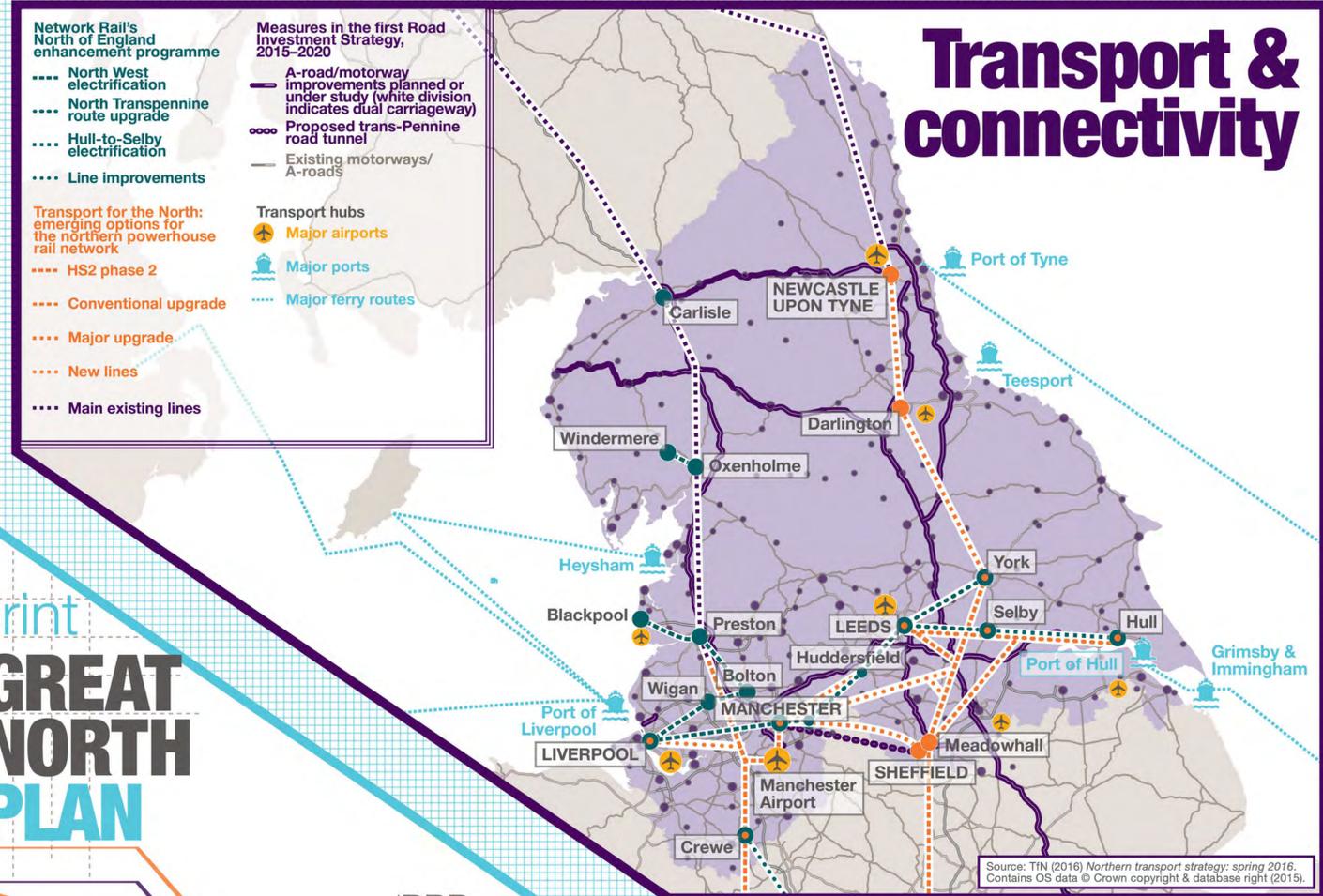
1. The five Core Cities in the north of England – working closely with TfN, Business North and central government – should identify and communicate a clear and inclusive process for much broader engagement in strategic planning for the northern powerhouse, along the lines of this blueprint. This should include engagement with businesses, universities, their wider city-regions, and the many smaller towns and cities that lie outside city-region boundaries.
2. As part of this process, a taskforce should be established for each of the seven workstreams identified above, other than transport. In the case of transport, TfN should clarify and communicate its processes for engaging wider stakeholders.
3. Recognising that to date the Great North Plan has been a business-led initiative, businesses in the north of England should continue to support its development by pledging time, expertise and resources in relation to the different workstreams identified above. This can be done via the Great North Plan website ([www.greatnorthplan.com](http://www.greatnorthplan.com)), by emailing [GreatNorthPlan@ippr.org](mailto:GreatNorthPlan@ippr.org), or by completing a Great North Plan pledge card.

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# Economy



# Transport & connectivity

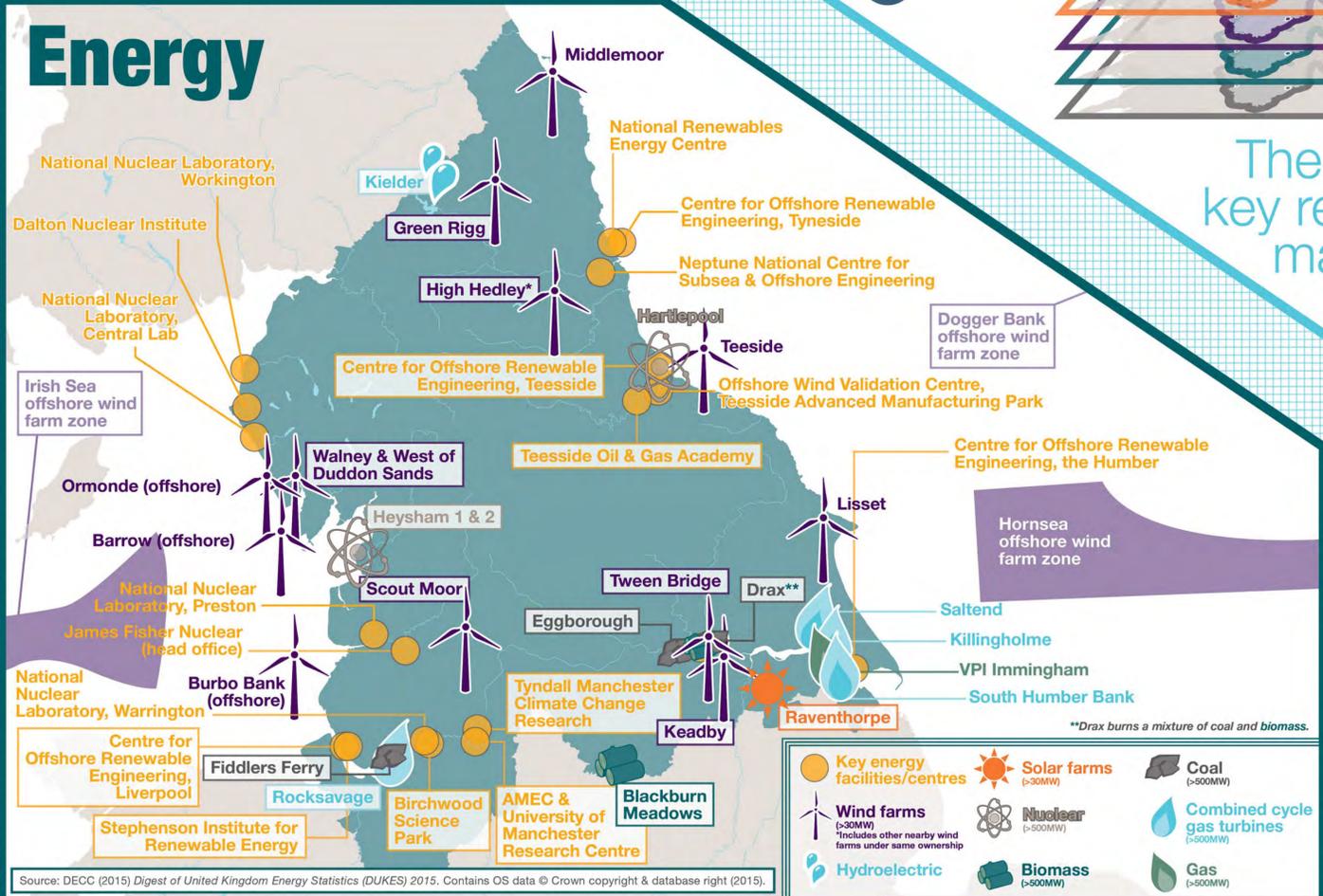


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## The North's key resources, mapped



# Population & place

