

# Connecting regions

**Maria Machancoses, programme director of Midlands Connect and director at Midlands Engine, discusses the reasons why investment in transport is sorely needed**



**“The Midlands is strategically important to the UK”**

**Maria Machancoses**

**Towards the end of September tracking firm RAM Tracking released information finding that drivers on some motorways across the UK are only able to reach an average of 25mph. Add this to our own work with businesses which found that 60 per cent of Midlands companies report that conditions on major road networks cause them problems, and this will only serve to fuel what the highways industry has long known: the highways across the UK need improvements if the UK is to reach its full potential.**

At Midlands Connect we are pushing for just that, we know that with the correct investment, the Midlands and the UK can get people and goods to places faster, in turn boosting job prospects, the economy and the UK's place in the global market.

Earlier this year Midlands Connect launched the Picking up the Pace report – the first step in a long-term plan to not only unlock growth and jobs, but also tackle the significant transport challenges that are already impacting on the competitiveness of both the Midlands and the wider UK. This project has already received high profile support from people such as the Prime Minister Theresa May and the Transport Secretary Chris Grayling, but it needs the support of UK businesses to reach a successful conclusion.

## Feeling the pinch

The highways industry has long felt the pinch on public spending. The need for road improvements is urgent, the cost to repair the potholes alone runs into millions, and Midlands Connect is pushing to make those improvements a reality – not just to loosen congestion on our roads, but for the economic benefits that will be created as a result.

The Picking up the Pace research highlighted that with strategic investments in road, rail, aviation and other communication networks, the region and the wider UK can truly prosper. This transport investment has the potential to create 300,000 new jobs, increase productivity by £1.1bn and save businesses £0.5bn per annum in agglomeration costs – no small feat. As far as we at Midlands Connect are concerned, and the 42 per cent of Midlands logistics businesses which

have experienced delayed deliveries as a result of the road network, it is vital that we improve the connections between small, medium and large sized businesses to get their products, ideas and talented people to where they need to be faster.

Businesses tell us they want to be better connected and it's important to remember that even businesses which thrive through online purchases cannot succeed without physical transport connections.

## Working with Highways England

Since the launch of Midlands Connect in October last year we have been working closely with Highways England to identify schemes that can unlock economic growth and network capacity. One such scheme is the Midlands Motorways Hub – a project designed to tackle the national road network bottlenecks which occur in the Midlands, to free up transport routes across the UK. To achieve this new ideas and traditional methods must be considered, including investigating strategies to make the most of what we already have, such as smart motorways, or simply investing more to expand the roads or build new ones that shorten journey times.

However, the importance of improving the connections is an issue not solely confined to the Midlands or the speed of getting from A to B.

If we look at the rest of the world's successful economies, it is clear they are not leaning on one single superpowered capital, but a network of strong, well-connected regions.

The Midlands is strategically important to the UK; it already generates £240 billion a year towards the national economy and is at the epicentre of the nation's transport network – so what benefits the Midlands benefits Britain.

As a thoroughfare for UK transport, the Midlands needs to create better connections for small businesses and supply chains, linking them with major companies and enabling them to flourish. With the support of the highways industry, Midlands Connect can help deliver more efficient roads and as a result more jobs, better exports, an improved quality of life across the UK and a stronger position in the global economy. ●

For more information visit [www.midlandsconnect.uk](http://www.midlandsconnect.uk).