

New Lancashire transport body to receive £35m funding

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Tim Ashton

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A new transport body for Lancashire is to be handed £35m over four years to spend on major road and railway schemes.

The county's three highway authorities, Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council have joined forces to create Transport for Lancashire.

The chief executives of each council met with the chairman and vice-chairman of Lancashire Enterprise Partnership to form a new committee of its private sector led board.

Transport for Lancashire will receive the devolved funding pot from the Department for Transport from 2015/16.

In the meantime an estimated £130,000 is to be given to the local transport body (LTB) to cover its set-up costs.

County Coun Tim Ashton, Lancashire County Council's highways and transport chief, said the LTB could become a key player in shaping the region's economic growth.

He said: "It's very much about economic development, creating jobs and retaining job skills in Lancashire. "We'll be looking to link people from where they live to where they work, getting resources to factories and moving materials around the county.

"This body may well turn out to be a lot more powerful than just that in the future.

"My ambition is that when the Government looks at us here in Lancashire, it sees we are singing from the same hymn sheet and have the same priorities.

"It's about having a strong voice for the local area to get funding from the Government and Europe."

Coun Ashton said he would lobby ministers on behalf of the LTB to try and access greater funding.

But he was unable to confirm at this stage what projects in Central Lancashire, such as the long-awaited Penwortham bypass work, could potentially benefit from this cash.

He said: "We've got £35m over four years but I don't think that is a lot of money in transport terms.

"I'm hoping to meet ministers later this month to discuss some of the schemes.

"The one who has the best plan and shouts the loudest will get the most money and that's what I intend to do.

"It could be new roads, it could be new rail links."

"Blackpool wants to expand its tramway, Blackburn might want to expand their rail, and there are all sorts in our plans for Central Lancashire."