

## Is 'Manchester City-Region' what's next ?

Europe's competitiveness depends on its knowledge economy and this depends upon the great cities which are the crucible for innovation and productivity.

Successful cities have democratic leadership and structures based on the scale of a modern metropolis. They also have the tax resources and legal muscle to deliver what they promise. Think of London and the huge boosts to efficiency and quality of life achieved by Mayors Ken and Boris since 2002 through the congestion zone, Oystercard, bike promotion and bus improvements.

Manchester with its fragmented local governments is at a collective disadvantage. Local politicians know it. However reluctantly they've been working for the past six years they on a project for collaboration - the 'city-region'. It's been a long saga. Central government offered incentives then changed the rules, national political parties blew hot and cold, Macclesfield, Congleton and Warrington were in then out, Stockport and Bury pulled out then came back in. Business leaders and opinionative academic consultants played cameo roles.

At last it came together late in March 2010 in an agreement between the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester to set up a 'combined authority' for transport, planning, housing and skills. The target date, depending on election outcomes and Parliamentary approval, is April 1st 2011. It's weak, it's conditional, but it's a beginning.

David Ottewell of *Manchester Evening News* is following this story closely. You can follow him day by day through the newspaper, the website, his blog, or tweets.

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