

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Rd
Westminster
London
SW1P 4DR

By Email: Transport.Secretary@dft.gov.uk

23 December 2020

Dear Secretary of State

We welcome the development work that your Department has undertaken for major rail infrastructure proposals in Yorkshire. We collectively saw that as essential to address decades of underinvestment in the North of England, and an essential strategic part of 'levelling up'. Therefore, we feel we have to write to show how extremely disappointed we are in the National Infrastructure Commission's Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North and that we strongly oppose its conclusions.

Fundamentally, while it is called a Rail Needs Assessment report, as Leaders, we don't recognise this as an assessment of what the North needs from rail. We feel that it fails to sufficiently address the economic consequences of the rail projects for our region and does not provide a holistic picture of how rail investment can meet our objectives.

While the report acknowledges the importance of rail investment and further devolution, we are more disappointed and frustrated because:

- Once again, we are being pushed to make a choice between Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and HS2 East, when both projects are vital for economic growth, recovery, the 'levelling up' agenda and development of skills and training. While investment for the further developed projects of HS2 Phase 1, Phase 2a and Crossrail are protected, both the North and Eastern authorities are being asked to fight for the scraps.
- HS2 East connects 13 million people and half of the core cities of England into a strategic economic corridor and the report completely underestimates the importance of the regional links between the city regions of Leeds, Sheffield, the East Midlands and the West Midlands.
- The approach and methodology used in the report is inconsistent and fundamentally flawed and completely misrepresents the geography and economy of the Leeds City region. For example, it ignores our HS2 Growth Strategy which we developed with the Government for several years and completely downplays the benefits of HS2 East to the country and to our region with onward connections to other West Yorkshire towns and cities. HS2 East regions have ambitious growth strategies that will deliver in excess of 150,000 additional jobs, based around the promise of 21st century infrastructure and the transformative change it will bring.

- The economic analysis is based on assumptions which bias investment towards the wealthiest parts of the country – flaws which the government itself recognised in its recent reform of the Green Book. Their findings are based on a top-down economic model that gives too little weight to HS2’s core justification to reduce the profound inequalities between the regions of the UK. The travel to work area analysis completely misrepresents the region and in addition the Transpennine Route Upgrade is considered ‘long distance’ yet NPR is not.
- None of the scenarios deliver NPR in full, with a new line between Leeds, Bradford and Manchester, even where prioritising regional links is considered and fall short of the stated ambitions of northern leaders as set out in the preferred NPR network. This will not allow the North to function as a single economy, constraining productivity, jobs growth and regeneration.
- At present less than 10,000 people are within a 60 minute journey to four or more of our largest economic centres. However once NPR has been delivered this will rise to 1.3 million people. This could support an increase in productivity of up to 2%. A city centre NPR station could help unlock £14.6bn to Bradford’s economy, up to 14,250 additional Bradford jobs and 8,500 additional housing units.
- The proposed packages are nowhere near ambitious enough to ‘build back better’, transition the economy towards net zero carbon or achieve the ‘levelling -up’ agenda set out by the Government.
- While Leeds is the main bottleneck of the rail network and suffers from the worst reliability in the North, which constrains growth, investment at Leeds and its approaches are not recognised or prioritised in the report. This impacts the rest of the region’s connectivity and without additional new capacity, we will continue to have to make choices that impact local and regional services.
- The indecision on HS2 East will significantly undermine business confidence and cause significant development blight around Leeds station for years. From our extensive work on HS2 East over many years, we know that to get other schemes to the same level of maturity will take up to ten more years of planning for new line elements. Time that we can ill afford to waste and at the same time leave prime HS2 sites in a state of limbo.
- The report takes no account of the severe capacity constraints that exist on the approaches to Leeds and the very significant land assembly challenges that would be faced once meaningful design work was undertaken.

The Government has a choice to make, it can make a choice to tackle climate change, to unlock economic growth, to bridge the productivity gaps and to level up. Or the Government can once again leave our region and other authorities in the North behind. We now call on the government to:

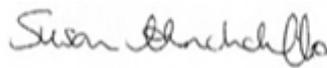
- ***increase the fiscal funding envelop*** by real investment in rail, skills and training.

- **provide certainty on rail investment** in the short term, medium and the long terms to restore businesses confidence. These include Leeds capacity improvements (station and track), Transpennine Route Upgrade, electrification, and the full Northern Powerhouse Rail with a new line between Leeds, Bradford city centre and Manchester.
- **provide certainty on the future of HS2 East which is currently paused** and honour its commitment to deliver the eastern leg of HS2 in full and do so on the same timescale as the western leg. If a clear decision is made, enabling works could start in 2024 and before the next general election.
- **break the cycle of promises** followed by downgrade or cancellation when it comes to transport investment in the North.

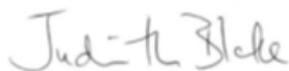
Ultimately it is for the Government to draw up the Integrated Rail Plan and to decide on the appropriate level of investment in rail. We look forward to hearing your plan and seeing some real action.

We request an urgent meeting to discuss.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe
Chair, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Leader, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council



Cllr Judith Blake CBE
Transport Lead, West Yorkshire Combined
Authority Leader, Leeds City Council