

First phase of HS2 set to get the go ahead

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The Prime Minister is expected to give HS2's first phase the green light today.

Boris Johnson is set to back the London to Birmingham section of the line.

Once complete and operational, the £100 billion project is expected to carry over 300,000 passengers – around 100 million a year.

The city centres of London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds will be connected by 345 miles of new high-speed railway track.

RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: "This Government has dithered over this decision for far too long which has meant uncertainty and delays to this vital rail project.

"Now that they are on the point of giving the go-ahead the Government and HS2 must take steps to ensure that jobs on the project are directly-employed, with union agreements, a safe workplace, and without the scourge of blacklisting.

"While we await the details of the full package it is essential that the Government guarantees that the Northern route of HS2 is not downgraded and commit to investing in an affordable, accessible and publicly owned railway fit for the 21st Century."

Supporters of the project say it will improve journey times between London and the north of England, create jobs and rebalance the UK's economy.

However, the project has been beset by delays and faced mounting concerns over the exact route of the line and the impact. The estimated cost of the project has risen from £56 billion five years ago to over £100 billion.

Andy McDonald MP, Labour's Shadow Transport Secretary, commenting ahead of the government's expected announcement on HS2, said: "HS2 has been appallingly mismanaged by the Conservative party, which has failed to deliver a single major infrastructure project on time or within budget.

"If HS2 is going to get back on track, the project has to be integrated with Crossrail for the North, it needs to be managed as part of an advanced rail network, and it must eventually extend into Scotland so that we remove the need for domestic flights.

"The government must also commit to running HS2 services under public ownership. That way it is the UK public – not private or overseas state-owned companies – who will see a return on this investment."

We'll keep you updated on any announcements and reaction.