

Budget 2020: The calls from railway organisations

March 10, 2020



The first Budget of Boris Johnson's majority government is revealed on Wednesday with changes to tax, pensions and social care among the issues set to be covered.

But ahead of newly-appointed chancellor Rishi Sunak's financial statement, what will it mean for the railways? It comes just weeks after HS2 and Northern Rail announcements and at a time of record investment.

Below is what some of the transport organisations across the country are calling for from the Budget.

Setting out a dedicated Northern Budget

Northern leaders are urging the Chancellor to reform the way funding decisions are made and provide a dedicated 'Northern Budget' so they can provide significantly enhanced opportunities for the region's people and businesses.

Among the calls includes:

- Commitment to build the £39 billion Northern Powerhouse Rail network in full by 2040.
- Commitment for a £7 billion Northern Infrastructure Pipeline of road and rail projects in the early 2020s.
- Commitment of £1 billion for Transport for TfN over the next three years so it can deliver on this vision.

Barry White, Chief Executive at Transport for the North, said: “Our work clearly shows that alternative approaches are not only viable but offer a transformational view of infrastructure investment that would enable the ‘levelling up’ of our region.

“We believe we’re on the path to devolution, and that by setting out a dedicated Northern Budget the Chancellor can empower the North to make the most of our ambitions.”

Increased investment in the South East to help ‘level up’ the UK economy

Transport for the South East has penned an open message to the Chancellor calling for increased infrastructure investment to help drive economic growth. In the letter it says the transport network is operating beyond capacity and can’t sustain ongoing growth with rail travel often unreliable.

Councillor Keith Glazier, chair of Transport for the South East, said: “The South East contributes more to the national economy than any region outside London and is our country’s main international gateway for people and goods.

“That’s why we need to see increased investment in our transport infrastructure, growing the economy and creating jobs here in the South East and supporting the investment already taking place in other parts of the country.”

Five crunch points to ‘levelling up’ the UK rail network

The Railway Industry Association has highlighted five ‘crunch’ points that could act as a barrier to ‘levelling up’ the rail network, ahead of the Budget.

These crunch points, all of which will take place over 2020 to 2024, include:

- ‘Boom and bust’ in renewals.
- A lack of ‘shovel-ready’ enhancements and – whilst acknowledging the Prime Ministerial statement of support for HS2 on 11 February – continuing uncertainty around major projects.
- Volatility in the rolling stock market, and a possible hiatus in decision-making whilst the Williams Rail Review is implemented;
- The need to increase rail electrification, and promote a range of clean traction modes.
- A significant ramp up in digitalisation in 2024.

Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of the RIA, said: “The coming few years will be of critical importance to the new Government, but they will also be pivotal for the rail industry. If we get this right, it could be a ‘golden age for rail’.

“We urge the Chancellor in his Budget, and with the impending publication of the Government’s National Infrastructure Strategy, to work with the railway industry to overcome these crunch points, so we can deliver greater capacity and connectivity on the UK rail network, with all the increased economic growth, investment and jobs this will bring.”

Spearhead an infrastructure revolution

Midlands Connect has called on Government to commit to Midlands Engine Rail, A £3.5 billion package of upgrades with the potential to add 736 services to the rail network each day.

Among its priorities for the Government includes:

- Fund Midlands Engine Rail, including flagship scheme the Midlands Rail Hub, to ensure full integration with HS2
- Invest in a smart ticketing platform to develop Midlands-wide contactless ticket payments on public transport
- Commit to a fair share of funding for the Midlands’ Major Road Network
- Accelerate plans for a multi modal transport study into enhancing the Trans Midlands Trade Corridor

Maria Machancoses, director of Midlands Connect, said: “Government must deliver on its promise of an infrastructure revolution and repay voters across the Midlands that were so pivotal to its election success. Creating a transport network fit for the future will spearhead prosperity, productivity and opportunity for decades to come.”

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