

# HS2 East: Government urged to help regions rebound by clearing the way for HS2 to build a better, faster, greener rail network in Midlands and North

July 6, 2020



Political leaders in the Midlands and the North are demanding an early start to HS2 as new research shows the eastern leg of the line could create up to 150,000 jobs.

They are pressing Prime Minister Boris Johnson to back his pledge to 'build better, faster, greener' by clearing the way for Phase 2b east of the high-speed network to begin ahead of schedule as they seek to revive regional economies in the wake of COVID-19.

New figures show that the area linking Leeds and the East Midlands has seen a £58bn shortfall in infrastructure funding over the past decade when compared to Greater London.

Leaders in Leeds and Nottinghamshire also say their economies are missing out on billions in potential every year because they struggle with unreliable and overcrowded trains and communities cut off from

good transport links.

The Labour leader of Leeds City Council, Councillor Judith Blake, and the Conservative leader of Nottinghamshire County Council, Councillor Kay Cutts MBE, have joined forces to demand that government enables work to start early on Phase 2b of the high-speed line.

In a letter to 10 Downing Street, they say early investment in new infrastructure is critical to government achieving the goals implied by its levelling up agenda.

Councillor Blake said: "Making more of the economic potential of the UK's regions is going to be critical to the nation's future growth as we seek to both recover from the impact of COVID-19 and confront the challenges of the future.

"But it will not be possible if we continue to rely on failing rail infrastructure which was built more than a century ago. We now need government to reverse historic under-spending and unleash the economic capacity of city regions like Leeds and counties like Nottinghamshire."

Councillor Cutts added: "The Prime Minister has quite rightly identified infrastructure as a key mechanism for levelling up the country.

"Our strategy goes further than high-speed trains. We have developed detailed plans to make sure the benefits of HS2 extend to people at community level. So this is our route to future prosperity for everyone and the sooner we start building the better."

Research commissioned by the councils forms part of their submission to the National Infrastructure Commission's Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North. It says that:

- The Eastern Leg is home to 13 million people and around 6m jobs, equating to 20% of the UK – bigger than the combined size of the West Midlands and North West, and larger than the economy of Denmark.
- Though the area covered by HS2 Phase 2b East is bigger than Greater London, it has received £58bn less transport investment over the past 10 years – enough to have built the Eastern Leg and other vital rail projects.
- Demand forecasts show any additional capacity on the existing East Coast Mainline would be full by the time it was built.
- 14% of the Eastern Leg area's working population is in transport poverty, with a lack of affordable transport to jobs.
- Without HS2, choked transport would see people across the area miss out on tens of thousands of jobs and billions of pounds in economic growth.
- With HS2, the Eastern Leg area will deliver an additional 150,000 jobs and billions more in productivity.

Councillor Cutts said: “Improved connectivity is going to bring people and businesses closer together so that those living in towns as well as cities can get access to good jobs. It is also going to help us deliver more training, more homes and more business developments.

“If we follow through on these plans there is potential to bring an additional 74,000 jobs to the East Midlands alone. For the sake of our communities, we need to get on and level-up.”

Councillor Blake added: “If this area had received the same levels of transport investment as Greater London, we would already have been able to deliver the Eastern Leg, and would have begun Northern Powerhouse Rail and the Trans Pennine Upgrade. So our communities and businesses would already be enjoying the benefits.

“The case for the Eastern Leg is compelling, with a far higher return than other sections. We cannot afford to delay this investment: the sooner we start, the sooner people will benefit and the economy will grow.”

The two leaders have also told Boris Johnson they are confident that connecting their regions to a new high-speed network would turbocharge his levelling-up agenda by unleashing a new era of growth.

They have developed comprehensive plans for a web of new connections alongside HS2 which would help overcome transport poverty and expand the labour market – tackling some of the labour supply problems that have constrained business growth in the past.

These plans include combining HS2 with Northern Powerhouse Rail and Midlands Engine Rail, integrating all three with existing local networks.

The new connections will be made possible partly by moving inter-city trains on to the new HS2 line, creating room for new local and regional services on existing tracks. But there are also plans to join the dots between different modes of travel so that transport services feed into each other.

Experts also warn that without a means of shifting away from mass car usage, the UK will not hit its climate change targets.

Their report says that while rail demand across Britain has doubled over the last 20 years, 72% of commuting in the HS2 Eastern Leg area is still by car, only 3.5% by rail. By contrast, 40% of London commuting is by rail and only 30% by car.

On current funding estimates for phases 1, 2a and 2b of HS2, the high-speed network would need to deliver an additional 64,000 jobs to pay back the capital expenditure. The report says this is only 15% of the jobs targeted around the country as a result of HS2, which means that it could achieve a benefit-to-cost ratio as high as 8.5 if those targets are met.

The report, carried out by the consultancy Volterra Partners, also says that life expectancy on the eastern leg is lower than the UK average, with good transport links seen as a foundation for people accessing better opportunities and improving measures of health and wellbeing.

The push to bring HS2 East forwards is being supported by key regional business groups.

Sandy Needham, CEO, West & North Yorkshire Chamber, said: “We firmly believe that HS2 is essential to assist the future growth and advancement of the Northern economy. It will help reduce the disparity between north and south, improve connectivity and enhance rail capacity on the network. HS2 should be seen as an investment in the country’s future prospects and ambitions.

“The North presents a huge opportunity to contribute to the success of the UK and we believe, in a post-Covid world, it is critical to the country that all parts are able to fulfil their potential. We can only do that, however, if we are given the tools. Investment in our rail infrastructure is fundamental to that. Ensuring HS2 arrives in Leeds from Birmingham is vital.

“Leeds City Region’s HS2 Growth Strategy forecasts that HS2 will create around 50,000 additional jobs and a £54bn boost to the economy. Already Leeds has attracted over £500m of investment since HS2 was announced and it will contribute significantly to the development of the South Bank area of the city, one of the largest regeneration sites in Europe. Implementing the Growth Strategy will also ensure that economic benefits are felt by the rest of the region.

“Without HS2, the high speed east-west links created by Northern Powerhouse Rail will fail to bring maximum economic impact, it would be a rail equivalent of building the M62 without the M1. We must press on with both projects whilst ensuring upgrades to our existing infrastructure are improved. If we are looking for a greener, more environmentally sustainable future for public transport then rail is a key component to this.”