

In the News- 16th March 2020

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In today's main news, The Daily Telegraph is reporting that the Government has opened talks with rail companies about putting emergency measures in place to deal with falling passenger numbers following the coronavirus outbreak.

A rail industry source told the BBC 'fairly drastic measures' may be required for companies to survive, as passenger numbers have reportedly fallen by up to 18 per cent on some lines.

Measures could include a reduction in the number of trains and more flexibility over the payments to Government.

In other news, Boris Johnson has been warned not to “delay or dilute” plans for the HS2 line to Leeds by northern leaders who are growing increasingly concerned that the government intends to prioritise the high-speed line to Manchester, known as the western leg.

Writing in the Sunday Times, Labour’s Judith Blake, leader of Leeds city council, and the Conservative leader of Nottingham county council, Kay Cutts, warned it should not become a competition between Manchester and Leeds after a speech by the HS2 minister made no reference to the Leeds leg.

The government is said to be giving Blake and Cutts private assurances the two lines would be built “at the same time” and Leeds would not come out second best.

Staying with HS2, a senior civil servant is accused of withholding information after it emerged she told MPs that the project was operating within its budget a month after being informed that costs had spiralled.

Bernadette Kelly, the permanent secretary at the Department for Transport, told a hearing of the public accounts committee that the Government was “determined” the HS2 line would meet its then £55.7 billion price tag – just weeks after being notified that the main construction costs were 83 per cent over budget, back in 2018.

Ms Kelly defended her remarks earlier this month, stating she “did not say that the project was coming in on budget, but that the budget had, at that point, not changed.”

Finally, Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines has pledged a cash boost of up to £2million to clean up Britain’s railways as part of the Great British Spring Clean.

Writing in the Daily Mail, he described the litter and graffiti plaguing the network as a ‘disgrace’, and promised to invest in more robust preventative measures to keep Britain’s railways clean and tidy.