

Integrated Rail Plan slammed by northern representatives

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Representatives for transport in the northern regions, including Transport for the North (TfN) and the chair of the North East Joint Transport Committee have not held back in their opinion over the newly-unveiled Integrated Rail Plan.

The plan aims to bring together previous rail projects, including HS2 and Northern Powerhouse.

TfN says the rail network in the region is not fit for purpose and the plan fails to pull the infrastructure out of the Victorian age. It adds that the plan's approach is a case of "a bit here and a bit there".

Meanwhile, Martin Gannon described the plan, which drops the direct HS2 link to Leeds, as a "hammer blow" that treats the area with contempt.



Cllr Louise Gittins

In a statement, cllr Louise Gittins, Interim Chair of Transport for the North, made the partnership's position more than clear: "Today's announcement is woefully inadequate. After decades of underfunding, the rail network in the North is not fit for purpose. It is largely twin-track Victorian infrastructure trying to cope with the demands of a 21st Century economy.

"Leaders from across the North and from across the party political divide came together to ask for a network that would upgrade the North for this century and in line with the rest of the country. Our statutory advice asked for an over £40 billion network but the Government has decided to provide even less than half of that.

"The leaders of the North, jointly with government, have worked hard to come up with an evidence-led plan to help reverse the chasm of under investment over the last four decades to give passengers in the North a railway network fit for today and for generations to come.

"That doesn't mean a bit here and a bit there of minor upgrades to the existing network. It means transformational change for the whole rail network. That means building HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail in full. That means good east-west connections, improved reliability and a better customer experience to bring about modal shift to meet our decarbonisation strategy.

"Whilst we have been working on our upgrade plans we have watched as billions have been poured into HS2 building work from London to Birmingham. We have watched as billions have been poured into Crossrail being dug out and built across the capital. It is time for the North to have its fair share. It's time for the North to have a proper railway network to allow our towns and cities, our businesses, and our people to thrive and grow for generations to come. It's time for real evidence of levelling-up.

"If we truly want to level up the country we don't need words and promises. We need commitment. We need investment. We need Government to make good its pledge to the North and to deliver funding so we

can deliver value back into UK PLC.

“We will be studying today’s Integrated Rail Plan announcement closely and will consult with our TfN Board before giving our considered response.”



Cllr Martin Gannon

Cllr Martin Gannon, chair of the North East Joint Transport Committee, said: “This is a hammer-blow for the North East and is the very opposite of levelling up. I’m not quite sure what our area has done to deserve such contempt. The Government appears to be arbitrarily ruling out major investment in the East Coast Main Line in our region, as well as confirming it won’t build HS2 to Yorkshire or the North East, and the Northern Powerhouse Rail plan seems to have been scaled back to a minor upgrade that is pretty much what was already promised – and not delivered – a decade ago. The Government has failed our region when it comes to ECML connectivity and I’m sure that everyone, including the business community and politicians from every party will feel as exasperated as I do on this.

“Long over-due investment is needed urgently in the capacity of the East Coast Main Line in the North East, including using the Leamside Line as an effective way to take freight trains off the fast passenger route to increase capacity on the existing line. The recent disastrous plans to decimate services in a new timetable – thankfully now withdrawn – proved that the route isn’t fit for purpose for today’s needs, let alone for the future. Without this investment or commitment to invest the Government is holding back the North East.

“People and businesses in the North East deserve better than to be frozen out of national investment plans like this. In the meantime we watch as taxpayers cover the costs of a new tube line and Crossrail in London, and HS2 as far as Birmingham, the East Midlands and the North West.

“We will continue to fight for better rail links for the North East, to improve our connections to the rest of the country and to help our economy to grow.”

Meanwhile, Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region said: “The Integrated Rail Plan was a once in a generation opportunity to revolutionise our country’s rail network. Properly delivered, it had the

potential to be as transformative for rail travel as Stephenson's Rocket. Instead, they have proposed a service that could have been promoted by Gladstone in the Victorian era.



Mayor Steve Rotheram

"What we have seen is a government pretending to deliver that transformation but doing it on the cheap. Communities across the North have been held back for decades, forced to accept sticking plaster solutions and grossly underfunded by government. Today's announcement is a continuation of that.

"Earlier this year, I warned that the government were heading towards this path; that they would try to force us to accept a cheap and nasty option that would be detrimental, not only to our region, but to the wider North and UK as a whole.

"It won't deliver the £16bn of economic benefit we were promised; it won't free up freight capacity or take heavily-polluting HGVs off the road, and it won't help connect our region with opportunities across the country. Instead, it looks set to cause us all of the pain of years long disruption with none of the benefits on the other side – and won't be delivered any faster than existing plans.

"The Prime Minister and Chancellor are both on record talking about the vital importance of NPR to the North's prospects. What does it say to 15m people across the North when they have chosen not to deliver it? "It's not too late to fix this. My door is open if the government are serious about levelling up the North and want to engage with us."