

MPs call for full delivery of HS2's Eastern Leg to bridge East – West divide

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A group of MPs, civic and business leaders from across the Midlands and the North has written to Boris Johnson calling for the full delivery of HS2's Eastern Leg from Birmingham to Leeds. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the cross-party group cites a new report which demonstrates stark social and economic inequalities between the Eastern and Western regions of the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine.

Mind the gap: The role of HS2's Eastern Leg in bridging England's east-west divide, authored by campaign group HS2 East, highlights that communities surrounding the Eastern Leg of HS2 Phase 2b suffer from lower productivity, poorer social mobility and receive lower levels of transport investment than communities surrounding its Western Leg, set to run from Birmingham to Manchester.

Signatories cite HS2's Eastern Leg as an essential investment to address these inequalities, highlighting the huge regeneration schemes it is set to catalyse across the East Midlands, Yorkshire and North East, creating over 150,000 highly-skilled jobs.

Productivity along the Eastern Leg of HS2 Phase 2b was found to be ten per cent lower than along its Western Leg, while the three Eastern Leg regions; Yorkshire and the Humber, the East Midlands and North

East have the three lowest productivity rates in England, falling 35%, 33%, and 32% below that of London.

These Eastern Leg regions were also home to twice as many 'social mobility coldspots' than the Western Leg regions; areas where Local Authorities were within the worst twenty per cent UK-wide for a range of criteria including the education provided to deprived children, the grades they receive and the jobs they secure.

Writing before the Government is expected to publish its Integrated Rail Plan which is examining how best to integrate Phase 2b of HS2 with Midlands Engine Rail and Northern Powerhouse Rail the leaders are clear that all HS2 phases must be delivered in full, with both the Eastern and Western Legs built to the same time scale.

Darren Henry, MP for Broxtowe, said: "The Government has committed to levelling-up the UK economy, and delivering the Eastern Leg of HS2, in full, is an essential step in doing this. As well as creating thousands of highly-skilled jobs, the Eastern Leg will also speed our transition to a cleaner, greener transport network. Poor access to transport is a key indicator of social deprivation, we need this investment to improve local and regional connectivity and speed the way to a productive recovery from COVID-19."

Hilary Benn, MP for Leeds Central, said: "We know that the full economic potential of the North is not being tapped and that children who grow up poor in the eastern regions of the Midlands and the North are more likely to stay poor and less likely to achieve social mobility. We need to do something about this, and investment in HS2's eastern leg will help to create jobs, unlock regeneration and increase productivity that our communities need if these divisions are to be reduced."

Full letter..

Dear Prime Minister,

Deliver the Eastern Leg of HS2 to level up the UK economy

We write to you as a group of MPs, Lords, civic and business leaders to urge your renewed commitment to the full delivery of the Eastern Leg of HS2 Phase 2b.

After signalling your commitment to Phase One and Phase 2a of HS2 earlier this year; we urge you to provide certainty to the communities of the Midlands and the North that so urgently need investment to speed their recovery from COVID-19. After decades of chronic underinvestment in transport, these regions are in desperate need of the regeneration, job creation and economic growth HS2 will bring.

The inequality and disparity between the towns and cities we represent and other parts of the UK is highlighted by a brand-new report from HS2 East. This partnership of the UK's 'powerhouse' cities and industrial heartlands across the Midlands, the North and Scotland is home to more than 13 million people and 1000s of businesses.

'Mind the gap: The role of HS2's Eastern Leg in bridging England's east-west divide' outlines the East-West

divide that lies at the heart of the UK. An analysis of social and economic indicators has revealed a stark disparity between the outcomes and life chances of communities living along the Eastern Leg of HS2 Phase 2b, compared to communities surrounding the Western Leg of HS2 Phase 2b, and the UK average.

For generations the people living in these areas have been overlooked. It is a fact that the communities along the Eastern leg of Phase 2b suffer from lower productivity, are more financially stretched and less likely to achieve social mobility. In accordance with your 'levelling up' agenda, we urge you to tackle these issues by taking action now.

In our efforts to bring your attention to the Eastern leg, we do not wish to create divisions with the regions on the Western leg. We believe strongly that Phase 2b of HS2 should be delivered in full, and at the same time as the Western Leg. However, it is our duty as elected members

and civic and business leaders to outline why the communities we represent will benefit and prosper from Europe's largest infrastructure project:

- Raising productivity: The new high speed railway will transform connectivity between the UK's major cities and produce huge journey time benefits. Less time spent travelling and increased ease of access to new domestic markets will increase productive output and reduce the disruption caused by cancellations and delays.
- Encouraging social mobility: Not only will HS2's construction see the creation of thousands of apprenticeships, it will also prompt the creation of over 150,000 new jobs along the Eastern Leg, many of which will be highly-skilled.
- Catalysing regeneration: The arrival of HS2 is prompting widespread regeneration around the planned new stations in the Midlands and the North. This level of transformation has not been seen for a generation, and will see thousands of new homes built, new leisure destinations opened and a host of holistic placemaking in inner city areas.
- Reducing transport poverty: HS2 will be the backbone of our public transport network for the next century, and will vastly improve access to public transport for communities along its route. It is the basis of Northern Powerhouse Rail and Midlands Engine Rail.
- Environmental impacts: HS2 will create space for over 2 million lorries' worth of goods to be moved from Britain's roads onto its railways each year. A move that will reduce carbon emissions by 76%.

We believe that HS2 has a significant role in this country's recovery from COVID-19. A stronger, greener economy must be accompanied by better social mobility, productivity and prosperity for millions in our country. With this in mind, we would welcome the opportunity to brief you, your ministers and officials on this report (please find a copy enclosed) and our HS2 East partnership.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Kay Cutts, leader of Nottinghamshire County Council, co-chair of the HS2 East Partnership

Cllr Judith Blake, leader of Leeds City Council, co-chair of the HS2 East Partnership

With support from:

Lord Patrick McLoughlin, former transport secretary

Lord Andrew Adonis, former transport secretary

Hilary Benn MP, Leeds Central

Clive Betts MP, Sheffield South East

Sarah Champion MP, Rotherham

Judith Cummins MP, Bradford South

Julie Elliott MP, Sunderland Central

Tim Farron MP, Westmorland and Lonsdale

Lilian Greenwood MP, Nottingham South

Diana Johnson MP, Kingston upon Hull North

Fabian Hamilton MP, Leeds North East

Darren Henry MP, Broxtowe

Kevin Hollinrake MP, Thirsk and Malton

Paul Howell MP, Sedgefield

Ian Lavery MP, Wansbeck

Holly Lynch MP, Halifax

Jason McCartney MP, Colne Valley

Catherine McKinnell MP, Newcastle-upon-Tyne North

Ian Mearns MP, Gateshead

Nigel Mills MP, Amber Valley

Grahame Morris MP, Easington

Alex Norris MP, Nottingham North

Toby Perkins MP, Chesterfield

Craig Whittaker MP, Calder Valley

Baroness Burt of Solihull

The Rt Hon, Baroness Morgan of Coates

Lord Newby

Lord Wallace of Saltaire

Lord Shutt of Greetland

Cllr Martin Gannon, Leader of Gateshead Council and Chair of the North East Joint Transport Committee

Cllr Tricia Gilby, leader, Chesterfield Borough Council

Cllr Chris Poulter, leader, Derby City Council

Cllr Nicholas Rushton, leader, Leicestershire County Council

Sir Peter Soulsby, city mayor, Leicester City Council and chair of Transport for the East Midlands

Cllr Simon Spencer, deputy leader, Derbyshire County Council

Cllr Ian Ward, leader, Birmingham City Council and transport portfolio lead for the West Midlands Combined Authority

Corin Crane, CEO, Black Country Chamber of Commerce

Pat Doody, chairman, Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Dawn Edwards, president, East Midlands Chamber of Commerce

Elizabeth Fagan, chairman, D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership

Paul Faulkner, CEO, Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce

Dan Fell, CEO, Doncaster Chamber of Commerce

Kevin Harris, chairman, Leicester and Leicestershire Local Enterprise Partnership

Matt Jackson, president, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce

Scott Knowles, CEO, East Midlands Chamber

Maria Machancoses, director, Midlands Connect

Henri Murison, director, Northern Powerhouse Partnership

Sandy Needham, CEO, West & North Yorkshire Chamber, West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce

Sir John Peace, chairman, Midlands Connect

James Ramsbotham CBE, CEO, North East Chamber of Commerce

Paul Robinson, chairman, Rail Forum Midlands

Sharon Smith, CEO, Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce

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