

Northern leaders reluctantly agree to hold off submitting Northern Powerhouse Rail business plan

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Transport for the North (TfN) has agreed delaying submitting the business plan for Northern Powerhouse Rail until after the publication of the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP).

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps told TfN to wait until after the government had published the IRP, which will set out how NPR will link up with other major infrastructure projects, including HS2.

TfN had planned to submit the strategic outline case for the project next month.

Speaking at the TfN board meeting Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, said the strategy outline case should be informing the IRP, not the other way around.

He continued: "We won't accept a cheap and nasty option."

Northern Powerhouse Rail is a major strategic rail programme, specifically designed to support the

transformation of the North's economy by providing effective and efficient rail connectivity between the North's main centres, offering a faster and more frequent service across the entire region.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, claims their voice at TfN is being marginalised and ambitions downgraded at the same time. He said that in agreeing to delay submitting the business plan they need to set out a list of things that are not acceptable.

At the board meeting, Chief Executive Barry White said that work on the business plan had been on schedule.

In response, the Department for Transport says that levelling up all areas of the country remains at the centre of the government's agenda, which was reflected in the recent Spending Review.

It says the Transport Secretary has spoken with Northern leaders extensively, including in late December, to discuss their priorities. The Northern Transport Acceleration Council is now considering how a range of northern projects can be delivered more effectively.

A DfT spokesperson said: "This government is absolutely committed to delivering the upgrades to level-up the North, building on more than £29 billion invested in transport across the north since 2010.

"In the next financial year, TfN have access to over £70m of funding, the majority of which will help develop proposals for Northern Powerhouse Rail. There is also a significant proportion of money remaining in their reserves, enabling them to carry out all their statutory functions effectively."

Responding to the news, Robert Nisbet, Director of Nations and Regions for the Rail Delivery Group said: "By enabling more frequent services and providing extra space for freight, Northern Powerhouse Rail will deliver benefits across the north of England and Britain. That is why the development of this vital upgrade programme must keep moving forward."