

Rail Investment for the North & Midlands: how to make it happen

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Greengauge 21 has undertaken a detailed review of the National Infrastructure Commission's 'Rail Needs' report which calls for:

- an adaptation of the north eastern arm of HS2 to serve all of the major cities east of the Peak District and Pennines
- the development of an 'X' shaped HS2 network by adding a south western leg, with existing lines from Birmingham to the South West and South Wales electrified
- building on what would become a first stage of HS2's north eastern arm –a link from Birmingham to Nottingham.

While others have criticised the NIC's Rail Needs report for not sticking rigidly with plans drawn up 11 years ago, Greengauge 21 say they see it as an opportunity to accelerate benefits to the North & Midlands and do it better.

[The report can be found here.](#)

Commenting on the new report, Greengauge 21 Director Jim Steer said: “A shift in mindset is needed following the National Infrastructure Commission’s report, away from a sole reliance on new high-speed line infrastructure to deliver the capacity and connectivity gains the North and Midlands’ needs.

“Instead, these gains can be delivered better and sooner with a careful blend of electrification and upgrading of existing lines alongside some better thought out high-speed line construction. The aim should be a step change in the links between the cities to the east of the Pennines and Peak District which the current HS2 proposals do not achieve at all well.

“A key aspect of this shift is overcoming the problems of current HS2 designs in city centres, which generally preclude HS2 services being extended onwards over existing lines. Our report sets out how this can be achieved in Birmingham to create the ‘X’ as well as to allow onward connections to Bradford from Leeds city centre. The suggested approach delivers HS2 connectivity to Derby, Chesterfield and Sheffield, and excitingly showshow Nottingham’s existing city centre station can in effect be placed on HS2 and a new, faster cross-country route, with benefits spread right across the country.”

The Greengauge 21 report also highlights where HS2 technical scope can be refined with little lost and significant cost savings. “Best of all”, says Greengauge 21 Director Jim Steer, “we show how a two-stage approach to HS2 on the east side of the country can deliver, first a transformation in east-west connectivity across the Midlands, and second connectivity gains for all of Yorkshire/Humber, the North East and Scotland.”

“Critics were never right to pretend that HS2 was all about reducing journey times to/from London”, Jim Steer adds. “What this report shows is how the Government’s and National Infrastructure Commission’s primary aim of ‘levelling up’ can be met and how the same scale of investment, properly specified, can be used to create more capacity for rail freight and allow surface rail to compete effectively with short haul domestic flights –both essential steps to decarbonising the transport sector.”

Photo credit: Greengauge 21