

Rail stations investment key to building back better after COVID-19

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Investing in rail stations can give a much needed boost to local economies and communities in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis, according to a new report which highlights the benefits of devolved authorities' involvement in station transformation.

The [report](#), published by the Urban Transport Group, finds that, by and large, the greater the role of sub-national authorities, the better the local station, strengthening the case for further devolution of the UK's railways.

One third of all trips made on the national rail network (pre-coronavirus pandemic) were on rail services which are either fully or partially devolved.

The report examines over 35 completed station projects from across the whole of the UK and shows how by taking an active role in these projects, local and devolved authorities have helped to meet local housing need and spark regeneration, turn run-down stations into gateways and places to be proud of, and improve the accessibility and environmental performance of station buildings.

The report finds: “In recent years we have seen more stations transformed from run-down Victorian hulks, or spartan bus-sheltered platforms, into places that people can take pride in, feel comfortable in using and which are fulfilling more of their wider potential. Local councils, and devolved authorities and administrations, have been key to this process.”

The report – *Action stations: How devolution is transforming rail stations for the better* – also highlights plans for new devolved authority promoted stations, such as Darlaston and Willenhall in the West Midlands, and White Rose and Thorpe Park in West Yorkshire. Investing in new stations such as these can become a focus for transport investment – which will be vital as many communities and local economies seek to bounceback after the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stephen Joseph, transport policy consultant and advisor to the Rail Devolution Network, who co-authored the report, said: “Stations are more than simply the places where trains stop, they also help to define those places – acting as attractive gateways which celebrate and reflect history, becoming a focus for commercial and community activities, and even spurring housing developments and wider regeneration.

“The need to deliver these types of benefits is more urgent than ever in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. As the custodians of place, local, regional and devolved administrations recognise what stations can do for local communities and economies both now and in the future. Their active role in station projects – whether renovating older stations or building new ones – and the benefits this brings, further strengthens the case for greater devolution of our railways.”

The report goes further by looking at the potential to achieve even greater results through devolving more responsibilities for stations, from setting more demanding minimum standards for stations’ facilities, cleanliness, accessibility and security, and delivering common branding with the rest of the local public transport network, through to ensuring plans and funding for stations is integrated with wider plans around housing, economic development and decarbonisation.

Tobyn Hughes, Managing Director of Transport North East and lead Board member on rail for the Urban Transport Group, added: “Devolved authorities and administrations need significant influence over their local stations, ranging from full or partial ownership of stations through to having a strong and binding relationship with the owners and operators of stations.

“As we move from short term emergency arrangements for the funding and oversight of rail networks to something more robust and long term, there is a great opportunity to build on the proven success of rail devolution in delivering better rail services and stations. As this report shows, stations can be wonderful assets for local communities and that this is best achieved by making sure that more decisions on those stations are taken in the places those stations serve.”

Click [here](#) for more details.

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