

Railfuture's way forward for at-risk HS2 East and Northern Powerhouse Rail

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The eagerly anticipated Integrated Plan has been delayed, leading to fears of cutbacks or cancellations to investment in the North of England's railways.

"A smart solution? We're keenly aware that the term "smart" has been used before as a euphemism for cutbacks" said Railfuture director Ian Brown. "The then Secretary of State used it when he announced cutting back electrification of the Great Western Main line to somewhere around Chippenham and the Midland Main Line similarly near Market Harborough. The word "smart" is also starting to be used again as the government looks at options of cutting back the HS2 East scheme and potentially, Northern Powerhouse Rail too."

"We haven't changed our position that HS2 East (Birmingham to Leeds) and Northern Powerhouse rail (Manchester to Leeds) should be constructed in full, properly integrated into the North's rail network, to provide additional network capacity and resilience and economic benefits across the whole region. "

"If the government does announce a "smart" cutback, we've set out our minimum requirements so the original objectives of levelling up the north in transport terms can be achieved."

Railfuture's 10 demands –smarter still:

1. HS2 West must be completed in full from London Euston, via Old Oak Common (Interchange with Crossrail) to Birmingham Interchange (Birmingham Airport)- served by more HS2 trains, and Curzon Street in Birmingham. Associated rail and light rail distribution projects, based on Curzon Street and Moor Street stations must be implemented to maximise regional benefits in Birmingham and the Black Country.
2. HS2 West must continue as per powers obtained to Crewe, Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly.
3. The plan must provide through linkages on to the West Coast Main Line designed to provide maximum economic benefits to Cheshire, North Wales, Lancashire, Cumbria and Scotland by the provision of through trains running onto the classic network directly from HS2. HS2 must be seen as addressing capacity and resilience issues on the whole national rail network in the West and East Midlands and Northern England.
4. Augmented HS2 station platform capacity is required at Manchester Airport and Piccadilly. At Manchester Airport, capacity is required to provide for an HS2 shuttle to Manchester and onwards so relieving the Castlefield Corridor. The two additional HS2/NPR platforms are required at Piccadilly to facilitate NPR connections and also through services HS2/NPR via Manchester, preferably in the form of through platforms as advocated by Railfuture or at least by reversal with a small time penalty. The recently constructed Ordsall Chord would not be used by NPR trains but would become available as originally planned but then abandoned, for Calder Valley trains accessing HS2 at Piccadilly and Manchester Airport.
5. Levelling up the North West without levelling up the North East is unsustainable if the Northern Powerhouse as a single economic entity is to be taken seriously. If HS2 East is cut back, a series of mitigation measures are required to achieve capacity and resilience objectives, even if the speed objective is subordinated.
6. A plan for the East Midlands is required based on HS2 East going as far as East Midlands Parkway or Toton as a minimum, so providing connections or through services to Nottingham and additional capacity on the Birmingham to the North East CrossCountry route. A fast regional Birmingham to Nottingham route is a Railfuture priority shared by authorities in the East and West Midlands, not provided by the original HS2 East plan.
7. HS2 East must feed into an upgraded Erewash Valley route directly serving Chesterfield and Sheffield and onward to Wakefield and Leeds via an upgraded and electrified Sheffield to Leeds route. HS2 trains would serve Wakefield and Leeds via Sheffield.
8. The previous “smart” decision on Midland Main line must be reversed by continuing electrification from Market Harborough via Leicester, Nottingham and Derby to Sheffield.
9. If the government does also cancel Northern Powerhouse Rail (Manchester – Bradford – Leeds) and opt for a capacity upgrade and electrification of the Standedge Trans Pennine route branded as NPR, Railfuture contends that the following upgrades are essential;

NPR to run from 2 additional HS2 platforms at Manchester Piccadilly (Currently being consulted)

NPR to run into Leeds on an improved alignment, irrespective of the choice of NPR routing

Infrastructure upgrades are required to connect the HS2 stations in Manchester and Leeds to the Standedge route so reducing journey times, particularly alleviating the current poor alignment approaching Leeds.

NPR would serve Liverpool using the upgraded infrastructure at Miles Platting, Victoria and the Chat Moss route.

NPR would serve Bradford as would HS2 by through HS2 trains via Manchester.

The 4 tracking upgrade planned by Network Rail in the Mirfield area is essential to this plan so also facilitating the freight route via the Calder Valley to Yorkshire.

10. Infrastructure upgrades are required on the East Coast Main line to accelerate the current service to Leeds and provide economic benefits, envisaged by HS2 to North Yorkshire, Durham and Teesside, Tyneside, Northumberland and connectivity into Scotland. This includes alleviation of certain pinch points south of Doncaster and provision of a four track railway, effectively from south of York to Newcastle.

Railfuture chairman Chris Page added: "The only truly smart solution in a government cut back scenario is an HS2 London - Manchester - Leeds high speed route with a branch to the East Midlands integrated with an upgraded Midland Main Line to Sheffield and Leeds."

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