

The £96 billion Integrated Rail Plan explained

November 18, 2021



The Government has announced what it has called the “biggest ever” package of public funding for Britain’s rail network — the Integrated Rail Plan.

In reality, the plan is a mix of established and new projects, as well as some cutbacks that have sent political shockwaves.

The £96 billion plan brings together HS2 and the Northern Powerhouse projects, in what the UK Government says is an attempt to accelerate improvements up to ten years quicker than would otherwise have been the case.

The DfT says in the plan it will deliver, “better journeys to more people across the North and the Midlands, similar to or more quickly than under earlier plans.”

In his statement to the House of Commons, Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps MP said the money is five times that invested in Crossrail and ten times the cost of the Olympics.

“We are about to embark on one of the biggest single acts of levelling up of any government in history,” he told the House.

But some have balked at changes to the HS2 plan, which originally would have seen its high-speed trains reach Leeds. Instead, the Integrated Rail Plan proposes the shortening of HS2's eastern leg to East Midlands Parkway on the Midland main line, where trains will continue on the conventional network to East Midlands cities and the North. The Midland main line is one of three routes that will receive enhancements to make those onward journeys quicker and more frequent.

The main details include:

- The HS2 project being categorised now as building 110 miles of “3 new high-speed lines,” according to the plan, “improving rail services to and between the East and West Midlands, Yorkshire and the North West”.
- A high-speed line between Birmingham and East Midlands Parkway, [a shortened version of HS2's eastern leg](#). Trains will continue to central Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield on an upgraded and electrified Midland Main Line.
- HS2, it has been confirmed, will stretch from [Crewe to Manchester](#), with new stations at Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly, but the eastern leg to Leeds is being replaced with infrastructure upgrades. There will be “a study” to look at the best way to take HS2 trains to Leeds, including capacity at Leeds Station.
- Northern Powerhouse Rail – “a new high-speed line between Warrington, Manchester and Marsden in Yorkshire” – an option originally put forward by Transport for the North in 2019.
- The DfT adding there will be a [new mass transit system](#) for Leeds and West Yorkshire. The plan says this will be “righting the wrong” that Leeds is the largest city in Western Europe without one. There will be £200 million of immediate funding to plan the project and start building it, and the department says it commits to supporting West Yorkshire Combined Authority over the long term to ensure it gets done.
- Greater capacity for 400 miles of the network
- Improvements that will make journeys between the North and London faster. Journeys will improve between northern cities as well – journeys between Birmingham and Nottingham will take 26 minutes, York and Manchester will be cut to 55 minutes (from about 83) and Bradford to Leeds will take only 12 minutes.
- As part of this, electrification is high on the agenda. There will be 180 miles of newly-electrified line. Between Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds £625 million has been allocated, further improvements to the Midlands Main Line will see £249 million.
- Beeching cuts will continue to be reversed, with areas upgraded including Newcastle.

The proposals were not without controversy. [Leaders in the north slammed the latest plan](#) and the dropping of Leeds from the HS2 eastern leg, some [worried what this meant for a greener railway](#), the RIA [described it as “piecemeal”](#), and [those that did praise it](#) often did so with a word or two of concern for Leeds or other cautionary sentiments.