

Transport for the North in talks with Network Rail on rail reform

November 23, 2021



Leaders from across the North of England will tomorrow (Wednesday 24 November) consider recommendations from Transport for the North (TfN) which could position the region as a 'pathfinder for reform' in shaping what will become the new model for Great British Railways.

Despite major challenges with the recommendations of the Integrated Rail Plan, England's first Sub-national Transport Body has been working closely with Network Rail on collaborative proposals to radically change the way rail infrastructure and services are delivered in Britain. This would mean a strong strategic role for Transport for the North alongside empowered city regions with integrated local networks, aligned transport and rail investment plans – and a profit and loss account for the North to give clear visibility on where money is being spent.

TfN, through its work with the Rail North Partnership, a forerunner of devolution in action, has already helped steer the rail industry and local authorities in providing services across the North through the Covid pandemic. Now it is helping drive and accelerate a programme of investment to tackle rail congestion in Manchester at the heart of the North's rail network; and it has also played a key part in engineering a re-think on East Coast Main Line services so it can ensure east-west services across the region are protected.

Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive of TfN, said: "The North has had to learn the hard way the consequences of not having track and train properly aligned, but through our 'Railmap' approach to linking infrastructure and services we are already joining things up in the North.

"What we've been doing as part of our business as usual activity is what the Williams-Shapps White Paper on Rail Reform calls for as a model of best practice for the future."

Tomorrow it is expected that, with the support of Sir Peter Hendy, the Chair of Network Rail, TfN Members will be asked to endorse further collaboration with the Great British Railways Transition Team – a move which could see Transport for the North working more closely than ever with the rail industry as it works to ensure regional and local representation (double devolution) is 'baked into' the new model for the railway.

Included in tomorrow's recommendation to Members will be a call for the headquarters for Great British Railways to be located in the North – the birthplace of the railway and the spiritual home of much of Britain's railway heritage.

"Over the next 18 months we will be refreshing our evidence-led Strategic Transport Plan," added Martin. "The Great British Rail Transition Team is also developing its 30-year Whole Industry Strategy Plan and this brings a real opportunity for us to work together. Our refreshed evidence base and world-class transport modelling intelligence will help ensure that taxpayer's money generates the best possible return and money is invested where it really needs to be."

Meanwhile Mayor Dan Jarvis has written to the Prime Minister to express his deep dismay at the government's broken promises over the rail network in South Yorkshire and the North. It comes ahead of Wednesday's Transport for the North meeting, where the Government's Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) will be discussed.

The IRP scrapped the HS2 eastern leg to Sheffield and Leeds, leaving Yorkshire's two biggest cities no closer to getting faster or more frequent services.

The government also drastically watered down Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), which they had promised or re-announced more than 60 times since 2014. NPR would have provided better connections between South Yorkshire and the rest of the North, unlocked thousands of new jobs and helped regenerate towns across the region.

Mayor Dan Jarvis said: "The Prime Minister's cut-price rail plan has badly let us down. South Yorkshire and the North will not forget this betrayal.

"Not only has he abandoned much-needed and desperately overdue improvements to services for passengers, he's squandered an opportunity to unlock thousands of jobs, massive new investment and the regeneration of our towns and stations across our region. After so many re-commitments and re-announcements, after so many promises of transformation, for him to do this and to call it levelling up is simply treating people with contempt.

"This was supposed to be the moment where the government began to put right years of neglect and

underinvestment in the North, where our needs were finally put first or a change. Instead they are locking in a second-class and second-rate solution for a generation. It's the same old story – when it comes to the crunch, once again the government is leaving us to make do with crumbs off the table.

“Rather than levelling up South Yorkshire, this Prime Minister is holding our region back.”

The letter highlights significant detail missing from the IRP, including:

- Proposals to improve capacity on the East Coast Main Line and the potential benefits for Doncaster
- The status of two key rail new station in the Dearne Valley at Goldthorpe and Rotherham
- Plans to redevelop Sheffield Midland Station, which already faces significant capacity constraints, to accommodate high speed trains

It also highlights the uncertainty faced by places such as Mexborough in Doncaster and Bramley in Rotherham, who still face the prospect of disruption due to land in their communities kept safeguarded for a future HS2 route, and asks for urgent clarity for residents and businesses.

Photo credit: Transport for the North