

Ms Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire
Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
Mr Oliver Coppard, Mayor of South Yorkshire
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe, Leader of Bradford MDC
Mr Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor of Liverpool City Region

cc Lord Ben Houchen, Tees Valley Mayor
Ms Kim McGuinness, North-East Mayor
Mr David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire

High Speed UK
Connecting the Nation

www.highspeeduk.co.uk

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20th May 2024
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Dear Northern Leaders,

We write to alert you to critical failings in Transport for the North's recently published Strategic Transport Plan. These failings seem certain to prevent TfN's proposed transport interventions – in particular Northern Powerhouse Rail – from ever delivering either the ultimate goal of a Levelled-up, Net Zero North, or the Strategic Transport Plan's promise of £118 billion annual GVA benefits.

The March 2024 Strategic Transport Plan (STP) should have signposted the way towards the necessary transformation in the connectivity and capacity of the Northern Powerhouse's railway network. Yet the STP offers no such vision; instead, it puts forward a disjointed raft of ill-considered schemes which (when assessed holistically as a Northern network) will collectively:

- Fail to meet most of TfN's own journey time targets, established back in 2016;
- Fail to deliver the 'London-style connectivity' that was promised in the 2022 Levelling-up White Paper;
- Fail to provide the transformational increase in Transpennine and cross-Manchester capacity, for both passengers and freight, that is necessary to achieve Levelling-up and Net Zero in the Northern Powerhouse.

Given the time (approximately 10 years) that Transport for the North has been working on its Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) proposals, the Strategic Transport Plan's lack of detail, of both routes and stations, is frankly astonishing. But sufficient information still exists in the STP, and in the wider public domain, to enable us to confidently predict the dire consequences that it carries, for all the communities that you represent.

- The NPR route to **Liverpool** (via Manchester Airport and Warrington) is highly circuitous, with a 35 minute journey time that spectacularly fails TfN's own 20-minute Liverpool-Manchester specification (in fact slower than the existing direct Chat Moss line, built back in 1830!!). Note also that TfN's proposed 'high speed' route, following the existing freight line via Fiddler's Ferry, will effectively block this line's use as part of a strategic Transpennine freight corridor to the Port of Liverpool.
- The NPR station at **Manchester** Airport is located on the opposite side of the M56 from the airport, and luggage-laden passengers en route to the airport terminals will be compelled to catch the Manchester Tram one stop along the as-yet-unbuilt Wythenshawe Loop.
- No detailed route has ever been published for the proposed new-build NPR Transpennine main line via **Bradford**, with a new station remote from the city centre. This will leave Bradford with 3 mutually disconnected stations – the absolute antithesis of 'London-style connectivity' – and no prospect of achieving the balanced 360-degree connectivity that Bradford so obviously needs.

- The STP includes a puzzling reference to a “new station” at **Leeds**. However, it offers no explanation of how where this new facility will be located, or how it will be integrated with the existing Leeds City Station to comprise the single integrated West Yorkshire network hub necessary to accommodate the STP’s planned “doubling or... tripling” (STP page 26/140) of local, regional and national traffic.
- With NPR enhancements concentrated on a new northern route via Bradford, **Sheffield’s** dire Transpennine connectivity will see no significant improvement. TfN’s proposed enhancement of the existing Hope Valley line will badly fail to deliver TfN’s own specification for journey time and route capacity, no supplementary Sheffield-Manchester route is proposed to improve capacity and resilience, and with no prospect of significant road-to-rail modal shift, the crippling congestion along the A628 Woodhead Road will remain to blight the South Yorkshire economy. Also of huge concern is the proposed ‘Barnsley Dearne Valley’ station, at least 10km from the town it is intended to serve.

We are particularly concerned at TfN’s claim (STP page 28/140) that its proposed NPR transport interventions will bring about full Levelling-up of the Northern economy, and thus deliver the prize of £118 billion of annual GVA benefits across the North.

- We do not dispute TfN’s £118 billion GVA per annum valuation of a Levelled-up North, by which the performance of the Northern Powerhouse’s economy is raised to match that of the South-East. But we cannot see how a single stand-alone line such as Northern Powerhouse Rail, offering only poor integration with the wider network, can possibly bring about the necessary transformational gains in network connectivity across the entire North.
- The STP offers no quantified evidence to demonstrate either that NPR will transform the network to the required extent, or that it comprises the optimum scheme to bring about this transformation.
- Any claim of NPR delivering optimised connectivity to gain the full £118 billion Levelling-up prize is instantly disproved by the massively superior network performance of our High Speed UK/Network North Exemplar Alternative.

You will hopefully recall the information sheet that we circulated when we spoke to you at last month’s Northern Transport Summit at Manchester Airport. This demonstrated how our Network North scheme, taken in combination with our High Speed UK programme for a national network interlinking all UK regions and nations, will achieve every single intercity journey time target and address every strategic connectivity priority set by Transport for the North.

We would comment that Network North’s performance, far outmatching anything that Northern Powerhouse Rail can offer, is primarily achieved not by high speed *per se*, but by fully integrated railway network design. This includes not only route design between cities, but also full integration with the existing network and bespoke station solutions that (unlike TfN’s Strategic Transport Plan) will achieve ‘London-style connectivity’ in all the major cities. On this basis, we are confident that our proposals will provide a launchpad for a Levelled-up and Net Zero North, and we will be writing shortly to each Northern Mayor to further explain the advantages that HSUK and Network North will bring to their mayoralty.

All this enables HSUK and Network North to fully conform with Transport for the North’s 3 strategic connectivity priorities (STP Page 33/140) for the Northern Powerhouse:

- 1) “Pan-Northern connectivity”;
- 2) “Connectivity between the North and other parts of the UK, including international gateways”;
- 3) “Local connectivity within places”.

By contrast, the proposals set out in TfN’s Strategic Transport Plan fail on every count.

Our challenge to Transport for the North is to set out an alternative narrative, to present evidence that might demonstrate that their proposals will achieve their goal of an “effective, efficient transport system” that will succeed in “transforming the North” and thus bring about both Levelling-up and Net Zero. Please be assured that we have made repeated attempts to engage with Transport for the North, both to inform them of their proposals’ huge deficiencies, and also to urge a new way forward for railway network development in the North of England based around the vastly superior performance of Network North. Regrettably, however, the TfN leadership has refused to engage with us in any meaningful manner.

The present situation, of Transport for the North pushing forward with its own hugely suboptimal proposals, in the face of the demonstrably superior Network North alternative, is effectively short-changing the people of the North by at least £100 billion per annum, more than £6,000 per citizen every year.

All this renders Transport for the North totally unfit for its purpose as an organisation dedicated to the development of transport networks in the north of England, and it exposes TfN as a zombie quango utterly incapable of playing its essential role in delivering either Levelling-up or Net Zero.

We believe that the present situation is neither sustainable nor acceptable, and we hope that you would share this view. We stand ready to assist you in whatever way we can, and we will contact you soon after the May local elections to discuss how we take matters forward.

Yours sincerely

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PS Further information regarding our High Speed UK / Network North proposals can be found on www.highspeeduk.co.uk