

Mr Tom Gordon MP,
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High Speed UK
Connecting the Nation

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Dear Tom,

We met at the hustings events at the Wesley Chapel back in June, and you may recall our conversation on the subject of railway development in the Northern Powerhouse, and its crucial importance to achieving both Levelling-up, and a Net Zero transport system. You may also recall the question that I posed to the assembled candidates regarding a future integrated bus/rail network in North Yorkshire, and the diagram that I circulated, illustrating how such a network might be configured.

But first, please accept my congratulations on your success in the election on 4th July; and now that you are safely installed as this town's MP, I would like to request a meeting in the very near future to continue our discussions. In the meantime, could I please refer you to the attached presentation P31, see Appendix A.

My concerns in respect of Northern railway development are twofold:

- to ensure that Northern Powerhouse Rail and a wider integrated transport network will deliver real and optimised benefits (both Levelling-up and Net Zero) to all Northern communities, including of course Harrogate and Knaresborough;
- to ensure that we have sufficient public funds available to build this network.

My belief is that under the current and historic mismanagement of the Department for Transport (DfT), and of Transport for the North (TfN), neither desirable outcome is possible.

There is absolutely no doubt that a transformation in the connectivity and capacity of the North's railway network is vital both to rebalancing the economy, and to achieving the step-change road-to-rail modal shift necessary for decarbonising our transport system en route towards Net Zero. This is now accepted as fact by all major political parties, and all have been united in their calls for a transformative upgrade of our national railway network; and, when pressed, all parties agree that the improvement of east-west transpennine links is of much greater importance than improvement of north-south links towards London.

This was the fundamental logic for then-Chancellor George Osborne's Northern Powerhouse initiative of 2014, and for the Northern Powerhouse Rail project that sprang from it. Yet 10 years on, Transport for the North has still to publish any definitive and detailed proposals for Northern Powerhouse Rail's new routes and stations. This compares very poorly with the speed by which the DfT and HS2 Ltd published detailed plans for HS2 – 14 months from launch of HS2 project in January 2009, to publication in March 2010!!

I believe that the fundamental problem lies with HS2's epic failure as a national public project. It has been designed as a superfast stand-alone railway, with minimal integration with the existing network; and it has been designed to exclusively north-south priorities, with no thought for improving Transpennine connectivity. As illustrated in my presentation (Slides S17-S28 and S44), these pre-existing HS2 proposals have effectively sabotaged Transport for the North's efforts to design efficient and comprehensive transpennine links between the major cities of the North; and even as HS2 is collapsing as a national project, the double-digit (or possibly triple-digit) billions required to complete the London-centric HS2 Phase 1 (from London to the West Midlands) and onward links to Manchester) seem certain to starve funding from more worthwhile railway projects in the North.

All this raises massive concerns as to the competence of the transport and engineering professionals who have managed the UK high speed rail project over the last 15 years.

My assertions as to the failure of HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, and my questioning the competence of those in charge, are informed by the vastly superior performance of the High Speed UK (HSUK) Exemplar Alternative. Designed to diametrically opposite principles of full integration, network optimisation, modular configuration and complete independence from HS2, HSUK is a national scheme – effectively a UK-wide Integrated Rail Plan – that can be delivered in manageable regional modules, variously Network North, Midland Ring (East and West Midlands) or TartanTrax (Scotland).

Please be assured that HSUK and Network North comprise far more than a ‘felt tip concept’. Routes nationwide have been designed to a scale of 1:10,000, bespoke station solutions have been developed in all major cities, and a ‘demonstrator timetable’ is now in place to illustrate both the journey time savings that Network North can achieve, and its overall performance as a transformed railway network for the North.

From all the design work undertaken over many years, I can state confidently that HSUK’s more efficient design will greatly reduce its costs, and massively increase its connectivity benefits; moreover, its huge and demonstrable Levelling-up benefits (refer Slides S9-S15) will unlock sources of finance completely unavailable to HS2 and derivative schemes such as Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The attached presentation concentrates upon the North, and sets out (Slides S36-S66) Network North’s comprehensive superiority over Northern Powerhouse Rail on 7 key metrics:

- Full interconnection between principal hubs of the Northern Powerhouse rail network;
- Compliance with TfN’s own journey time targets;
- Direct links from Manchester Airport to all principal Northern Powerhouse communities;
- Transformed capacity for transpennine passenger traffic;
- Transformed capacity for transpennine freight traffic;
- Definitive location-specific schemes to transform capacity at all principal network hubs;
- Achievement of full integration between intercity and local passenger services.

The last consideration, of full integration, is perhaps most important for outlying communities such as Harrogate and Knaresborough. Without this integration, any benefits of Northern Powerhouse Rail will be concentrated upon a few ‘hot-spots’ clustered around the ‘high speed’ stations in the principal cities; only with full integration can all communities benefit.

This of course begs the question, of the rail network’s limited coverage in rural counties such as North Yorkshire, a deficiency which can only practicably be addressed by developing new and enhanced bus routes. That is the logic for the integrated bus/rail network that I have proposed for all of the York and North Yorkshire Mayoralty, as illustrated in the diagram that I passed to you at the hustings.

We are now writing to Lord Patrick McLoughlin, Chair of Transport for the North, to challenge him as to the multiple inadequacies of TfN’s Northern Powerhouse Rail scheme, and of the supporting (2024) Strategic Transport Plan. To help convince Lord McLoughlin of NPR’s deficiencies, we have included a short performance checklist, which we have appended to this letter. We have already written on a similar basis to all Northern Mayors, selected copies attached. Regrettably, despite the clear gravity of the situation, none so far have deigned to respond.

It is plainly vital that those responsible for optimal development of the North’s rail network are held to account, and I would be pleased to meet you at the earliest opportunity, to discuss how we might take matters forward to the benefit of all.

Yours sincerely

Colin Elliff BSc CEng MICE, Civil Engineering Principal, High Speed UK

APPENDIX A

10 Key Performance Tests for Northern Powerhouse Rail		Winner	**Reference to NN presentation
<i>Does NPR or Network North (NN) perform better?</i>			
1	Does NPR offer full interconnection between 11 principal network hubs?	NN	S36-S42
2	Does NPR meet TfN's own journey time specification?	NN	S43-S45
3	Does NPR offer comprehensive direct links to Manchester Airport?	NN	S46-S48
4	Does NPR transform capacity for transpennine passengers?	NN	S9-S13, S49-S54
5	Does NPR transform capacity for transpennine freight?	NN	S9-S13, S49-S54
6	Is NPR supported by detailed schemes to transform principal hubs?	NN	S55-S62
7	Does NPR benefit small town communities beyond principal hubs?	NN	S63-S66
8	Is NPR configuration dictated by cancelled sections of HS2?	NN	S17-S28, S44
9	Does NPR resolve the current network disconnect in Bradford?	NN	S20, S29-S35
10	Does NPR achieve optimum Levelling-up in the Northern Powerhouse?	NN	S14-S15

**HSUK/Network North presentation available on http://highspeeduk.co.uk/P31_HSUK_NN_Presentation.pdf and in the HSUK website Library as Document P31

APPENDIX B

