

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
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

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20th November 2024

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Dear Northern Leaders,

We write with reference to our recent letters (dated 20/05/24, 18/06/24 and 05/09/24, emailed from colin.elliff@highspeeduk.co.uk) to yourselves, concerning Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan (published March 2024) and the consequences that its massively suboptimal and inappropriate design will carry for the communities that you represent.

Regrettably, despite the critical issues raised in these letters, we have only received one substantive response, from the office of South Yorkshire Mayor Oliver Coppard; and while we appreciate the courtesy of this communication, we would observe that it still fails to address the core substance of our concerns. The text of the South Yorkshire response is set out in Appendix A.

Please be assured that we understand the current uncertainties as to the Government's intentions in respect of HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail – and indeed more local initiatives such as the Liverpool-Manchester Railway and the West Yorkshire Mass Transit System. We also understand the parlous state of the public finances, which will inevitably limit what can practicably be achieved – and here we would draw your attention to the yawning gulf between the vast sums still being lavished on the HS2 project in the South, and the minimal sums that appear to be available for railway network development in the North.

All this makes it absolutely crucial that you, as the Mayors leading the Combined Authorities that oversee the Northern Powerhouse's railway network, are working to a plan that will ensure optimal development of this network in the North. This is what the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) purports to do, as evidenced by its claim of £118 billion annual GVA benefits – equivalent to full Levelling-up of the Northern economy.

Yet (as noted in our letter of 20/05/24) the Strategic Transport Plan offers no evidence to demonstrate that its chosen primary intervention of a single new Northern Powerhouse Rail transpennine route, augmented by new HS2 routes approaching from the south, will result in the required optimised network, offering the greatest possible improvement in connectivity and capacity.

The Strategic Transport Plan also fails to demonstrate the rigorous processes that would be necessary to achieve its claimed transformative gains. We cannot discern:

- any structured consideration of how the railway network of the North will perform, with the proposed new Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 routes in place;
- any process of optimisation to ensure that the intervention of these new lines will result in the best-functioning network for the North, offering the greatest gains in connectivity and capacity for the greatest number of people;
- any consideration that continued high levels of spending on HS2 will consume all public funding necessary to build new railways in the North.

Collectively, these failures render TfN's Strategic Transport Plan incapable of delivering its ultimate political goal of a Levelled-up, Net Zero North.

Our criticisms of the Strategic Transport Plan come from a unique place – our development of the alternative High Speed UK/Network North scheme, to radically different principles of full integration, network optimisation and complete independence from HS2. The vast and fully-documented superiority of Network North demonstrates clearly that Northern Powerhouse Rail (and HS2) cannot be the optimised scheme it is claimed to be; and this renders the entire Strategic Transport Plan unfit for purpose.

All this raises the very obvious question, of how a well-resourced organisation such as Transport for the North could have failed so spectacularly to develop an optimised railway network that will deliver for the people of the North, and we have written to TfN Chairman Lord McLoughlin (see attached) to set out our concerns.

In our letter we have challenged Lord McLoughlin and his officials to present an alternative narrative, to demonstrate that their proposals do represent the optimum transport outcome for the Northern Powerhouse. To inform this challenge, we have established 10 simple tests (see Appendix B) against which Northern Powerhouse Rail should offer optimum performance. However, our analysis indicates the opposite, and for more information we would refer you to our latest presentation, available in the HSUK website Library as Document P31, see: http://highspeeduk.co.uk/P31_HSUK_NN_Presentation.pdf

Transport for the North's failure, to plan the transformed railway network that the people of the Northern Powerhouse need, is also evidenced in the ongoing Transpennine Upgrade works at Ravensthorpe in the Calder Valley. These works – if they are carried out in accordance with current Network Rail plans – will block the restoration of the Spen Valley Line, crucial for the future intercity connectivity of Bradford and crucial also for future connectivity of local communities in the Spen Valley and across West Yorkshire.

Regrettably, Transport for the North has neglected to protect this vital transport corridor that would have assured much-improved connectivity across West Yorkshire, and it falls instead to High Speed UK to engage with Network Rail to press for amendments to their scheme. We are writing to Network Rail and to local political leaders, and also to Transport for the North; copies of this correspondence can be viewed (as letters L19, L20 and L21) on <http://highspeeduk.co.uk/newletters.html>.

We are sure that you, as political leaders of the Northern Powerhouse, would agree that the people of the North deserve not any railway network, but the best possible railway network, delivering the greatest improvement in connectivity and capacity on a local, regional and national level. We are sure that you would also agree that if our concerns as to the performance of Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan prove to be justified, such a suboptimal plan – and all the schemes that underpin it – will become unsustainable and untenable against the more fundamental political goal of a Levelled-up, Net Zero North.

We trust that you will support our concerns, and we would strongly suggest as a first step that we make a full presentation to all Northern Mayors, at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

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

APPENDIX A

Text of email dated 7th October 2024 from office of South Yorkshire Mayor to HSUK Civil Engineering Principal Colin Elliff (names of SYCA officials redacted):

Dear Mr Elliff,

Thank you for your recent email to Mayor Coppard, containing copies of your previous correspondence with him earlier this year. Apologies that you didn't receive a substantive response, but I can assure you that the contents of the emails were shared with the relevant transport officers in my team, who provided some feedback to me.

I understand that you came to our office a few years ago and presented your plans and ideas to two of our officers, one of whom, Xxxx Xxxxxxx, is still working here. Whilst we appreciate all the work that has gone into your detailed and comprehensive proposals for an alternative approach to Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 in the North, we do not consider that a presentation to the Mayor would be a good use of his time at present. However, officers have looked at the plans included in your most recent email and will bear them in mind when assessing future Government rail plans.

As you will be aware, the new Government is reviewing all the transport investment plans of the previous Government, in the light of their assessment of the state of public finances and will be publishing its findings and proposed way forward later this year. We expect this will set out their proposed approach to Northern Powerhouse Rail, HS2 (including safeguarding), the previous Government's Network North plan and the current Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline. You will also be aware that the Government have already cancelled the Restoring Your Railways programme, which suggests there is unlikely to be substantial new funding for a new and expanded rail network. Therefore, any rail proposals need to be realistic and affordable. However, it is always useful to have independent experts such as yourself putting forward ambitious alternatives for consideration.

Kind Regards

Xxxxxx Xxxxx

Director of Development, Collaboration and Culture

Office of Oliver Coppard
South Yorkshire's Mayor

APPENDIX B

10 Key Performance Tests for Northern Powerhouse Rail <i>Does NPR or Network North (NN) perform better?</i>		Winner	**Reference <i>to NN presentation</i>
1	Does NPR offer full interconnection between 11 principal network hubs?	NN	<i>Slides S36-S42</i>
2	Does NPR meet TfN's own journey time specification?	NN	<i>S43-S45</i>
3	Does NPR offer comprehensive direct links to Manchester Airport?	NN	<i>S46-S48</i>
4	Does NPR transform capacity for transpennine passengers?	NN	<i>S9-S13, S49-S54</i>
5	Does NPR transform capacity for transpennine freight?	NN	<i>S9-S13, S49-S54</i>
6	Is NPR supported by detailed schemes to transform principal hubs?	NN	<i>S55-S62</i>
7	Does NPR benefit small town communities beyond principal hubs?	NN	<i>S63-S66</i>
8	Is NPR configuration dictated by cancelled sections of HS2?	NN	<i>S17-S28, S44</i>
9	Does NPR resolve the current network disconnect in Bradford?	NN	<i>S20, S29-S35</i>
10	Does NPR achieve optimum Levelling-up in the Northern Powerhouse?	NN	<i>S14-S15</i>
<p><i>**HSUK/Network North presentation available on http://highspeeduk.co.uk/P31_HSUK_NN_Presentation.pdf and in the HSUK website Library as Document P31</i></p>			