

CLlr Louise Gittins,
Mr David Skaith,
Co-Chairs, Transport for the North

ref L31

High Speed UK
Connecting the Nation
www.highspeeduk.co.uk

cc Ms Katie Day, CEO

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16th June 2026
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Dear Co-Chairs,

On 20th November 2024 of this year, we wrote your predecessor Lord Patrick McLoughlin to detail our profound concerns at the latest (2024) iteration of the *Strategic Transport Plan* published by Transport for the North. This letter, and associated letters to Northern Leaders (dated 20/05/24, 18/06/24, 05/09/24 and 09/10/24) detailing the massively superior performance of our alternative Network North scheme, are all set out in our document library as Letters **L11**, **L12**, **L14**, **L18** and **L19**. Please refer to <http://highspeeduk.co.uk/newletters.html>.

It is a matter of regret, that Transport for the North has failed to respond in any meaningful way to these matters of clear public concern, and we would urge you, and the Transport of the North organisation that you lead, to engage with our concerns.

We now wish to alert you to new concerns that we have identified with your 2024 *Strategic Transport Plan* (STP). This document purports to present a blueprint for a future transport system in the Northern Powerhouse, and it is clear in its stated intent:

“Transforming connectivity is fundamental to transforming the North’s economy...”

The *Strategic Transport Plan* makes the bold claim, that its proposed interventions – primarily the new transpennine Northern Powerhouse Rail line linking Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford, Leeds and Hull – will effect this transformation, and deliver economic gains worth £118 billion additional annual GVA, equivalent to full Levelling-up of the Northern economy. Moreover, the STP offers the *Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review* (NPIER) as justification for this claim.

We have studied these documents in detail, and we have reached the following specific findings:

- We can find no evidence that a serious independent connectivity study of definitive Northern Powerhouse Rail proposals has ever taken place.
- We can see no evidence that definitive Northern Powerhouse Rail proposals even exist.
- Transport for the North’s £118 billion claim relates only to the ideal of an optimally-connected Northern Powerhouse, not to actual detailed proposals.
- As a justification for emerging Northern Powerhouse Rail proposals, it is essentially worthless.

Our concerns are set out in greater detail in the attached letter (reference **L32**) to Northern Leaders, and are summarised in a series of Freedom of Information requests in **Appendix A**.

We would be grateful for your prompt response to our FoI requests, and if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

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

APPENDIX A

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS TO TRANSPORT FOR THE NORTH

The purpose of these Freedom of Information requests is to compel to Transport for the North to:

- a) reveal the basis of the claim of £118 billion additional GVA benefits, and Levelling-up of the North's economy, that has been made in the 2024 *Strategic Transport Plan* and supported in the *Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review* (NPIER).
- b) demonstrate that Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) actually exists as a detailed, substantive scheme, developed to rigorous railway engineering criteria.
- c) explain how the NPR scheme conforms with the *Strategic Transport Plan's* vision statement: "Transforming connectivity is fundamental to transforming the North's economy."
- d) explain how NPR represents the best option to achieve this transformation.

High Speed UK's Freedom of Information requests to Transport for the North go as follows:

- Q1** Please confirm whether the £118 billion/Levelling-up claim is based upon an idealised, optimally-connected Northern Powerhouse (**Alternative A**) – or upon TfN's actual Northern Powerhouse Rail proposals as represented in the *Strategic Transport Plan* (**Alternative B**).
- Q2** If **Alternative A** is the case, please explain how the demonstrably suboptimal NPR proposals will be enhanced to deliver the necessary optimal "transformed connectivity", including responses that address the following specific deficiencies (*inter alia*):
 - Q2.1** Journey times between the principal cities of the Northern Powerhouse, that comprehensively fail to meet TfN's original specification, set in 2016.
 - Q2.2** Primary city pairs such as Sheffield and Bradford (Yorkshire's second- and third-largest cities) which under the STP will continue to have no direct interconnecting rail service.
- Q3** If **Alternative B** is the case, please define the full detail of the NPR scheme that was considered by SKW and Cambridge Econometrics (CBE) in their development of NPIER.
- Q4** Please define what independent transport modelling (if any) was undertaken by SKW/CBE.
- Q5** Please define what transport modelling was undertaken by Transport for the North, and how this modelling was verified/validated by SKW/CBE.
- Q6** Please explain how this modelling (and its resulting claim of £118 billion additional GVA) addressed the lack of any definitive NPR schemes for central Manchester and Leeds (and by implication, Liverpool, Manchester Airport, Sheffield, Bradford, Newcastle etc), and what assumptions were made for optimised network performance at these locations.
- Q7** Please provide full details of previous and current NPR transpennine routes.
- Q8** Please explain how TfN's design processes have been developed to ensure that Northern Powerhouse Rail (and other associated schemes as described in the STP) will deliver the "transformed connectivity" demanded in your *Strategic Transport Plan*.
- Q9** Please explain how TfN have evaluated the alternative Network North scheme, with its well-documented ability to deliver the required "transformed connectivity" – as advised in HSUK letter dated 20/11/24 (ref **L18**) – that is essential to "transforming the North's economy".
- Q10** Please describe the processes that TfN have adopted, to identify critical alignments for new (or upgraded or restored) railway routes, and then liaise with the appropriate Planning Authorities to protect these routes from encroaching urban development.
- Q11** Please review the technical comparisons set out in our letter (ref **L32**) to Northern Leaders, and provide an alternative narrative if you believe any of these comparisons to be wrong, unfair or inappropriate.