

Dear Secretary of State

Transport for the North's Statutory Advice for Manchester

Alongside the £96Bn commitment to the delivery of the Integrated Rail Plan, significant investment is being made to improve the North's current rail network delivering much needed infrastructure to supporting service changes, enabling faster, more reliable journeys, helping the North to grow.

However, despite this investment, there is more to do to fill the gaps and effectively integrate major schemes with each other, and the current network.

This letter highlights where Transport for the North feel further investment is needed and makes recommendations for how the industry should approach this work.

Context

An effective, efficient rail network in the North is fundamental for connecting people to jobs, health, education, and leisure opportunities, connecting businesses to each other and employees, and allowing the efficient movement of goods and services.

As a sub national transport body our role is to advise Government on the priorities for investment in the North's transport system, informed by our local knowledge, expertise, evidence, and with a particular focus on connecting places across the North.

The evidence base upon which Transport for the North has prepared its revised Strategic Transport Plan is clear: investing in the transformation of the North's connectivity is a necessary condition for realising its economic potential, improving social inclusion, and reducing transport's environmental impact.

Major investments are planned, including the vitally important Transpennine Route Upgrade and HS2, however the constraints on the current rail network, particularly in the Greater Manchester area, continue to be a significant blocker to providing a reliable service for customers today, and unless addressed, will prevent these major schemes from realising their full intended benefits, dampening down the envisaged transformation of rail services across the North for both passengers and freight.

Manchester Task Force

The creation of the Manchester Task Force has enabled progress to be made in addressing some of the long-standing constraints in the Greater Manchester area by bringing together the industry and partners. In this regard, the Manchester Task Force acts as an exemplar of the benefits of a collaborative approach and as such could be used elsewhere to inform the rail reform agenda ahead of the formal establishment of Great British Railways.

The work undertaken by the Manchester Task Force to date has led to the introduction of the December 2022 timetable as a temporary solution to help stabilise services following the issues of the May 2018 timetable change and has delivered improved levels of performance. The changes have brought stability,

but at the cost of reduced connectivity between key towns and cities of the North which must only ever be considered an interim solution until much needed new infrastructure is delivered.

The recent announcement of £72.3m toward delivery of the next phase of infrastructure improvements in Manchester is welcomed, and serves as a strong commitment from the Department to address the issues in Greater Manchester, helping to address yesterday's problems, but it is clear that further substantial investment is needed, and at speed if we are to continue to restore services and successfully prepare the network for the changes to come.

Demand for Rail

The importance of the North's rail services is reflected in the strength and pace of the recovery post pandemic. Notwithstanding changes in travel patterns and disruption resulting from industrial action, revenues have returned, as has growth, and with it crowding and performance issues.

The evidence underpinning our revised Strategic Transport Plan establishes the need to plan for and deliver significant growth in use of the rail network across the North if we are to deliver agreed economic, environmental, and social outcomes, including the legal requirement to achieve carbon net zero.

To achieve the modal shift and decarbonisation it remains necessary to plan for significant expansion of the rail offer beyond existing commitments already made by Government in the Integrated Rail Plan. This includes the need to further address constraints within the Greater Manchester area that are not addressed by those commitments.

Current infrastructure development plans do not address this level of ambition, and are still predicated on the restoration of services, rather than equipping the network for growth. As such, additional investment in the Greater Manchester area and at the North's other key major rail hubs will be required to realise the full benefit of major schemes alongside accommodating future local and regional growth.

We accept that at times, there may be a need for compromise to balance disruption, cost and resources, but any compromise of train services should always be the last resort, and where this is the case, we ask that the Department and industry engage us in meaningful discussion to determine the best approach to be taken. However, we must be clear, the North has already compromised with the introduction of the December 2022 timetable, and we do not feel it acceptable for local and regional services which the people of the North rely upon to be compromised in this way again.

An Outcome Focused Approach

It is clear that there is no one single solution to the issues in Greater Manchester, and that a series of interventions are needed, but what is currently missing is a clear plan which effectively brings together the work of the Manchester and North West Transformation Programme (MNTP) with the other major schemes destined for region, including HS2, Transpennine Route Upgrade

and Hope Valley upgrade, and which incorporates upcoming rolling stock changes, resources, and skills.

This plan is desperately needed, and should be predicated on delivering four key outcomes:

1. **Increasing Capacity on the Castlefield corridor** enabling trains to operate reliably through the Castlefield corridor, accommodating current service levels, restoring absent services, incorporating Transpennine Route Upgrade services, and increasing the provision for freight. The Castlefield Corridor should remain designated as congested infrastructure until the point at which the available capacity meets service requirements.
2. **Delivering reliable train service performance**, specifically ensuring that performance through central Manchester consistently achieves the national average for T-3, T-15, and for cancellations as a minimum, providing a dependable service for all.
3. **Restoring and improving rail connectivity to/from Manchester Airport** to the rest of the North, including rail access to/from Sheffield, Bradford, Chester, and North Wales, ensuring these are protected throughout the introduction of major schemes to the region, with no service regressions or downgrading of capacity or connectivity.
4. **Providing the capacity for growth** to accommodate the increase in passenger and freight services that are required to achieve agreed economic, environmental, and social outcomes as set out in the revised Strategic Transport Plan, realising the benefits of the major schemes coming to the region, particularly the Transpennine Route Upgrade and the associated high gauge works, transforming east-west freight connectivity.

Furthermore, it is Transport for the North's recommendation that to achieve these outcomes, the following activity is required:

1. An on-going commitment by the Department for Transport to the work of the Manchester Task Force and with it the Manchester and North West Transformation Programme, appropriately funded and resourced, and to expand its terms of reference include the development of options for infrastructure enhancements to effectively integrate committed major schemes alongside the growth of local services.
2. Support for the development of the 'Blueprint for the North' by Transport for the North and its partners, in collaboration with industry. We would ask that the Department for Transport adopts and maintains this as the mechanism by which the need for future improvements is identified on a collaborative basis, incorporating interventions to effectively integrate major schemes into the existing rail network. This is likely to include the timely development and delivery of solutions for Manchester Piccadilly and Stockport area, alongside key activities which support the realisation of

service changes, including service planning, rolling stock changes, recruitment, and training.

3. A commitment from the Department for Transport to work with Transport for the North and its partners to use the Blueprint to drive forward the required pipeline of investment in the Manchester area, at pace, which is managed and delivered as a co-ordinated programme, integrating both track and train.
4. Acknowledgement of the extent to which the need to address capacity issues in/around Stockport and Manchester Piccadilly is required to enable the committed outcomes for the Hope Valley Upgrade to be realised, additional local rail services to be introduced, and to maintain operation of existing local rail services during the construction phase of HS2 Phase 2B.
5. Based on the evidence available it is arguable that the Stockport area should be formally identified as congested infrastructure in advance of normal process, thereby affording time for measures to be taken to address foreseen capacity issues in this area ahead of the operation of High-Speed services.
6. The Department for Transport to ensure that it formally seeks, in a timely way, the views of Transport for the North and its partners when choosing how to balance and address the interdependencies between Transpennine Route Upgrade, Northern Powerhouse Rail, HS2 and services on the rest of the North's rail system.

The Manchester Task Force demonstrates the added value of collaborative working in the manner advocated as part of the Government's Rail Reforms. It shows that it is possible to develop viable and affordable solutions and to oversee their implementation in a practical and pragmatic way. The benefits of this collaborative model will be promoted for other network congestion hotspots that have impacts across the North including Leeds, Sheffield and York.

The evidence base is clear that continuing to prioritise the need to address the remaining constraints in the Greater Manchester Area is not only critical to the successful delivery of committed investments, but to enabling agreed outcomes for the North to be realised.

Transport for the North remains committed to working with the Department for Transport, through the Manchester Task Force and Manchester and North West Transformation Programme, with a view to delivering these recommendations.

This letter supersedes Transport for the North's statutory advice in respect of the Greater Manchester rail network submitted in February 2020.

Yours faithfully,