

Dear Secretary of State

Transport for the North's Statutory Advice for Manchester

An effective, well planned, and reliable transport network for the North is a fundamental part of everyday life – 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 and 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.

The constraints on the rail network in the Greater Manchester area continue to be a significant blocker to realising the transformation of rail services across the North for both passengers and freight.

The creation of the Manchester Task Force has enabled progress to be made in addressing some of those constraints 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 to inform other aspects of the rail reform agenda ahead of the formal establishment of Great British Railways.

Notwithstanding the progress made to date with the successful introduction of the December 2022 timetable, nor the commitment of £72.3m toward delivery of the next phase of infrastructure improvements, the work of the Manchester Task Force demonstrates a need for further improvements. That need derives from an evidence-based assessment of on-going constraints in the Greater Manchester area (including, but not limited to the Castlefield corridor). Specifically, it shows that improvements will be required to address key bottlenecks, including Manchester Oxford Road, and to enable the delivery and effective integration of planned investment in HS2, the Transpennine Route Upgrade, the Hope Valley Upgrade and Northern Powerhouse Rail alongside local partner aspirations.

Future Demand

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 overcrowding and performance issues.

The evidence underpinning the 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 net zero.

To achieve the modal shift and decarbonisation benefits associated with those outcomes it remains necessary to plan for significant expansion of the rail offer beyond existing commitments already made by Government. This includes the need to further address constraints within the Greater Manchester area that will not otherwise be addressed by those commitments. Indeed, 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 those commitments, delivering benefits across the North.

An Outcome Focused Approach

Based on the evidence available, it is Transport for the North's recommendation that the Government should plan for and deliver improvements in the Greater Manchester area in an expedient manner that will benefit the North as a whole, by:

1. **Increasing Capacity on the Castlefield corridor** with no less than 16 trains per hour each way able to operate reliably between Ordsall Lane Junction, Castlefield Junction and Manchester Piccadilly. The Castlefield corridor should remain designated as congested infrastructure until the point at which this is achieved.
2. **Enabling a reliable performance**, specifically ensuring that performance consistently achieves the national average for T-3, T-15, and cancellations as a minimum, providing a dependable service for passengers.
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.
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.

Furthermore, it is Transport for the North's recommendation that this will require:

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 (revenue) resourced, and with a remit to align its activity with the development and delivery of committed major schemes already in the pipeline.
2. A commitment from the Department for Transport to maintain the 'Blueprint for Manchester' as the mechanism by which the need for future improvements is identified on a collaborative basis with Transport for the North and its partners.

3. A commitment from the Department for Transport to work with Transport for the North and its partners to use the Blueprint as the basis for taking forward a pipeline of investment that is managed and delivered as a co-ordinated programme.
4. Acknowledgement of the extent to which the need to address capacity issues in/around Stockport 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. Based on the evidence available it is arguable that the Stockport area should be formally identified as congested infrastructure.
5. 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 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,