



From Lord Berkeley
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To northern mayors and other leaders, 26 November 2020

A northern rail network from northern experts to match London's network of services

Dear...

For some time I and colleagues have been considering how best the rail journey experience within the Northern Powerhouse area can be improved.

From discussion with many of you during my time as Deputy Chair of the Oakervee Review, it was evident that there was some divergence of view between different cities and their mayors or leaders about priorities for rail investment. Was it a high-speed line to get to and from London more quickly, or was it to improve local and regional services within the Northern region and beyond, with particular emphasis on East – West routes?

We pointed out that services to and from London were already quite good, and passengers generally would not want to use them every day. Conversely, local and regional services were more likely to be used more frequently or daily. Many leaders we met wanted both, but with HS2 costs still escalating and the UK's financial position worsening, it is unreasonable to expect to get both, i.e. one pair of lines focussing on London or a wider range of route improvements focussing in travelling within the Northern region and with particular emphasis on East West services.

There is now the added challenge of assessing future demand, about which the Department of Transport is silent. What is worrying is that, according to the Rail Delivery Group, road traffic returned to its pre-Covid levels in September, whereas rail only managed around 40%. So the future demand for rail travel, taking into account the success of remote working, must be uncertain. Will future demand grow more in local services or intercity?

Thus as a contribution to the debate, I have pleasure in attaching two presentations from Network North who have developed a compelling vision of a comprehensive set of routes and services to 'interconnect the major towns and cities of the Northern Powerhouse with a fully electrified rail network.'

I believe that a good vision for your region would be to achieve a regional network of rail lines as good as those which the South East enjoys. That would really rebalance the economy! Ideally, your Region should have control not only of what gets built when and the related finance, but by concentrating on regional services, electrification and better services in smaller 'bite-size sections', the work can be delivered and the benefits felt much more quickly.

Given the constraints of Corona, meetings are difficult, but I would much appreciate a short meeting with you remotely to discuss these ideas with you.

Tony Berkeley, House of Lords