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Government should welcome and take forward the recommendations of the ‘Rail Needs Assessment’ for the Midlands and the North, published today (15 December 2020) by the National Infrastructure Commission.

The Report says that the need for rail improvements is greatest in the regions, and that therefore priority should be given to upgrades in these areas and, if the money was available, prioritising regional links.

The report also emphasises the need for concentrating on East West links in the North Liverpool – Manchester – Leeds/Sheffield and beyond.

Lord Berkeley said ‘I welcome this report and its emphasis on delivering rail improvement in the North and Midlands regions where the economic need is greatest. It is the first report from a government agency that challenges the runaway costs of HS2 and recommends that any enhancements beyond upgrades should be dependent on whether the core schemes are delivered ‘on time and within the budget’. Applying this to HS2 should mean cancelling it tomorrow and spending the money in the regions – where there are many shovel ready projects, including electrification of the Northern parts of the Midland Main Line and improving the Castlefield corridor in Manchester.’

The Report rightly states that prioritising regional links are more likely to bring higher benefits overall, emphasising the need to connect major towns and cities, but it also reminds us that the focus should be on journeys that people are most likely to make – into cities from the surrounding area (in 2018-19 – 60% of rail journeys in Yorkshire and Humberside) compared to 10% to London.

It is a very sensible and pragmatic report, and is very much in line with much of what I said in my dissenting Oakervee report dated January 2020

I do urge political leaders in the North to welcome this realistic report into the real economic and transport needs of their regions – for upgrades and regional links – ones which can most easily be delivered on time and to budget. As the Secretary of State for Transport said yesterday, ‘we have only one pot of money’. He should also reinstate into this pot the £1bn that was removed from Network Rail’s enhancement budget in the recent Spending Review.

I strongly support the overall view of the National Infrastructure Commission which clearly thinks that this pot should be spent in the Regions.’

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