



Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Integrated Rail Plan](#), HC 974

Wednesday 23 March 2022

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Ruth Cadbury; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 218–279

Witnesses

II: Andrew Stephenson MP, Minister of State, Department for Transport; and Nick Bisson, Director, HS2, Integrated Rail Plan and Northern Powerhouse Rail, Department for Transport.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Transport](#)
- [Northern Powerhouse Partnership](#)
- [Northern Powerhouse Partnership](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Andrew Stephenson and Nick Bisson.

Q218 **Chair:** I ask our two remaining witnesses to give their name and rank for the record. We will start with the Minister.

Andrew Stephenson: I am Andrew Stephenson, Minister of State at the Department for Transport.

Nick Bisson: I am Nick Bisson, director at the Department for Transport for the integrated rail plan and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

Q219 **Chair:** Minister and Mr Bisson, thank you very much indeed for being with us. You are the last panel in our inquiry, which has been incredibly interesting. We have heard from three Mayors, of West Yorkshire, Birmingham and Manchester. We have heard from a range of academics. We have been up to Leeds and Bradford to get their views. It coincided with our HS2 update, so we met the chief executive of HS2. Obviously, we had Network Rail and the NIC before us, before you came. It is all now down to your views.

Let's start with a general opener, but I do not want to take too long. I only have until 10.40 and then I will hand over. What are the big upsides of the 25-year plan? By that same nature, what are the downsides of trying to plan so far ahead?

Andrew Stephenson: First of all, thank you, Chair, for conducting this inquiry. This is the biggest single investment ever from the Government into British railways. It is a £96 billion plan. It is a pipeline that gives certainty to the industry to invest. This is a plan that will bring cities and communities across the midlands and the north closer together. It will boost productivity, therefore, and will help with levelling up. The IRP will fundamentally bring more benefits to more places more quickly than the previous plan. That is why we have taken some of the decisions that underpin this plan.

We believe that it strikes the right balance. There have been compromises that had to be made. I have spent a lot of time listening to stakeholders across the midlands and the north over the past two years that I have been in post developing this plan. We have not been able to give everybody everything they wanted, but I think this plan goes a long way to delivering the benefits and the outputs that people wanted in terms of significant capacity improvements and significant journey time reductions, and to deliver those benefits sooner than previously expected.

Q220 **Chair:** That is the top line in terms of the policy. By that very nature, you are planning ahead and putting a cost to it. You do not know what the cost will ultimately be. There is an impact on the already overloaded capacity parts, Leeds station being a good example. Where do you yourself see the risks and negatives from having such a long-term plan?



Andrew Stephenson: I think everybody wants to see improvements, and they want to see them today. A lot of the improvements in this plan will take a long time to deliver. Since we published the plan I have, of course, deposited the western leg build to take HS2 from Crewe into Manchester. That is a revolutionary piece of infrastructure and will significantly increase capacity and dramatically reduce journey times, but the delivery into service date for that is not until 2035 to 2041. I will be approaching 60 or just past my 60th birthday by the time it is delivered. That is a long time to wait.

What we have tried to do with a range of other things is to bring those benefits sooner. Some things will still take a long time to deliver. One of the challenges with the plan is that it sets out just a core pipeline, so lots of people are saying, "But what about Hull? What about Sheffield?" We see it very much as the core pipeline to give industry certainty to invest, to plan and to train people up. Using an adaptive approach, we can then add to that network. We can build on it and go further in the years to come. I am not sure if Nick wants to add anything.

Nick Bisson: No, that is fine.

Q221 **Chair:** In terms of the business case and the Green Book, which has been updated, has this been predicated on the Green Book as was, or have you modelled it on the Green Book that can take into account regeneration levelling up and also decarbonisation? It is not quite clear from page 98 whether there has been a nod towards the new Green Book or whether it has been based on the new Green Book. Could you help?

Andrew Stephenson: I will answer that, and then I will perhaps defer to Nick as well. The most recent changes to the Green Book put a lot more emphasis on the strategic case. I would say that was absolutely fundamental to how we looked at these projects. We are two years to the day of going into the first lockdown, and Covid, of course, has decimated passenger numbers of the railways. If we were using the conventional way of analysing transport investment, we would have been doing it at a time when passenger demand had evaporated and therefore the BCRs for many of these schemes would not have stacked up at all.

We had to look at the long-term case. We had to look at the strategic case. Of course, the changes to the Green Book allowed us to put a lot more weight on strategic connectivity and the agglomeration benefits of joining parts of the midlands and the north closer together, allowing people in different cities to collaborate and work together. I would say that this has very much been based on the latest iterations of the Green Book. Nick may want to add to that.

Nick Bisson: There is a qualitative and a quantitative piece. As the Minister says, in making an overall judgment about value for money you look not only at the crude BCR numbers but at what objectives have been set and how this contributes to the Government's priorities for the country. On that basis, we are comfortable.



To answer the quantitative question, we typically look at benefits on three levels. We look at the benefits to transport users. We extend that to what we call wider economic benefits, looking at agglomeration and the like. The third level, which is the most difficult to do analytically, is to repeat that, but with a relaxation of the assumptions about land use and about population and employment. Typically, the underlying assumptions are that the population of, let's say, Manchester continues to grow in line with historical trend and the number of jobs in Manchester grows in line with historical trend. If you are trying to let that vary as a consequence of the scheme and pick up the feedback, it becomes more complicated, and that is what we will be doing as we take the business cases forward.

Q222 **Chair:** The technical annex says that "given the early stage of scheme development, full analysis of the wider economic impacts of the different options has not been completed, in particular to understand the dynamic impact of new infrastructure on land use, employment and population growth."

Nick Bisson: That is what I just said, I think.

Q223 **Chair:** That has not been taken into account.

Nick Bisson: We have not got to the level 3 piece in quantitative terms. We will, going forward, but we are happy about the relative assessment of different schemes, and, as the Minister said, in the qualitative judgment of, "Is this the right thing to do for the country?", we have wrapped in the contribution to the overall objectives.

Q224 **Chair:** The other bit it is subject to is the 12-minute journey time from Bradford to Leeds. That is subject to a business case as well.

With all of those variables that the three of us have just discussed, of the three options in terms of Northern Powerhouse Rail you have plumped for option 1, which is the upgrade. You say that all are low to poor value for money, but how can you rule out options 2 and 3, given that there are so many variables in the system? There is a nod to the new Green Book on regeneration, and it would massively have regenerated Bradford. I am curious as to how you can land on a decision using limited information and rule out a decision using limited information.

Nick Bisson: I think you are looking at the comparability of the outputs from the different options. As we set out in the various documentation, the journey times are not very different. The train service that you run there is fundamentally the same. What is assumed is four trains an hour from Liverpool and three from Manchester to Leeds and beyond, with two trains an hour from Birmingham to Manchester to Leeds and beyond.

As you say, you are not getting the same degree of change from Bradford to Manchester. As we set out in the evidence to the Committee, if you look at where people in Bradford are currently working, there are 40 times more working in Leeds than there are in Manchester. That is why



we have prioritised the Bradford-Leeds connection, and indeed looking at the West Yorkshire mass transit system.

Q225 **Chair:** Minister, do you want to add anything?

Andrew Stephenson: No, I concur with that. As we said in our evidence to the Committee, points 30 and 31 are the most pertinent on this. Very few people in Bradford currently work in Manchester. Of course, that is not an argument that we should not invest and that we should not help change the economic dynamics, but even if you look at a 20-fold increase in the number of people working, it would still be 6% of Bradford's population.

Most people in Bradford most value local transport networks. That is why we think investing in a West Yorkshire mass transit system is going to be of more benefit to people in Bradford, as well of course as reducing the journey time between Leeds and Bradford from 20 minutes to as low as 12 minutes. We believe that those investments will help Bradford more than spending up to £18 billion to go for Transport for the North's preferred option of a brand-new route going across via Bradford.

Nick Bisson: To pick up a theme from the session you were having earlier, it can also be delivered much more quickly.

Chair: We put your evidence to people in Bradford—that not enough people go from Bradford to Manchester—and you can imagine what the answer was: "If we had the rail line, they would."

I have gone on far too long, although only by a minute, and we have a whole series of sections to go through. Members will do that. The first section is regarding the amendment—shall I call it?—to the HS2 plan, the 2b eastern leg. We start with Ben and then we have Greg.

Mr Bradshaw: Amendment, cancellation or whatever you want to call it.

Chair: I was trying to find the word.

Q226 **Mr Bradshaw:** Minister, I would like an explanation, please, for the decision to cancel the eastern leg to Leeds.

Andrew Stephenson: The most important thing to start with, Chair, as you will appreciate, is that we have not cancelled the eastern leg. What we have said is that we will build a first phase from the west midlands to East Midlands Parkway, allowing HS2 trains to directly access the centre of Nottingham and Derby. We have then allocated £100 million to look at how to get HS2 trains to Leeds, whether building a wholly new line, as previously proposed, or upgrades or a combination of the two, and also looking at issues like capacity at Leeds station. We hope that study is under way soon.

The Prime Minister has said on a number of occasions that he is committed to delivering HS2 trains into Leeds. We have not cancelled it. I appreciate at the moment that saying that as part of this plan we are



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only initially funding, as part of the core pipeline, from the west midlands to East Midlands Parkway, has led to a degree of concern among people.

Q227 Mr Bradshaw: I think what puzzles the people in the areas and regions that consider themselves to be worst affected by this—notwithstanding what you said earlier about the benefit-cost ratio—is that all the previous benefit-cost ratios showed that the Leeds leg and the eastern leg were far better in benefit-cost terms than either the Manchester leg or even phase 1 to Birmingham. Was the benefit-cost ratio taken into account when the decision was made, and how?

Andrew Stephenson: It was taken into account. All these factors were taken into account. What had previously been looked at was constructing a wholly brand-new line or basically just doing upgrades. What we decided to propose as part of the core pipeline as an initial new high-speed line from the west midlands to East Midlands Parkway is something that has not previously been looked at. It would allow HS2 trains immediately to go into the centre of Nottingham and Derby, two main population centres in the east midlands. That would not have happened under the previous plans. We believe that that has a very good BCR, and therefore helps the BCR for the entire network.

The BCRs were looked at. They were part of the consideration. It is true to say, as you have just said, that the eastern leg had a better BCR previously than the western leg, but we believe what we are currently proposing on the east is the interim solution before we come up with the final solution. It actually has a very good BCR and very good connectivity for local communities.

Q228 Mr Bradshaw: What is it?

Andrew Stephenson: The BCR for the eastern leg, I would say, has not been remodelled at this stage. We have various working BCRs, but we only publish BCRs when we are doing business cases.

The BCR for the western leg, because when I deposited the Bill we published a new strategic outline business case, we said was 0.6 to 1.7. We gave a range because, of course, there is uncertainty over it. The actual BCR for the eastern leg will depend on the end state. At the moment, we are saying we will build initially west midlands to East Midlands Parkway, but until we have the outcome of the £100 million study and know if we are building on from there, or what we are doing, it is quite hard to model a BCR. Nick may want to say more.

Nick Bisson: In the technical annex to the IRP we published the value-for-money categories of the different choices, which showed that what was proposed in the IRP was likely higher value for money than the eastern leg originally conceived.

We did not publish the detailed numbers because both of the models involved—PLANET for HS2 and NoRMS for TfN—were undergoing upgrades at the time. We felt that the relative assessment of the different



schemes was robust, but that those numbers had a degree of variability in them. We will update those for the future business cases.

The only other thing I would add on the consideration is that if you look at the material the Department has published over a long period, going back to 2013, it has consistently shown that on the eastern leg there are alternative choices for getting significant capacity increases. On the west, we feel we have maxed out what you could do with the west coast main line, and that you would definitely be looking at a new line. If your question was only capacity, there were alternative choices in the east. That is in work that Atkins did for the Department. It was published in 2013 and updated by Mott MacDonald in 2017-2019.

Q229 Mr Bradshaw: Minister, do you understand why the concerns of those who feel concerned about the cancellation of the eastern leg are fuelled by your failure so far to produce a BCR for that cancellation, or for what you are proposing instead? When do you think you might have that?

Andrew Stephenson: We will certainly be able to look at this in more detail when we know the end state. We are hoping to kick off the routes to Leeds study as soon as possible. I met Yorkshire leaders last Friday, and this was again a point I reiterated to them. I am keen for that work not to be delayed any further and to get it under way.

As soon as we have decided what the end state will look like, we will of course have to come up with a BCR. With HS2, we have always been clear throughout the project that we tend to only publish BCRs when we are making investment decisions. Of course, when we moved forward with phase 1, we published a full business case when we deposited the Bill in 2013, and in 2017 for phase 2a. We published a strategic outline business case for the western leg, when we deposited the Bill to Parliament last month.

Certainly, our ambition would be to deposit legislation for an eastern leg in due course. We are re-enabling the teams to look at the first section and start the public consultation and everything that needs to go into underpinning that. When we deposit that to Parliament, we will have to bring forward a business case for it. That will have to include BCRs and all the other information that you and others would expect.

Q230 Mr Bradshaw: What is your estimate of the impact on the overall cost of the entire project of the cancellation of the eastern leg?

Andrew Stephenson: I reiterate that at the moment we do not know what the end state is. The full eastern leg as modelled previously was, I think, in excess of £30 billion, and the funding envelope for building the eastern leg, midland main line and east coast main line upgrade was, I think, £12.8 billion. If we decided not to build any further and decided not to do anything more, there would be a sizeable cost reduction in the overall funding envelope that we need to construct HS2. I think whichever way the route to Leeds comes out, there is certainly going to



be talk of potential new stations, new lines or significant upgrades in order to facilitate the services we want to see to Leeds.

I cannot say how much the saving is at the moment, but ballpark it is what was previously estimated the last time a cost estimate for the eastern leg was given versus what is within the £96 billion currently allocated for that scheme.

Mr Bradshaw: Thank you.

Q231 **Greg Smith:** To continue on the same theme, Minister, you have just said that when the fresh legislation comes through to build the remaining parts of HS2, and indeed the IRP, new BCRs will have to be published. Will one be published for the entirety of HS2 to include phase 1 within that? Is there a likelihood that it will drop below one?

Andrew Stephenson: Yes; a BCR will be published for the whole HS2 network when we publish the next full business case for any phase of the railway. There is a risk it will fall below one. We have said for the western leg that the BCR is 0.6 to 1.7. Clearly, one of the biggest factors driving that is current uncertainty over rail demand following Covid.

At the time of the publication of the IRP, I think Northern was running at 62% and TransPennine was running at 67%. The national average of rail passenger usage at the time was 62%, so the north was recovering quicker, but it is still fair to say that on all routes across the country passenger demand is down. Because passenger demand is down beyond the historical trends we would have expected, that has had a significant impact on the BCRs of not just HS2 but all the other projects we have considered.

Q232 **Greg Smith:** Hang on a minute. We have been told, certainly since I have been elected as a Member of Parliament, that HS2 is really more about capacity than speed. Many more questions come out of that, but we won't go there right now. You have just said that demand for the railways, albeit because of the pandemic, is massively down, so where is the case for this railway at all any more?

Andrew Stephenson: We have had to balance different views on this, but the view that I hold and the view that the Government hold is that passenger demand will recover. People will still want to live in great population centres and great cities and commute between them. When the IRP was written, the national figure for rail usage was 62% of its pre-Covid levels. I think the latest figure I have seen—Nick may wish to correct me—was 72%. Even in just a couple of months, we have continued to see recovery.

We have seen recovery of passenger demand in the north quicker than in the south. We have seen recovery of passenger numbers of weekend and leisure users faster than those who were commuting into work five days a week. We are seeing demand recover, but, as I am sure the Committee saw when it visited Leeds, Leeds is a city that has been transformed in



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recent years. There are new buildings going up right, left and centre, in the same way that Manchester and many other cities such as Birmingham are all following the same trajectory.

There is still a desire, post pandemic, to live in our great cities. Therefore, we believe fundamentally that there will be an increasing desire to travel between those great cities, and we should provide a low-carbon, mass transit system for them. That is the fundamental part of the business case for HS2.

Q233 Greg Smith: Just to confirm, Minister, certainly a big takeaway I took from our trip to Leeds and Bradford, and talking to colleagues in the House of Commons of all parties who represent seats in the midlands and the north, is a pressing demand to travel between towns and cities, particularly across east-west, in the north of England. The Government are right to be focused on those east-west routes.

What I did not pick up on was any particular, pressing urgency for north-south routes. How far has that actually been modelled into the decision? As far as I can see it, from evidence we have taken, and from simply talking to colleagues and people we saw on our trip, the demand is not for north-south; it is for east-west and connectivity between villages, towns and cities in the north of England as opposed to a very fast route in order to come south.

Andrew Stephenson: A lot of the northern leaders I have spoken to—as part of developing this plan I spoke to over 60 northern leaders—do not want to choose. If they had to choose, they would probably say east-west, but then, if you pushed them further, they would say it is about local connectivity. It is more about how you get into town on the bus routes, the cycle routes and everything else, because those are the journeys that the vast majority of people take. It goes to the dilemma of how much we spend on the major projects like this and how much we spend on local transport. Of course, the Government want to deliver both.

One thing that is important to recognise is that in the integrated rail plan, which flowed out of the Oakervee review, phase 1 was already under construction and phase 2a was heading towards Royal Assent. We basically said, “Take them as a given and then look at everything else.” Immediately, the National Infrastructure Commission in the rail needs assessment very much focused on east-west because we were taking some of the big north-south investments as happening. They have not just had Royal Assent; notice to proceed has happened and the main works civils have mobilised.

I think the north needs both. I do not think that the north should be forced to choose. That was a refrain of Andy Burnham when he was in front of this Committee. London has both, so why would the north or the midlands have to choose? Nick, do you want to add anything?



Nick Bisson: I would probably pull out what the economic effects are, and what we are trying to do. One point is unifying labour markets and giving people access to a wider range of jobs, and firms a wider skillset to draw on. By the time we have finished, Manchester to Birmingham will be 41 minutes. That is bringing those together, so it is not just about unifying across the Pennines. I would say it is about Birmingham to Manchester and Birmingham to Nottingham as well.

You then have the evidence from Mayor Street about the extent to which the north-south investment is driving business investment in the west midlands now and in the north later as those plans get firmer. We are trying to unify labour markets; we are trying to make it easier for firms to locate outside the pressured south-east that they currently see; and we are looking to give businesses certainty about the future as well.

Greg Smith: I think my time is up.

Q234 **Chair:** It would be worth summarising the evidence, to a certain extent. I recognise what you just said, Mr Bisson, but you have actually said that you have not been able to take into account population growth, employment or land use. Here, you are saying that you have looked at that when making this decision.

Nick Bisson: What I said to you earlier was that there is a quantitative piece. Have we yet modelled that? No. There is a qualitative piece. Have we taken that into account in the decision making because of the objectives the Government have set? Yes.

Q235 **Chair:** It appears that sometimes, when you want to evidence a decision but you do not have the exact figure, you take into account those extra points, and yet in others you do not. I don't understand how you can do it for some but not for others, if this is one big integrated £96 billion plan.

Nick Bisson: We are being consistent about the assessment of how the different options contribute to the objectives that the Government have set out.

Q236 **Chair:** Again summarising the evidence, because this is the last session, we had always previously looked at the BCR being 1.5 if it went all the way up to Leeds on a new line. That was what took it from 1.2, which was the indicator of low to poor value for money. Now that does not occur, but the thing that really struck me is that we do not have a figure for how much the revised 2b east will cost. If we do not have a figure for what it will cost, how can you work out what the business case is? How can you make that decision?

Nick Bisson: In the technical annex—the table on page 26—we set out the assessment of the different options that had been considered, including the likely value-for-money categories of each. They looked at upgrading the existing network. They looked at what is in the IRP in terms of a route to East Midlands Parkway and access to Sheffield. They looked at an extension of Sheffield to Leeds and at three larger options:



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the eastern leg in full; an upgrade via Newark; and an upgrade of the Erewash Valley line which parallels the midland main line.

Q237 **Chair:** Again, you are working on the basis that we are going so far with the new line, but the aim is to get the HS2 trains into Leeds.

Nick Bisson: Yes.

Q238 **Chair:** That has to be almost part of the build so that, yes, we will see those HS2 trains in Leeds. You cannot do that without substantial investment in Leeds station, and, as you may have heard from Peter Hendy, you cannot get more trains in there unless you add more platforms.

Nick Bisson: Agreed, but it is a little bit more nuanced than that. Once TRU is built—I am not going to talk about local services because I think they are fairly static—Leeds station is assumed to be coping with two and a half trains an hour terminating and seven and a half going through on the long-distance service. When I say half a train, that is a train every two hours.

With the previous plans, if you had built the eastern leg in full and TfN's version of the Northern Powerhouse, you would have been trying to accommodate 10 terminating trains and nine through. It is the terminating ones that really take up the capacity because they obviously need to sit in the platform for—

Chair: About 10 minutes.

Nick Bisson: Yes. Depending on how you take HS2 trains to Sheffield, there are choices about holding the number of terminating trains much lower than that. There is work to be done at Leeds station, but we need to look at the full range of options for how that might best be achieved, consistent with where the Government get to on the best way of getting HS2 to Leeds.

Chair: I have gone over time, but I thought it was important for Members to summarise that evidence. Let's move on to disruption and Grahame Morris.

Q239 **Grahame Morris:** I want to pick up on one of the earlier answers. I hope that you caught some of the evidence from the first panel. I put similar questions to those panellists. Their answers were about reliability and resilience, and the option of new build rather than upgrading Victorian infrastructure. I am summarising, and maybe I am doing them a disservice, but their answer was that ultimately it is politicians who make the decision. Whether that is completely objective or subjective is a matter of debate.

Going back to your earlier answers to my colleagues about the value for money or the opportunity cost in relation to the cancellation of the eastern leg phase 2b, can we go back to the MacDonald report? That opinion seems to be at odds with the evidence you have given. It states:



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“In isolation both Strategic Alternatives to HS2 provide some benefits to a limited set of locations”—presumably that is Nottingham and Derby, as you mentioned—“but overall provide significantly less benefits than the Phase 2b Eastern leg in full.” Is it using a different set of criteria?

Andrew Stephenson: Can I clarify? Is this from the Mott MacDonald report?

Grahame Morris: Yes.

Andrew Stephenson: Previously, when we modelled the Y network, we have done option appraisals.

Nick Bisson: We address this in paragraph 24 of the evidence we gave to the Committee. It is clearly the authors’ opinion. The Government have to take their own decisions. Their opinion was that for the east midlands the IRP plans outperform previous proposals. For Chesterfield and Sheffield, it is similar. From London to North Yorkshire and the north-east, there are significant improvements, and only modest improvements to Leeds.

The scope of Mott MacDonald was only on the eastern leg. Actually, if you look at Leeds, the previous plans for Birmingham to Leeds would have given you a journey time of either 49 or 79 minutes—the difference depending on whether you served Sheffield or not. The last business case we published assumed that you served Sheffield, so you got the longer journey time. Because Mott did not look at the western leg, actually we are offering a Birmingham-Leeds journey time via Manchester of 79 to 89 minutes; the difference depends on whether the trains stop at Crewe.

I think we have done more than is accepted there, but fundamentally the judgment the authors are making is that you do not have an HS2 train to Leeds. That is what is driving a lot of it. As the Minister said, that is what the Government want to look at through the £100 million study.

Q240 **Grahame Morris:** I understand that. From conversations and evidence we received during our visit to Leeds and Bradford and from evidence given to the Committee, including from the previous panel, the objective criterion of reducing journey times is not the sole criterion. It is about improving connectivity, and resilience and capacity in particular. Numerous witnesses, both politicians as well as academics and others, have stressed the importance of that.

To stick to the questions that I am supposed to ask, what informs your choice? Is it value for money? Is it the BCR? Is it whether to upgrade the existing Victorian infrastructure or go for new build, which seems to be the preferred option in the south?

Andrew Stephenson: I will defer to Nick in a minute, but for me there are two overriding considerations. The first would be the ability to deliver benefits sooner. I say that because I principally look after the HS2 project. HS2, as a project, started in 2009. It took until 2013 to deposit a



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hybrid Bill and until 2017 for Royal Assent. It was 2020 before we got main works construction under way. It will be 2029 to 2033 before we open phase 1. With anything new build, you are looking at a minimum of 20 years.

With something like the trans-Pennine route upgrade, two years ago I inherited a scheme scoped by the previous Government. It was a £2.9 billion part-electrification and an upgrade. We have now changed and modified that to be an £8 billion scheme. There is lots more three-tracking and four-tracking, and lots more ways of increasing capacity and resilience. A lot of that is within existing Network Rail land boundaries, and therefore we can crack on with it. We can get on with parts where we need consents at the same time as getting Transport and Works Act orders put through. The trans-Pennine route upgrade is already something that is well under way and delivering.

For me, the principal reason is that we can deliver benefits sooner by investing in the existing network. The second is that we are all increasingly conscious of our environmental commitments and the need to hit net zero by 2050. The sheer amount of concrete, steel and other things that are involved in new build, with a lot of tunnelling that of course residents demand to mitigate very obvious local concerns, mean that it is hard to avoid a huge environmental impact. For me, they are the two principal reasons, but Nick might have others.

Nick Bisson: The only thing I would add—it reflects a little bit the conversation we were having with Mr Smith—is what is the difference in outputs and how similar are they? When we looked at Manchester to Leeds, there was a four-minute difference in journey times. Fundamentally, it was the same train service in terms of the capacity that is needed. Similar considerations apply to Liverpool.

In the east midlands we are actually doing better to Nottingham and Derby. We are still getting to Sheffield in the same time, despite building less new line. That is really what is driving the assessment.

Q241 Grahame Morris: I understand the time factor in new construction and new build. Can we go back to the disruption that is involved in upgrading the existing Victorian infrastructure? I know that Ministers hate this, but we have had sight of a leaked memo from the chief executive of Network Rail, Andrew Haines. I am completely familiar with this because I frequently have to travel down to London on a Sunday on the east coast main line if I have appointments early on a Monday.

This is for the east coast main line, I might say, but it gives a flavour of the level of disruption. He says, “assuming continuous weekends of closures to complete the works...the route would be closed at one location every week for between 26 and 29 years.” If it was closed at two locations, it “would take 13 to 14 years” to complete the works. How will you mitigate the disruption for the IRP? That seems immense. I know that is a weekend—I appreciate that—but still.



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Andrew Stephenson: I certainly do not underestimate the disruption that some of these investments could cause. We have to work very closely with local stakeholders, passengers and others to ensure that we keep the disruption to a minimum.

I am very keen that we explore a whole range of options. The most important thing is to ensure that passengers are informed when disruption is likely so that they can plan accordingly and that you have alternative routes available, if they are available, not just for passengers but for freight. Freight can be redirected if freight operators can plan long enough in advance.

We need to look at things like night-time working and whether we are getting as much productivity over every night-time closure as we can. There is also innovation. A new-build project like HS2 has been at the forefront of what we have tried to do. If I am not using the west coast main line and I am driving to my constituency, I use the M42. There is a 2,750 tonne bridge over the M42. It was installed over one weekend. It was constructed off-site and rolled into place. Therefore, we only closed the road for one week. Traditionally, there would have been lane closures for several months. There would have been all sorts of disruption on that route, but we were able to do that. In another circumstance, we were actually able to install a 900 tonne bridge in 45 minutes.

Innovation is changing the way we can do some of these things. Modular and off-site is allowing us to transform. I would question some of the working assumptions from Network Rail on these things. Why can't we do things better? Why can't we do things faster? Sir Peter was talking about how they have learnt lessons on electrification. I think they have got to learn a lot more lessons on electrification. Ministers are very keen for them to bring the costs down and go a lot further on what they are doing. A lot of that can be done through embracing the innovation of many great British companies who are leading the way on this stuff globally.

Grahame Morris: I would like to return to the issue of freight a little later, Chair, but I will hand back to you.

Q242 **Chair:** Again, to summarise, looking at your own evidence, the Department says: "In the authors' opinion, not running HS2 trains to Leeds will not fully meet the Government's strategic priorities in the area." It is a bit of a double negative. Everything is predicated on, "We've got to get HS2 trains to Leeds," in order to deliver the value that you are talking about.

Andrew Stephenson: The Prime Minister has been very clear. We are taking HS2 trains to Leeds.

Q243 **Chair:** One of the reasons for not building a new line all the way up to Leeds in the IRP is decarbonisation, because it takes more carbon to build new lines. How does that stack up? Obviously, we are building new HS2 elsewhere, so we must think new lines are good. Surely, when you build



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new lines you actually get more people on them. Does modal shift get taken into account?

Nick Bisson: Going back to the point we were on, it is how close are these in output terms; are there viable alternatives? As I said, going back to 2013 we have said there are not viable alternatives on the west coast. We have maxed it. There are viable alternatives on the east, and we will look at some of those as part of this work.

Chair: I follow that completely. Thank you. We move on to capacity with Ruth Cadbury.

Q244 **Ruth Cadbury:** How much additional rail capacity will be created by the construction of the IRP? What type of capacity is it? Is it more seats, more trains or more freight?

Andrew Stephenson: Both.

Q245 **Ruth Cadbury:** It was three: seats, trains and freight.

Andrew Stephenson: All of them. Certainly, more carriages and certainly more trains as well. All three. I will give a quick top line. Unfortunately, I think that High Speed 2 is inappropriately named. It is about capacity rather than speed, but we are where we are. If anyone comes up with a better name I would be pleased to accept it.

For London to the east midlands, it is going to more than treble capacity. For Birmingham to the east midlands it nearly trebles capacity. For Liverpool to Manchester it more than trebles capacity. For Liverpool to Leeds, it increases capacity nearly six-fold. For Leeds to York, it more than doubles the capacity. London to Sheffield has the same capacity increase compared with the previous plans. London to Newcastle, with the upgrades to the east coast main line, will deliver more seats than the previous HS2 plans.

Capacity is very much at the heart of this. People focus on the headline journey times, and I think that is something that we, Transport for North and others were guilty of in the past. As I say, it is an inappropriately named project as high-speed rail. Everybody focuses on speed, but actually capacity on all those key routes is at the heart of the £96 billion integrated rail plan.

Q246 **Ruth Cadbury:** How does the additional capacity created by the IRP compare with the potential increases in rail capacity that would have been provided by the proposed HS2 eastern leg?

Andrew Stephenson: Versus the eastern leg? The eastern leg would have delivered greater capacity.

Q247 **Ruth Cadbury:** By how much?

Nick Bisson: It depends on where we are talking about. In terms of trains, you clearly get more capacity by building an entirely new line.



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Whether that is used or not then depends on the commercials and the markets you are saving.

If you look at the plans for the use of released capacity on the west coast main line, they include more commuting services to Milton Keynes, Nuneaton and so on. It does not necessarily include more services to Coventry, famously, so when you are looking at the different markets it is not straight. The table on page 26 of the technical annex sets out the increase in capacity to different destinations from the different range of plans.

Q248 **Ruth Cadbury:** And in comparison to HS2 eastern leg?

Nick Bisson: Yes.

Q249 **Chair:** Does it include all the capacity that could be freed up, or is it just the extra capacity?

Nick Bisson: That table is the capacity, if you like, on the long-distance seats. The question about freed up comes down to what you would run. On the midland main line we think the proposals in the IRP probably release more capacity. If you want, I can explain why.

Q250 **Ruth Cadbury:** More than eastern leg HS2?

Nick Bisson: Yes.

Q251 **Chair:** Can you write to us? I imagine there is quite a bit of detail and you probably want to take some time.

Andrew Stephenson: I caveat what we have just said by saying that, of course, all these figures are based on the core pipeline and not the end state. With the eastern leg, we have said that we will build to East Midlands Parkway. We are spending money to look at the routes to Leeds. We concurrently compare the current plans to the eastern leg, but the end state may be different and therefore may be better or worse, depending on how you look at it.

Q252 **Ruth Cadbury:** We need to be clear how much of that increased capacity is more trains, with more options—fast and non-stop versus stopping—or how much it is just more seats because you can get longer trains in. What we are really trying to understand is how the capacity increases you have described can be delivered on upgraded Victorian infrastructure when you have fast and slow trains, and freight trains, all competing for the same train tracks.

Andrew Stephenson: I can have a go at answering that, and then I will defer to Nick. If you take, for example, one of the centrepiece projects in this—the trans-Pennine route upgrade—previously, yes, the trans-Pennine route was twin-track most of the way and we were proposing simply to electrify the line to help with decarbonisation. What we have said as part of the IRP is that, in addition to full electrification and digital signalling, we will radically increase the amount of three-tracking and



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four-tracking, which allows fast trains to overtake slow trains. It also allows us to put more freight on that route. We are investing in gauge clearance as well for freight.

In terms of improving the capacity of the main current east-west arterial route across the north of England, you are going to see really significant improvements in capacity for passengers on both local services and fast services, and for freight. The freight sector, when I met it in developing the plan, was very keen to ensure that fast services and night-time closures were not forcing freight trains off.

For trains, carriages, passengers and freight, that is an example of one project in the plan that is trying to deliver for everyone. I hope it will successfully deliver for everyone.

Q253 Ruth Cadbury: Many routes in and out of London are four-track. What proportion of the upgrades that you describe are going to be upgraded from two-track to four-track?

Nick Bisson: There are sections of that on the trans-Pennine route between Leeds and Manchester. There are also sections east of Leeds. There will be some places on the east coast main line. What we have actually looked at is where the pinch points are. You do not necessarily need a continuous four-track railway everywhere. We are seeking to address the capacity that is needed to deliver the seats, and indeed the freight benefits.

On the trans-Pennine route, the critical addition for freight is actually a third line up the hill at Marsden, which the IRP adds to the scope of the project and that was not there previously. That gives you a more reliable all-day freight path. On the east coast, some of the bottlenecks are things like the flat crossing at Newark, the routeing around Doncaster and so on. That is what the Mott work looked at addressing.

Q254 Chair: For the record, the annex talks about an increase of 400%: "The full newbuild scheme also delivers a capacity increase of over 400%." What is that 400% of? I could not quite work it out. Is that 400% more across the rail network, across that particular line or across fast-speed lines?

Nick Bisson: If you are looking at the tables, that is seats.

Q255 Chair: Is that seats on the upgraded line?

Nick Bisson: It is if, for example, we look at seats between London and the east midlands or seats between Liverpool and Manchester compared to today.

Q256 Chair: Is it just the seats on that line?

Nick Bisson: Yes.

Q257 Chair: We want to ask about NPR and Bradford. As I mentioned, we went



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up and visited the local authority team. We met businesses in Bradford. There was obviously a large degree of disappointment. We walked to what would actually have been the new Bradford station if their dreams had been realised.

There is mention in the IRP of it being too far out of town, but we walked it and it did not feel that much further up the hill than the interchange. In a nutshell, why did Bradford miss out? You have talked about the different business cases, but were you attracted by the concept that "This is a young, dynamic city. It is the sixth largest city. We could really do something incredible here to regenerate it. This is all levelling up"? Where did the argument not work through for that, Minister?

Andrew Stephenson: I am very keen to support Bradford. I recognise that it is a young and dynamic city. Committee members may know my constituency in east Lancashire. I actually border the Bradford district. I border the Keighley constituency, and therefore I go to Bradford frequently. I know the area and the people. I am very keen to support Bradford.

If you look at the three options that we were presented with for NPR, it came down to what they delivered and how they delivered it. The value-for-money case on all of them, even before Covid, was struggling. The one that delivered the best value for money for taxpayers was the existing route via Huddersfield, if we could deliver the kinds of benefits that we wanted to via that route, which is not just the trans-Pennine route upgrade. There is new build from Manchester to the Yorkshire border as well to deliver that.

The trans-Pennine route is a route that I know well. It flows through Ashton-under-Lyne, Stalybridge, Dewsbury, Batley and a whole range of communities. They are many of the left-behind towns we talk about and the areas that we need to level up. Probably the catchment area of all the different towns and conurbations along that route is similar to Bradford itself, if not greater. It was not just a value-for-money assessment for levelling up and driving benefits across the north. There were very significant benefits to upgrading the Huddersfield route much further than we had ever anticipated, rather than the new line via Bradford.

I appreciate the strength of feeling in Bradford as to why it should have been a new line via Bradford. We are doing very significant upgrades to the existing line to reduce the journey time from Bradford to Leeds from the current 20 minutes down to as low as 12 minutes. On the Yorkshire mass transit system, I believe we are supporting the aspirations of Bradford, but I appreciate why many people there wanted that new line via Bradford. As we said in our evidence to the Committee, you are looking at a journey time, Manchester to Leeds, of only four minutes less than our proposals. The Transport for the North option for the route was £18 billion more.



In Government, we have to make choices and deliver value for taxpayers' money, and I could not justify that level of expenditure. Again, in our evidence to the Committee, we said that even if there was a 20-fold increase in the number of people from Bradford travelling to Manchester, you would still be talking about a very small percentage of the Bradford population. Lots of people in Bradford would rather we invested in other forms of mass transit, whether it be the new mass transit system, better buses, better cycling routes or other ways of supporting the city. That was the impression I got from speaking to many of the people I know who live in the Bradford area.

Q258 Chair: In a way it is a strange one, but because Birmingham and Manchester really benefit from this plan in ways we have heard from their Mayors, are you concerned that businesses would find it more attractive to expand or relocate to Birmingham and Manchester, away from Leeds and Bradford? By it being much better for those other two cities, could Leeds and Bradford end up being worse off?

Andrew Stephenson: I hope the rise of the northern cities will help all the other areas in the north rise, in the way that I do not think that the success of London is detrimental to other parts of the south of England. There is a risk that the cities will draw in all the resources and all the funding. Again, if you look at the strategic choice we made of going for option 1 of the existing route via Huddersfield, that was part of the thinking. With the existing route, you are going via places like Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Batley. They are relatively deprived, former northern mill towns predominantly, and places that need levelling up and investment. Yes, Bradford needs that, but so do those other places too. The connectivity on the existing route is already strong. If we can improve resilience there, and improve capacity and journey times, it helps to support the maximum number of people across the north.

As we have said many times, we are hoping to deliver these benefits to those communities sooner than ever previously expected. Of course, under the previous plans—the £2.9 billion upgrade for the trans-Pennine route upgrade—some areas like Huddersfield would have seen a worsening of their service. We have had to make some difficult choices. I am very keen to continue to support Bradford. I think the Yorkshire mass transit system and the reduction of journey time to Leeds will be helpful, but I appreciate they would still prefer to this day a direct rail link to Manchester.

Q259 Chair: You may find that my question allows you to come up with the same answer. One of the benefits you talk about for Bradford is the reduced journey time from, as you put it, 20 minutes down to 12 minutes. How can that actually be done in reality?

Andrew Stephenson: This is a great question for Nick to answer. I know that we have allocated £500 million, but I am not an engineer.

Q260 Chair: Nick, it's all yours.



Nick Bisson: The answer is that it is actually taken from work that Network Rail itself has done for the Department and for TfN as part of Northern Powerhouse Rail development. They identified a series of interventions on that line that could actually have driven the journey time as low as 10 minutes if you were only going to the new station, which is a bit further out. That is why we have taken it as 12 into the existing interchange.

Q261 **Chair:** When Network Rail modelled that, what did they say had to be done to the stretch to deliver the 12 minutes?

Nick Bisson: We might need to put that level of detail in the letter that you have asked for.

Q262 **Chair:** What struck us is that you have two stations—Bramley and New Pudsey—and it is a relatively short stretch of line. Most of the slower aspects of it are actually as you approach Leeds. Without a massive unpicking of the junctions coming into Leeds, it did not strike me, or indeed some of those who gave evidence, that it would be possible to do it. My concern is, can you only do 12 minutes by doing something much more expensive and radical than this plan allows for?

Nick Bisson: I really think we have allowed enough, actually, but we will happily set that out for you. As with all of the IRP and as with all of the HS2 business cases, we are quoting non-stop for the best journey times. On that route there is plenty of capacity to run some services non-stop to Leeds, between Leeds and Bradford, as well as continuing to serve New Pudsey in between.

Q263 **Chair:** That 12 minutes is subject to business plan. What does that mean?

Nick Bisson: It means that Network Rail will continue to take the engineering down. If they come back to us and say, “Do you know what, we could stop at 12 and a half minutes and save a significant amount of money,” we will look at that.

Q264 **Chair:** The concern must be that it is 12 minutes, but the business plan means that to get to 12 minutes you have to spend such a huge amount of money at Leeds station that there is no business case, in which case the 12 minutes that the Bradford residents think they are getting to Leeds will not actually get delivered.

Andrew Stephenson: It is important to say that all aspects of the IRP are subject to business cases. Obviously, the Treasury has said that this is the funding envelope, we are happy with this plan, and the plan has cross-Government support, but all these things will have to go through all the usual Treasury approvals and all the usual mechanisms for final sign-off. This is the plan and therefore, hopefully—particularly with somewhere like Bradford where significant work has already been conducted by Network Rail—there will not be any nasty surprises.



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Nick Bisson: Picking up your earlier question, Chair, on the relative attractiveness of Leeds and Bradford, for Leeds the critical thing is an answer on the HS2 question. For Bradford, these plans, coupled with works at Leeds station and what is on the east coast, could drive a pretty significant reduction in the London journey time and a much more regular service. That is one of the things we want to look at as this is developed.

Chair: All roads seem to lead to a massive redevelopment of Leeds station for this to be delivered. I will leave it there and hand over to Gavin Newlands.

Q265 **Gavin Newlands:** You have covered some of this, Minister, in the answers that you have given, but can you give me bullet points as to what benefits Bradford will accrue as a result of the IRP?

Andrew Stephenson: The two principal benefits are the £500 million that we have allocated to reduce the journey time from 20 minutes to as low as 12 minutes to allow people to get into Leeds much quicker, which would also improve capacity on that route; and the West Yorkshire mass transit system. We are working with our West Yorkshire partners to develop that. That is the kind of thing we really think should support Bradford as a principal deliverable of a new mass transit system.

Q266 **Gavin Newlands:** When we went up to Leeds and Bradford, I think it is fair to say that they were disappointed and somewhat surprised at the announcement on the IRP. What engagement did you have with local government and the West Yorkshire authority in developing a plan?

Andrew Stephenson: I met with a range of stakeholders during the development of the plan. I think it was over 60 northern leaders during the course of it. I would not be able to say how many times I met Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe, the leader of Bradford Council, but it was multiple. I met her most recently on Friday when I attended the Yorkshire leaders meeting. We had regular dialogue about the needs of Bradford. As I say, it is very close to my own constituency and, therefore, a community I am really keen to support.

Q267 **Gavin Newlands:** As I said to the previous panel, it is pretty clear in the NPR proposals that Bradford had the biggest need of any of the cities that we are talking about, and therefore the most to gain. Is it fair to say, Minister, that Bradford is the biggest loser in all of this?

Andrew Stephenson: I think all areas across the midlands and the north are gaining from these plans. A £96 billion historic investment—

Q268 **Gavin Newlands:** But does Bradford gain the least?

Andrew Stephenson: Gaining the least? Again, I am not sure. I think most people who commute from Bradford to Leeds, which is a fairly busy route, would see a reduction in journey time from 20 minutes to as low as 12 minutes as pretty impressive. That is where a lot of people actually commute on the existing rail network. I think people in Bradford see significant benefits to this. If you speak to people in the Bradford district,



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a lot are very focused on those local links, rather than a desire always to just go to Leeds or Manchester.

Q269 Gavin Newlands: My last question follows up a point the Chair raised, and also a point that you made in your initial answer about the plan giving business or industry certainty to invest. If you own a business that wants to invest tens of millions, perhaps hundreds of millions, somewhere in the north, and you have a choice of looking at a site in and around Bradford or in and around Manchester, notwithstanding other variables such as the skills available in the area, and you are looking at the infrastructure, both current and planned decades into the future, where are you going to invest your money?

Andrew Stephenson: We see transport as key to levelling up, but we would also acknowledge that other infrastructure like broadband and local skills play a key role. Bradford University is outstanding. There are lots of reasons to invest in Bradford, which is a vibrant and wonderful city, and a city that we are very keen to support.

Different businesses will take different investment decisions. It is clear that transport can help. The evidence from Andy Street showed that the clear evidence is that businesses are already relocating to Birmingham, 10 years ahead of the opening of HS2. It is clear that transport can drive that, but I hope some of the investments that we are seeing with the West Yorkshire mass transit system and other things will help businesses to continue to decide to invest in Bradford.

Gavin Newlands: With that well-crafted answer, I hand back to the Chair.

Chair: I know that time is marching on. We have two more sections for Members to go through. We have touched a lot on Leeds station. There are other stations available. I will hand over to Ruth Cadbury.

Q270 Ruth Cadbury: Minister, you said at the start of the session that the IRP proposals are done in a way that can be built on in the future. We have heard strong evidence from the Mayor of Greater Manchester, the Mayor of West Midlands and politicians in Leeds that the proposals actually do not enable long-term growth, and those stations are already at full capacity. Will they have sufficient capacity to manage both the extra passengers and the additional trains that IRP generates? What about the long term? What about the next plan after IRP?

Andrew Stephenson: That is a very valid point. I will defer to Nick shortly for some of the technical information. It is a fair assessment to say that all those three stations—Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds—are operating pretty much at capacity. I had the privilege of opening the new platform zero last year at Leeds station after we had invested £161 million trying to improve some of the capacity of that station.

As part of the plan, we are looking very closely at how we deliver that capacity. We cannot commit to delivering capacity if the stations cannot



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handle it. In Manchester, HS2 will mean a new six-platform station being constructed to take the new HS2 trains, which will also handle the NPR trains. In Birmingham, HS2 will be coming into a brand-new Curzon Street station, again keeping some of the pressure away from New Street station. Mayor Street talked about the importance of the midlands rail hub, which we are very keen to support as part of these plans.

With stations, I would say the biggest challenge remaining is how we address the capacity challenges at Leeds. That is exactly why we have commissioned the study, to do some more work on that and look at whether we can gain more capacity through the existing station. It must be said that in Manchester the introduction of the Metrolink released significant additional capacity at Manchester Piccadilly. A West Yorkshire mass transit system could do the same at Leeds. I say "could"; that is what the study needs to look at.

There was an existing HS2 plan to build a brand-new station at Leeds, a T-shaped station to add on to the existing station. We need to look at all those options and decide the best way forward. Nick, do you want to add anything?

Nick Bisson: Perhaps just three very brief points. With Birmingham, one thing we have not talked about in this hearing is the midlands rail hub scheme, which is also part of—

Chair: I was going to bring it up. Mayor Street was very keen.

Nick Bisson: Yes. That is also a way of delivering significantly more capacity to Birmingham, by allowing the switch of services out of New Street and into Moor Street.

Q271 **Chair:** We would not disagree with that, but his issue is, why isn't it part of it? It has been talked about, but surely it is so integral to deliver what you have just said that it needs to be in there.

Nick Bisson: And we are taking that development forward for subsequent decision on the business cases.

Q272 **Chair:** You are taking it forward—

Nick Bisson: Absolutely, yes.

Chair: —but it is not actually part of the plan, is it? He said it is encouraging that the west side is talked about, but he would like much more of a commitment that it is going to be delivered because that is what releases all the rest of HS2. Sorry, Ruth.

Ruth Cadbury: I am agreeing with you.

Andrew Stephenson: We are working very closely with the Mayor on the business case for that, and we are very keen to support the midlands rail hub. As we have said, this is a core pipeline, but we are going to take an adaptive approach and of course it does not cover all the investments



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we are going to be making in our rail infrastructure, so we are very keen to support the aspirations of the Mayor.

Nick Bisson: That was Birmingham. On Manchester, the technical advice from High Speed 2 Ltd was that the realistic capacity of the HS2 line into Manchester is 14 trains an hour, and that the service station is capable of dealing with that. As the Minister says, the introduction of HS2 will also release capacity in the existing Piccadilly station. We are separately looking, through the Manchester Recovery Task Force, at some of the shorter-term action that is required there.

We have talked a lot about Leeds. The key thing to get right is to look at the mix of terminating and through services. That will drive what is needed in the station.

Q273 **Ruth Cadbury:** For IRP, but post-IRP, what about the eventual plan to take HS2 to Leeds?

Nick Bisson: That is what we are doing in the work on Leeds, yes.

Chair: Thank you. We turn to the voice of freight, Grahame Morris.

Q274 **Grahame Morris:** Minister, you started to touch on this in your response to some questions I was asking earlier. I wonder if I might press you to elaborate a little bit. It is in relation to the effect that the integrated rail plan is going to have on rail freight volumes, particularly in the midlands and the north.

While you are thinking about your answer, perhaps I might share with you some of the evidence we have had from an academic who gave evidence to the Committee, Gareth Dennis. We heard that the IRP might actually reduce rail freight capacity on key corridors. We looked at some of the choke points when we were in Leeds, particularly the section from Doncaster to Leeds on the east coast main line because of overcrowding. You mentioned the limited number of trains.

If our aim is not just to improve journey times, capacity and resilience but also to reduce carbon emissions and move towards net zero, surely the last thing we want is to have a kind of perverse situation where freight is going from rail back on to the road, especially on the M62.

Andrew Stephenson: I completely agree with you. It is an incredibly important point. The one thing I found heartening when speaking to northern Metro Mayors and leaders is that all of them made the point about freight. They did not just focus on passengers and local services. They all made the point about freight. We have been very keen to support freight.

One of my regrets in publishing the IRP is that in the document we tried to summarise the freight benefits on one page. There is a lot more that we could have said, particularly with the example I was using before of the trans-Pennine route upgrade. Three-tracking and four-tracking, particularly on sections of the route where there are inclines, in addition



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to gauge clearance of course, will completely transform our ability to move freight across the route, which, at the current time, is very congested and freight trains often get bumped.

Various other projects that we are doing in this have freight at the heart of what we want to deliver. It is also fair to say that, in addition to the integrated rail plan through the rail network enhancements pipeline, we are already doing various investments to support the aspirations of the freight industry. Can we do more? Of course, but that is the kind of thing that we need to look at, particularly with the development of freeports and other things, to ensure that we can support the decarbonisation agenda and get more freight off the road and on to rail.

Q275 Grahame Morris: We heard evidence of some bizarre circuitous journeys that freight trains were having to take, partially as a result of congestion and sometimes as a result of engineering works. The detour they were having to take to eventually get to Hull was remarkable. Is it really feasible to be running express trains, stopping trains, commuter trains, and long-distance intercity services as well as freight services on the same line?

Andrew Stephenson: I will allow Nick to answer this. The weirdest route I have seen is the busiest freight route across the north, which is that biomass arrives in Liverpool to then go across to the Drax power station on the other side. It is currently about a seven-hour route. It is completely ludicrous.

There are lots of things we need to do, but in terms of getting freight east-west, as I say, this is why I am very proud that the trans-Pennine route upgrade has gone from something that literally was part-electrification and a few minor interventions in a £2.9 billion scheme to a scheme that is now approaching £8 billion with lots more three-tracking and four-tracking. It dramatically improves the capacity and the resilience of that line, and allows us to move lots more freight through, at the same time as delivering faster trains and the local stopping services that people want in Slaithwaite and Marsden and all the other stations along the route.

Nick Bisson: There is a wide range of freight benefits. There is capacity release between Liverpool south terminals and Crewe. There is capacity release on the Chat Moss line between Liverpool and Manchester. On the east coast some of the work that Mott did looked at how you provide for additional freight, both around the Doncaster area and making use of Eaglescliffe. Those are some of the things we will want to look at in taking that forward.

Specifically between Doncaster and Leeds, there are choices in the work on HS2 to Leeds that might make quite a big difference. For example, if you extended HS2 from Sheffield to Leeds, you would pick up Wakefield there. You might not have to put all of the fast passenger trains on the stretch between Leeds and Doncaster. You would want to leave an



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adequate service for Leeds to Doncaster. There is a lot to go at is all I will say.

Grahame Morris: Some technical solutions were raised for express trains. I don't know if I dare mention dynamic loops again. I take your point about increased capacity, particularly at Liverpool and some of the stations in Leeds and so on, but that does not get away from the problem of the choke points, some of which were identified to us. They really must be addressed, but I will leave it at that, Chair, as I am conscious of the time.

Chair: Thank you, Grahame. I am setting Ruth a challenge. She wants to ask a question that I think will not give a specific answer.

Ruth Cadbury: I am going to turn it into a specific question.

Chair: We have a statistician and an experienced Minister, so go on Ruth. You are champing at the bit.

Q276 **Ruth Cadbury:** Minister, I may be a west London MP, but I believe very strongly that you do not level up a country unless you level up every region. On page 18, the technical annex describes how the value-for-money analysis has not considered "the dynamic economy impacts which capture the location decisions of households and businesses." How did the Department pick and choose which value-for-money analysis factors to undertake?

Andrew Stephenson: We took into account a range of factors, including stakeholders' views, the view of Transport for the North and the view of the National Infrastructure Commission, in addition to work from Network Rail and the Mott report. All of this stuff came together so that we could come up with a holistic view and take a decision.

Q277 **Ruth Cadbury:** Do you feel enough weighting is being given to the elements that contribute to levelling up?

Andrew Stephenson: Yes, because I think the most important thing about levelling up is to ensure that we look at the strategic case for these investments. If you use a traditional model of saying, "Are these investments good value for money or not?"—I was challenged by one of your colleagues before on this point—a lot of these schemes would come in as poor value for money. A lot of that is due to the fall in rail demand. What we are saying is that it is in the strategic interest of the midlands and the north for us to get on and invest in the long term, and therefore go forward with this historic, largest ever investment that the Government have made in our railways.

Q278 **Chair:** The last question is from me. You will both probably leave the room and think, "Typical, we've now got a 25-year plan, £96 billion, largest investment, and they're trying to pick holes in the bits that aren't as good as the other bits."

Do you think that perhaps that is because there has been a lack of expectation management? There has been a lot of sunshine about the



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Crossrail of the north and other such comments and a sales pitch before the event. Do you think this has been an example of, "There is a heck of a lot to like in this, but perhaps the expectation management on certain communities could have been stronger earlier on"?

Andrew Stephenson: Local communities will always argue for what is best for those local communities. If you take a step back and look at this plan, it is the largest ever investment from the Government in our railways. We are spending five times more than we did on Crossrail and 10 times more than we did on the Olympics. This is a huge sum of money. It gives certainty to industry to invest and to plan. It allows us to drive forward projects and deliver benefits across the north sooner.

Unfortunately, communities will always argue for the best possible scheme and the best possible benefits. I think we are delivering broadly the same or even better benefits with this plan. I think it is a fair plan. I think it stands up to scrutiny, and I hope it will provide the foundations for a revolution in our railways across the midlands and the north.

Q279 **Chair:** We are all very passionate about that. I hope the plan is flexible enough to consider the recommendations that we may make off the back of this inquiry.

Andrew Stephenson: Indeed.

Chair: Mr Bisson and Minister Stephenson, thank you very much indeed for giving us your time. We look forward to sending you a report with our recommendations.