

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [HS2—progress update](#), HC 487

Thursday 24 February 2022, Leeds

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Watch the meeting

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

Questions 115 to 150

Witnesses

[II](#): Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire; and Ben Still, Managing Director, West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tracy Brabin and Ben Still.

Q115 **Chair:** For the record, perhaps if I can ask our second panel to introduce themselves.

Tracy Brabin: Hello. I am Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire.

Ben Still: Good morning. I am Ben Still, Managing Director of West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Q116 **Chair:** Good morning to you both. Mayor Brabin, it is great to see you again; I do not think I have seen you since you left us in Parliament. Mr Still, a very warm welcome to you as well, and also thank you for having us.

The HS2 inquiry is an ongoing inquiry for us. Every six months we try to get on to the line of route and take evidence. Last time we went to Birmingham, which was very much, "This is what HS2 will be bringing to the economy and to the people of the West Midlands". We always intended to come up to Leeds on the basis of, "This is what HS2 could bring in the event that it comes in full" as was expected. Obviously, in that interim the news has come through that the eastern leg has been cancelled. I would like to ask you, Mayor Brabin, what the reaction has been from the residents that you serve to that announcement.

Tracy Brabin: It has been frustrating and disappointing. All the mood music from Government, the Prime Minister and Ministers was that when the IRP—it was quite delayed; we were waiting for it—was going to be announced we would get that new line, Manchester to Leeds, and also HS2 was going to be built in full. We were surprised and disappointed, particularly as the growth plans for our region were attached to what felt like commitments from Government. We are having to readjust our thinking.

Now, as you know, we have a survey and £100 million is going to be allocated for an analysis of how to get fast trains from the Midlands up to Leeds. It does feel like there was a last-minute withdrawal of HS2 commitments maybe. When the Minister says, "We might get around to the solution," the solution is HS2 to Leeds—so why are we doing the survey? We have said we want to work with Government, we want to deliver for our community, so we would love to be part of that thinking around the survey to get local voices involved. I spoke yesterday to the Minister and he was minded to agree to that, that we would be involved in it.

It is a disappointment. We are losing all those thousands of jobs, those thousands of homes that we were planning on. British Library North is coming to the South Bank and we are really excited about that. HS2 in that key station was going to be part of an added value for that area of deprivation and for inward investment.



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We are an amazing place, West Yorkshire—Leeds in particular, with the Bank of England, the Infrastructure Bank and Channel 4. We need that fast transport, not just from London but to add to our connectivity between Sheffield and Manchester to make the journeys not only shorter but to add capacity, so that we can also fulfil our climate commitments by having a choice of trains. This is about resilience, capacity, connectivity and of course affordability.

- Q117 **Chair:** Thank you. We heard from business leaders from the area first thing this morning when we had a private roundtable with them and they gave us some idea of the scale of disappointment and the impact. We will also be going off to Bradford this afternoon to meet with the community of Bradford. What sort of discussions and consultation did you have with Government Ministers when it came to this decision? Were you consulted? Did you find out when everyone else found out?

Tracy Brabin: We found out when everybody else found out.

- Q118 **Chair:** Did you manage to uncover the reason why these changes have been made? Do you believe it is purely down to cost or are there some logistical reasons why it is just too difficult?

Tracy Brabin: Chair, we are as perplexed as so many others. We do not quite understand why, when Government have spent many millions of pounds investing in TfN and its expertise to develop a sequence of options, that the most suboptimal option was chosen. It can only feel like they have run out of money, because the added value is so huge and also chimes so clearly with Government's targets on levelling up and on the climate emergency. We can only assume it is cost.

I would say to the Committee going forward, I know you will make your own recommendations, but for us it would be hugely helpful if there was an analysis from Government about how they brought in the levelling-up targets in their thinking. At the moment the technical work that we asked for, which we received the night before a meeting of TfN, around the reasons why they made this decision—as I say, we were all so confused because it was all about cost. There was no wider impact assessment.

For example, not having a through train in Bradford misses out on a £30 billion boost to our economy. Thousands of jobs and businesses would be attracted to the region, as you say, about the West Midlands and Birmingham. That brings inward investment immediately, so if the Committee was challenging Government, I would say help me out because I do not understand why they have done it. It certainly does not chime with levelling up.

- Q119 **Chair:** It is interesting because the evidence from Mr Thurston from HS2 is that they do not know how much it will cost now because they have not costed it up. Also that means that we do not know what the benefit-cost ratio is because that has not been done either. Also the challenge that you touched on in terms of the trains coming up to Leeds: we understand



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that Leeds Station is currently running at 101% capacity—

Tracy Brabin: That is right.

Chair: —and has infrastructure challenges, which causes delays. Are you concerned that bringing HS2 trains up to Leeds is going to make things worse rather than better in terms of the station as a whole?

Tracy Brabin: No, not at all, because we have a plan for that. We have a T-shaped station that would handle HS2 but also give us greater capacity elsewhere. If I may, Chair—

Q120 **Chair:** Going back to that for a moment, that will not now be delivered, will it? Because as you said, the £100 million is not going to deliver the station improvements that you would need to deal with the capacity.

Tracy Brabin: There is a survey that is going to look at that and we would encourage Government to look at the capacity of Leeds Station. We cannot continue as we are, irrespective of HS2.

If I may, Chair, in October 2021 we were the second fastest back to recovery after Liverpool, at 97.05% of pre-pandemic when restrictions were lifted. Also 31 million journeys start or end in Leeds, 5 million journeys pass through and at the weekends we are at 45% more capacity than pre-pandemic, so our station is at creaking point. We absolutely need that investment. You will be going to Bradford and so often you are standing at the station waiting for a train. There are so many trains waiting to get in and freight is going through Leeds Station. Any delay—a poorly person in Dewsbury on a train—can stop Leeds moving.

Over the last few days when we have had flooding, you will have seen on social media pictures of Leeds being flooded. All that congestion just ground the whole network to a halt, so it is the resilience as well; it is not just Leeds Station and making sure that is fit for the future. We cannot buy in problems that we will not be able to unpick in decades to come. Ben, do you want to come in?

Ben Still: Thank you. If I may, to add to that, we understand that the £100 million that will be spent on examining the options of getting HS2 trains from the East Midlands to Leeds and beyond, the full range of options are going to be included in that study, which goes from the original HS2 proposals right through to threading trains through on existing infrastructure. We accept that the £100 million is not to build that infrastructure, but it is certainly to understand what the best way is to fulfil that brief.

Chair: Thank you to both of you. I will hand over to Ben Bradshaw to continue on the theme.

Q121 **Mr Ben Bradshaw:** You, as the elected Mayor, have not been given any explanation from Government Ministers for this decision?

Tracy Brabin: No.



Q122 Mr Ben Bradshaw: But your supposition is it is just that they have run out of money?

Tracy Brabin: We have asked Government to help us understand their thinking. I have written to Ministers. We were given the technical details about their thinking and it is because, they say, it is cheaper and will deliver sooner, but I would like to challenge that. Their sooner delivery is changing the language of the TransPennine upgrade into Northern Powerhouse Rail, so our preferred option is not going to be delivered sooner. It is going to be a hybrid, and whether that is going to be delivered sooner I am not sure, because it is in two phases. We just do not know. I wrote and asked and it seems to be about the money.

Q123 Mr Ben Bradshaw: We heard from the business leaders earlier that they have a real concern that this will hamper the essential modal shift from car to rail if we as a country and you as a region are to achieve carbon zero targets. Is that a concern you share and have you been given any indication from Government as to whether zero carbon was taken into account when making this decision?

Tracy Brabin: I am glad you raised that, Ben, because there was no indication that this is in any way around carbon reduction. In Yorkshire, West and South Yorkshire, the border is porous. We have 42,000 commuters every day. The majority of them go by car on the M1. We know that if you do not get freight off the roads and on to rail we will never hit our carbon target. I tried to make the point that this is not about speed but about further capacity, but we have not had any indication from Government that they were thinking about either levelling up or climate change.

Q124 Mr Ben Bradshaw: You mentioned earlier some of the investments that Leeds and the wider region have enjoyed in advance of this decision. What investment, growth and economic impact do you think will now be jeopardised by this decision that you were hoping and expecting?

Tracy Brabin: Every year that HS2 is not built we lose £1.7 billion of growth across the region and it is impactful. There is also going to be another element that is unquantifiable, which is about opportunity. The talent in our region, will they have the opportunity of those great jobs and of those colleges?

I run an outreach piece of work called Tell Tracy and digital business cannot get staff because people do not want to commute across the Pennines: partners getting home from work at 10.45 pm; a student at Leeds whose train from Liverpool takes over two hours, the same amount of time it took his dad in the 1960s and his grandfather in the 1930s; young people living out of the city centre not being able to take part in the night-time economy because trains home end at 11.00 pm.

We cannot necessarily quantify the missed opportunity. That is why I would encourage the Committee to ask Government if they have taken that into account, that levelling-up strategy, because it cannot just be



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about Michael Gove. Transport and the Treasury must be part of that conversation.

Q125 **Mr Ben Bradshaw:** Have any specific transport or regeneration schemes already been put into question or cancelled as a result of the recent Government decision?

Tracy Brabin: There is a plethora of surveys now, rather than delivering. Obviously we want those surveys to be undertaken at speed, surveys about the East Coast Main Line, surveys about how to get, as I mentioned, fast trains from Sheffield to Leeds, but whether that is a solution, I really do not think so.

Ben Still: To add to the Mayor's previous answer, it is not so much that there are schemes that have been cancelled or changed as a consequence already; it is more that for 10 years the economic master planning around Leeds centre has been based on the expectation and indeed the safeguarding of land, that the station was coming, the line was coming, and development was being planned around that for the city. Those plans had to change both in terms of what additional land the railway might need in order to accommodate the growth that has been discussed already around the station environment, but then how the safeguarding is kept or removed for those sites that have been effectively put on hold to allow further work to occur.

None of that is to say that the city and the combined authority will not work extremely hard to continue to encourage investment and the successes we have seen in the past we very much hope to replicate in the future, but it is an opportunity that has been forgone in the short term and we will have to work even harder for the betterment of West Yorkshire.

Tracy Brabin: If I may, Ben, just say that the safeguarded land is as big as 700 football pitches in the city centre, so this is and has been safeguarded for 10 years with the promise of HS2. It is deeply disappointing and frustrating, but what we do not want is to lock ourselves into something that is suboptimal that will then need unpicking in the future, which will cost us even more. We are in a prime position with Government. We are happy to work with them. If you give us the spending envelope we will work with you to phase it and to enable you to deliver.

I hope that the Committee understand that of the £96 billion we only get £7 billion in West Yorkshire, £6 billion of which goes to the TransPennine upgrade, which we have been calling for for decades. The £1 billion left over is for surveys and the electrification of Bradford to Leeds, and we are not convinced that you can do it in 12 minutes. We would love to see the engineering around that. You are going to see Bradford. You will see that currently you reverse out and if you do get that speed it will absolutely be at the cost of connectivity. You will be cutting out communities from access to a rail connection.



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Q126 Mr Ben Bradshaw: You are very angry about the impact this is going to have on your region as a whole. Are there particular bits of it that will be the worst affected and which are they?

Tracy Brabin: There is no doubt that Bradford has done very badly out of this. Obviously we are pleased there is money for the TransPennine. It is going to help Huddersfield, all of that connectivity along the TransPennine line, but Bradford is not having that connectivity—not just to Manchester and Leeds in a way that we would want it, but also to Newcastle, Sheffield and Manchester Airport.

This is not just about Leeds to Bradford; it is about Bradford as a community. It is an amazing community but it is the least connected in the country and it is the youngest. It is the poster child for levelling up and that is why we were so startled when there was no focus on Bradford, because it just does not make sense. Certainly having that extra capacity of the new line, that is mainly tunnelling and so is potentially less disruptive, would give us so much more capacity for freight and so on.

If I may also say, what was missing was Leeds to Hull. It is not even mentioned in the IRP. We want that connection across our region between Liverpool and Hull. We will not have that if you do not address what is quite easy to do, the electrification between Leeds and Hull. So Bradford in particular, but Hull has also missed out.

Chair: Thanks, Ben, and you touch on the situation with Bradford. As you have mentioned we are off to see them, because we are doing an inquiry on the Integrated Rail Plan and what that delivers as well as our rolling HS2, so this is a perfect time for us to be here. I will hand over to Gavin Newlands, who is going to take us further on the IRP.

Q127 Gavin Newlands: Good afternoon, thank you for joining us. On the IRP itself you have already started to address that, the fact that essentially NPR has been watered down and IRP is now in place, but with the status quo. To what extent do the improvements set out in IRP, despite its limitations, compensate for the cancellation of the eastern leg of HS2?

Tracy Brabin: I am not sure there is compensation. I do not see it as that. I see it as something that we have needed and wanted for decades. Of course it is welcome that we have that money and that upgrade, but it is not going to deliver our ambitions. Part of my issue is that it feels like Covid has been used as the smokescreen to talk about lack of footfall and do we need it still. That is not the case for the north. We have bounced back and we need it for our ambitious plans for our region. I am not sure it compensates. I do not know if Ben wants to say anything.

Q128 Gavin Newlands: In answering as well, Ben, are you able to calculate the likely impact on investment and growth on the region as a result of IRP since it has been published?



Tracy Brabin: No. We know what we are losing but we have not done that granular detail. I would like Government to do that to help us with understanding their decisions as to why we are where we are.

Ben Still: Certainly the TransPennine route upgrade has been a promised scheme since before 2011; it is welcome, but it forms part of the package. It is very difficult for us to be able to do any analysis because we cannot really understand exactly what the journey time and the capacity benefits will be as set out in the IRP—for example, how many trains the TransPennine proposals in the IRP will deliver across the Pennines and the impact on existing local services—and therefore it is difficult to understand how far off the original growth proposals the new TransPennine route upgrade opportunities will be.

Anecdotally, we expect it to be significantly short of the transformational journey time benefits and capacity increases that would have come with the full NPR via Bradford. From our perspective, it is the “via Bradford” bit that really adds the value because you are connecting in a city of nearly half a million people who are not on the mainline network. It is that kind of transformational benefit that unlocks the levelling up in the broad potential.

Tracy Brabin: We all know the added value of through trains as opposed to being branch lines and terminus; that is the added value with Bradford. To clarify as well, this plan was an infrastructure plan without the timetabling. We are not aware what the Government are intending. To be honest, what we have heard we are not quite sure can be delivered without a loss of capacity and connectivity.

Ben Still: One further point is the other element of the IRP that is an investment is the proposed electrification between Bradford and Leeds. Two things about that leave us wanting to ask questions of Government. First, there is already an electrified line between Leeds and Bradford into Bradford’s Forster Square and there was already a plan to upgrade that station to allow intercity East Coast Main Line trains to go there. We are not entirely understanding what the benefit will be of that additional electrification.

Secondly, we cannot fully understand why if you are going to electrify the line towards Bradford interchange that you would stop at Bradford and it would not go on to Halifax and then on to Manchester through the Calder Valley line. That was an electrification plan that has been around for decades and was a piece of work undertaken by Northern Sparks and put at the very top of its list for electrification. Again, it seems like an opportunity missed.

Q129 **Gavin Newlands:** Quite often when Government are making proposals they often talk about the journey time to London as if that would be the most important thing, but we have been hearing from businesses—perhaps you could confirm—and people at length in the region that east-west regional services are more important to them than the north-south



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connectivity piece. You may say you want both, but which is more important to businesses and people in West Yorkshire?

Tracy Brabin: Gavin, I don't think we should be forced to choose.

Q130 **Gavin Newlands:** I thought you might say that.

Tracy Brabin: Why are we having to choose when historically the south does not have to choose? It is not just about connectivity to London; it is about our green ambitions, getting freight on to trains, freeing up capacity to stop at more community stations along those routes, which is why you should have those fast trains to London.

We are looking at a joined-up network. The Government have invested £100 million with TfN to come up with a plan that would give us that fantastic regeneration for our region and allow us to fulfil our potential. Now we have a second-rate option where we are being asked to choose between one or the other. The Government have not given us a choice, they have said, "You cannot have either".

Q131 **Gavin Newlands:** Ben, do you wish to add in?

Ben Still: Thank you for the opportunity. Both HS2 and NPR were designed to link together the main cities of the north and the Midlands and on to London. The connections between Bradford, Leeds and Manchester and between Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield line you could argue are equally bad; they both need doing.

Q132 **Gavin Newlands:** Lastly from me. Tracy, you mentioned that Bradford was probably the biggest loser in the redesign of NPR or however you want to describe it. From what I have been reading in the old NPR plan, Bradford would have been the biggest winner in respect of economic output, jobs, GVA, rail journeys and reduction in car journeys, yet it has now become the biggest loser.

I have a question regarding how the Government plan these large projects. They are always looking at the business case and value for money, and because of the topography in other regions, Bradford perhaps will never have an easily arguable business case. How do we level up places like Bradford just in general? Because that is a very big issue.

Tracy Brabin: Gavin, we did have a great business case that TfN developed and it has done all the work and the data bundling. That is not necessarily in the public domain, but the business case is there, and we will continue to make that case.

Q133 **Gavin Newlands:** I am not disagreeing with that. The value for money aspect that the Government argues, comparing it with other potential projects—that is the issue. If you continually make arguments like that, how do we level up places like Bradford?

Tracy Brabin: We would say that the fact that most of it is in tunnelling is less disruptive.



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Ben Still: Only to add that I think the Government recognises that the current appraisal system does not work well for strategic transformation or investments. Credit where credit is due: they, and judges, have looked at how the Green Book rules could be revised and have implemented some of those changes over recent years. That puts more weight on the strategic case—the bits that are by definition harder to quantify and evaluate precisely to overcome the challenges you have outlined. It is therefore all the more perplexing that the IRP did not consider those impacts when making its recommendations.

Chair: We are going to touch on Bradford in more detail in our last section. Before I bring in Grahame Morris again, staying on the Integrated Rail Plan, Karl wants to come in.

Q134 **Karl McCartney:** Just a brief view, and you both might want to answer in different ways or exactly the same way. We touched on the TransPennine Express with some of the business representatives, which is probably a misnomer as it is not really an express. The trains travel quite slowly because they stop everywhere when they do run.

For services that were going to service your area would you rather have faster trains to take commuters faster between A and B or A, B and C or would you rather, as business has said, see capacity and reliability in place? What is your best answer to that?

Tracy Brabin: It is not going to be what you want to hear because it is a combination. Of course it is. It is about capacity, but it is also about connectivity and making sure that, for example, between Manchester and Leeds you do have that fast commuter train, but that you also have the capacity to be able to stop at Marsden and Slough et cetera. That is why the favoured option from TfN was to have a new line so you could increase that capacity. If you have one stopping train or a freight train, how will you have fast trains behind it? We need extra capacity on TransPennine, and our view is that extra capacity comes from that new line between Manchester and Leeds.

Ben Still: From an operational rail perspective, reliability is the most important thing because customers, passengers and businesses need to know that the train is going to run on the times that it is going to run. To be able to run a punctual, reliable rail service is absolutely critical. The importance of that came through very clearly following the May 2018 timetable issues.

Thereafter, the rail network in West Yorkshire serves two purposes. It does serve a very important local connectivity purpose for travel to work and travel to opportunities such as retail and healthcare. Those same tracks then perform those fast intercity links as well. It has been widely recognised by the work done by Transport for the North that even with the TRU improvements you still could not have enough fast train paths because of the additional capacity that fast train path takes to fully meet the demands of West Yorkshire and the north over future generations.



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That is why the planning was done for the new line. All the assumptions about NPR assumed that TRU was already built.

- Q135 **Karl McCartney:** To follow up on that is a last question, so I am looking for an overview; the buck is going to do a lot of heavy lifting in this question. Without passing the buck to anybody else, including the Government or local organisations, in your views what are the easiest deliverable or the “best bang for your buck” projects that would improve the lives of the people you represent, Tracy, and you work for, Ben, in and around the area that you cover? What are the easiest delivery projects that would be great to see in place within the next three to five years? We have one from the business representatives, but I want to see if you chime with that.

Tracy Brabin: I am going to be cheeky, Karl, and say two because it has to be that line with Bradford, and also that connectivity from the Midlands up to the Leeds is vital. If you had a choice, Ben, you would probably agree with me.

- Q136 **Karl McCartney:** It can be more than one; it can be your top three.

Ben Still: Certainly I would agree with the Mayor.

Tracy Brabin: Very good.

Ben Still: I would say over that three to five years, stretching it, the improvements that can be made to Leeds Station to give additional platform and a station through capacity are critical to keep the existing operational level needs met.

- Q137 **Grahame Morris:** Good afternoon, Tracy and Ben. My questions are also related to the east-west connectivity and some of the answers that you gave earlier. I was quite intrigued at some of the answers we got from an earlier panel, which was in relation to the costs of new build rather than refurbishment and the implications for disruption and resilience. We often seem to end up with refurbished lines rather than new lines. I will get to my question in a moment.

There is an obsession in ministerial statements—Tracy, I am sure you will recall this—of referring to improvements by shorter journey times, whereas the common currency that everyone seems to use is improved connectivity, improved resilience and improved capacity. The proposed improvements in the IRP that are going to become operational some years before HS2 is delivered: do you think that they are worthwhile and are going to deliver tangible improvements for West Yorkshire and for Leeds in particular?

Tracy Brabin: The TransPennine upgrade is going to deliver for us; that is what we have been asking for. It is Victorian architecture, so it is going to cause massive disruption. We cannot understand yet from Government how that disruption is going to be mitigated.



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I mentioned the floods earlier. On the evening Leeds was flooded, there were no trains over to Manchester. The TransPennine was closed because of flooding and the Calder Valley was closed. I had to come here and book in this hotel because I could not get home. I am lucky that I can afford a hotel. There were football supporters sleeping on the platform because they could not get home.

The mitigations for the impact of the work have not been done. We have been speaking to Government to try to be more involved in that, to help with that—the storytelling as well: that this is a good thing and we want this upgrade—but I am not sure that has been really addressed.

Ben Still: Just to add to that, the TransPennine route upgrade is very well run. What is stated in the IRP goes beyond the original TRU plans. We are therefore very interested to understand a bit more about the detail of those additional train paths. The IRP talks about going from six to potentially eight train paths into Leeds. We need to fully understand how you manage to squeeze that many trains on to even the additional elements of lines that are being proposed, nor how you get them into Leeds Station. Those are questions the IRP has posed that the rail industry now has to answer.

Tracy Brabin: If I may say as well, a young woman wrote to me and said she is doing a 14-hour day because already she is on a rail replacement. This is going to be part of our life for the next 10 years.

Q138 **Grahame Morris:** I have no answers, but we will ask those questions about how they are proposing to do that. I raised this in relation to further north, the north-east and the pinch point north of York where there are limitations on capacity due to single track in either direction and similar issues about freight trains, fast trains and stopping trains.

What I have been directed at is dynamic loops, larger loops of track where slow trains and freight trains would be diverted. Once again, we are kind of the poor relations in terms of new lines and major upgrades. I don't know whether that is a solution, but we shall ask how they are going to achieve that.

Tracy Brabin: I am not sure about the dynamic loops when you are in a valley and how would you do that.

Q139 **Chair:** Rounding up the Integrated Rail Plan section before we move on to Leeds Station, I remember shortly after the Prime Minister became the Prime Minister I asked him in the Chamber about whether it was HS2 or Northern Powerhouse Rail—either/or. He said it was not either/or, but both. What the Government have said since the plan was published is that we are delivering both because HS2 trains will come to Leeds and we are upgrading the TransPennine group so that there will be faster journey times between Leeds and Manchester. The Government still maintain they are doing both. What do you think of that stance?



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Tracy Brabin: I do think it is semantics, a rebadging because there was the promise of big investment. The Prime Minister stood in front of Stephenson's Rocket and said he would build a new line, Manchester to Leeds; the Minister stood up in the Chamber saying HS2 in full. It was not a "patched-up plaster over a cut" type of approach, making do and mending. It was ambitious and innovative and they have done it in other areas of the country. It does feel frustrating that it is about rebadging. We were promised something and we have not got it.

Q140 **Chair:** How do you feel about the argument put forward that this can be delivered 10 years earlier, therefore you want the chance of making sure the plan is changed in order to deliver it earlier and get the benefits delivered earlier?

Tracy Brabin: I am not completely convinced about it being earlier. I do think we could work with Government to talk about phasing and have priorities for our community. These projects are decades long—they do take time—but I am not convinced by that argument. Ben, do you want to comment on that?

Ben Still: Obviously any improvements are more welcome earlier and it would allow businesses and the city to plan around them. The commitment is very important, as is a rapid delivery. The challenge on the TransPennine route is that there was already a plan for the timescale of when TRU would be delivered. That is now going to have to be revisited because the TRU process, as I said, that is now modified from those previously developed by Network Rail. There is no real plan yet for how the section from Manchester to Marsden would be developed. We are yet to see what that timescale looks like. I really hope it can be sooner, but we don't know yet.

Equally, on HS2 trains coming up from the East Midlands to Leeds, if sooner means that they have to thread their way up on existing infrastructure, but later might mean that they have more dedicated infrastructure and can do so more reliably at a higher capacity, then I suspect people would rather wait a bit longer. That work has yet to be done. I think that is part of the £100 million study.

Q141 **Chair:** You touched on your uncertainty as to how the capacity can be increased so the number of services that you are being told will come in from Manchester to Leeds. Have you discussed that in detail with Network Rail as to how it will be able to deliver that?

Ben Still: Not in detail, but we understand it is doing the work to begin that quantification, to develop in effect the prototype train timetables for that and that will show how that will work.

Q142 **Chair:** It sounds as if there is more hope than there is absolute certainty that full capacity can be delivered.

Tracy Brabin: That is absolutely right, and we have been talking to HS2. You heard evidence before us about coming from Manchester to Marsden.



We are trying to be involved in the discussions and to be as helpful to deliver as possible. For example, the Warrington-to-Marsden HS2 trains, screeching into Marsden on Victorian structures—there are going to be real challenges around that. It would be very hard to understand reliability and numbers of trains when that major engineering work has not been done.

Chair: Thank you. We will focus a little more on Leeds Station and then Bradford.

Q143 **Greg Smith:** Good afternoon. I would say that our arrival into Leeds Station last night was very efficient and it was a very warm Yorkshire welcome for us. We are aware—this has been touched on earlier—of the capacities in that station. It is clearly landlocked; there is no space around it to simply add more platforms and more capacity. Given the increase in capacity the IRP will bring, how do you solve a problem like Leeds Station?

Tracy Brabin: Greg, how long do you have? That is our biggest problem. That is why the T-shaped station over many years has become the preferred option, because we need that extra capacity east-west and north-south. We are very pleased we have another platform, Platform Zero. We are investing in other stations around the region. We are doing our bit, but you cannot, as we say, put a pint in a half-pint pot. We do need that new station.

Q144 **Greg Smith:** Given that the IRP is very specific in the routes that it will take and that Leeds is not one of the most densely populated cities, but there is not a lot of spare land within the centre, is the answer that a new station has to be more of a Parkway outside and then have some sort of connectivity into the centre? I cannot see there is simply a way of delivering this to ensure that you can to Leeds faster but then you have to spend 20 minutes getting into where you need to go in Leeds to solve that.

Tracy Brabin: That is why the land has been safeguarded, Greg, because it is in the city—it is on the South Bank.

Ben Still: Those are excellent questions. At the moment Leeds Station is operating at capacity and something like half of passenger movements are delayed in some way or another going through Leeds. As the Mayor said, Leeds as a cause of rail minutes delay is the third biggest cause of those in the country at the moment and has been for several years.

Leeds is a real challenge because it is a bottleneck. The majority of routes are coming in from the west and only two routes go out from the east. Taking the trains through that system is a real challenge. It is made a bit worse because the way the western throat of the station is configured means that trains often have to cross several lines in order to get to their designated platforms.



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Lots of the work at Leeds that Network Rail has been looking at through a process separate to the IRP process has been about how you refigure the station to create additional capacity. That can go some way, but our understanding is that within the IRP it is understood that there are still impressions about how you best marry up the capacity available at the station with the TransPennine routes that will come into it. That question remains to be answered and it is something that Network Rail, I hope, are busy working with.

The Mayor is absolutely right: not having the station that would capture services coming up from the south exacerbates those east-west terminuses.

Q145 Greg Smith: We are not going to get a solution right now, but my final question is about the disruption and how long that will take as you transition from the current station services to a two-station model or just a new station model. Different circumstances, but I have many scars on my back from the disruption of HS2 being built through my constituency. The level of human misery involved in this construction is extreme. To deliver the IRP benefits for Leeds as a city, where do you see that the disruption of the construction of station capacity or remodelling the station capacity will lead you, and how long do you think it could potentially take to see those benefits come through—not in terms of the journey, but getting on and off the train in the first place?

Ben Still: A complex question. In respect of how you remodel a station while remaining operationally active, there is no doubt that that is going to be a drawn-out process and one that will be many years in duration. That said, if you have certainty about when it is going to happen and how you plan for it you can make the best of the challenging situation. The plans for the T-shape station would in effect create additional capacity without disrupting the east-west movements and mitigates some of those impacts to some extent.

There is already a quite significant amount of work looking at how the TransPennine route upgrade programme would deal with disruption and how we would make use of the Calder Valley line, although there are some points where in effect you move to replacement bus services because of the pinch-points that are taken. We would not wish for one second to underestimate the disruption to people's lives caused by investing in rail. It is one of the reasons that, following the experience on the West Coast Main Line, the move towards building new lines was seen to be beneficial.

Tracy Brabin: If I may add as well, this disruption is going to be massive and we only want to do it once. We could make mistakes today and do half of a job, loads of disruption, and then in 10 years' time realise we just have no more capacity left and we have to do it all again. It is going to be disruptive, but it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to tackle the challenges of this Victorian infrastructure that we cannot continue to live with.



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If we are going to level up, if we are going to reach our potential as a region—it is not just about us either: any disruption and fallout from Leeds is going to impact on the networks across the north and in the south—it is going to be impactful, so that is why we are so determined to get it right.

Q146 Chair: The 700 football pitches is the land that you set aside in order to redevelop the station. When will you have to say that you are going to have to regenerate and use that land and therefore just go ahead and do it because you cannot get what you want regarding a new station? Are you going to wait until the £100 million survey is delivered? You must be in a very difficult position concerning deciding what to do with that land.

Tracy Brabin: That is exactly it. It is down to the Government, and the Minister said that he wanted that land to stay safeguarded until the survey is completed. We have waited 10 years and can wait another few months, absolutely, because we have ambitions for the South Bank. It is already an extraordinary community with the climate innovation district, so many businesses moving into that region and, as I mentioned, the British Library of the North and theatres and culture. It is an exciting place to be. We are happy to wait, but we would like the Government to understand the importance of that new station.

Q147 Chair: Thank you. I said we would touch on Bradford, but not only do we want to touch on Bradford; we want to touch on all the West Yorkshire towns and ask which you feel have been particularly badly served by the IRP. We met with Labour and Conservative MPs from the Bradford region—not just Bradford itself, also Keighley, Shipley and Bingley—and they gave us their concerns. Could you give us a bit of a description as to who were the winners and losers when it comes to West Yorkshire towns?

Tracy Brabin: I am glad you have spoken to those Members of Parliament because when the IRP was announced there was almost universal dismay that we wanted and were promised something and it does feel like we were last in the queue. Having spoken to MPs of all parties in Bradford, I know that we are united in our stand for Government to understand the potential of Bradford and how Bradford could be part of the solution for Government hopes of levelling up.

As you say, this is not just about Keighley or the towns around Bradford; it is about those in Kirklees, Birstall and Cleckheaton that are more facing Bradford than facing Leeds. It is about the connectivity from Manchester Airport, as I mentioned before. Manchester Airport is saying it would love to be able to have people going on holiday from Bradford, not just to only use Leeds, Bradford, but to also use Manchester Airport, but they would not be doing that because the connectivity just is not there.

It is also about the rural communities. They know that they are going to be absolutely cut off from connectivity to London, maybe going to visit families or see a show. This is very important for opportunities across the whole of the region. As somebody who is a champion of towns, I really



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understand how rail is important for us and our region. Only 71% of our population have a car; our bus network is currently broken. We need that network of decent rail connectivity to get people out of the cars that they have on to that network of rail and to take most of our connectivity between our communities. I don't know if you want to add anything, Ben.

Ben Still: One point, Mayor, if I may. I think what the IRP does is create the potential for benefits to towns in West Yorkshire but also some uncertainty about whether those benefits will be realised.

For example, if you are Wakefield, the opportunity of HS2 trains finding their way to Leeds: will that be via Wakefield or not? Will it allow additional train services to call there or will it remove the capacity for local services, which will affect smaller towns around Wakefield? If you are in Halifax, the opportunity to extend electrification beyond Bradford on the Calder Valley line to Halifax and beyond is an opportunity that is not currently in the plan. The uncertainty around that is a challenge.

Equally, as the Mayor said, in Kirklees, Dewsbury and Huddersfield the level of disruption to be caused by the works is uncertain for TRU. The potential benefits for fast services will be significant as long as those local services are not impacted. Those are the questions we still have for Government.

Tracy Brabin: I mentioned that there had been no talk of the Leeds to Hull. This is very important for the five towns and areas of deprivation. Ex-mining villages in West Yorkshire have skills for those businesses in Hull and we have talent that could come from Hull into Leeds. We are not making the most of that. Wakefield and those communities in the five towns have been very poorly served by the IRP.

Q148 **Chair:** When we were having our conversations, Bradford was described as unfortunately being treated like the middle child, in the sense that the elder and the younger, being Leeds and Manchester, seem to get it all. Are you concerned that there is a perception from London that there is actually only one child, and it is Manchester, and the decision-makers are not properly taking Leeds or Bradford into account? Has that been going on for some years—that it is all about Manchester?

Tracy Brabin: I am the Mayor of West Yorkshire, so I would say it is all about West Yorkshire. Manchester has had a Mayor for a number of years and we have the first Mayor for West Yorkshire singing and dancing about our region. Maybe we have not had that voice, but we need to stand collectively together because Andy Burnham, Steve Rotherham, Andy Street and other Mayors, we all stand together about connectivity because we know that we all need to rise together. There is no point in having the third child, as you say—the youngest being left out of the room.

We are making the case we will help Government deliver. We are incredibly ambitious for our region. We are the biggest financial district



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outside of London. We have so much to offer, and it just seems slightly crazy if Government have no understanding of that and do not share our ambitions. That is why I am very pleased that the Select Committee has come here today.

Ben Still: Just to pick up on your comment about Bradford, the original plans for NPR were about joining up six city regions. That did not include Bradford at that point, so we and other partners argued very strongly for Bradford to be included in that network. Given the opportunity for what was described as a brand-new line to be built in the north between Leeds and Manchester, for it not to pick up Bradford would have been the opportunity lost.

We encouraged and worked with TfN to get that on to the map to ensure that Bradford was looked at as an option. The various options were looked at around where that could be put in Bradford, but we very much thought of that, as the Mayor has said, as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect Bradford, the largest city in the country not on a railway mainline.

Q149 **Chair:** Mayor Brabin, do you accept that there has been some failure at a local leadership level perhaps because of the way things have been organised, and that that has set this area at a disadvantage? In a way it is a loaded question because you are now in place. It is not meant personally about anyone; it is just the structure of the organisation.

Tracy Brabin: No, I don't accept that. I think we have had decades of underfunding; we have a long way to come back from our position. I think we have shown great leadership and been a voice, advocate and champion for our regions and we have stood together. All the local leaders across West Yorkshire, their council leaders, myself and all the Mayors are speaking with one voice, saying that this does not work.

For example, saying that cutting Bradford out is a cost-effective way of balancing the books: we do not understand where the £18 billion from the Government comes from. What we are saying is you might not necessarily need that Warrington-to-Marsden line, that HS2 expensive line, when you could potentially do it for £8 billion from Manchester with that stop in Bradford to Leeds.

There are a lot of unknowns around this. If there is any question mark about leadership it is about the decision-making from Government to get us to this point because they have invested in TfN to give them advice. They have then gone back to TfN and said, "Give us your cheapest option. We will take that".

Q150 **Chair:** In relation to the actual business case, you have described the area, a growing economy and the station is running over capacity. Delivering HS2 all the way up to Leeds would improve connectivity for 13 million people and that is 20% of the population. You have a good case, so I assume you welcome this £100 million because that is going to



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help you make the case, and you are not giving up.

Tracy Brabin: The case has been made. Not to be disrespectful, but the plan was commissioned by Government, by DfT. TfN developed the plan and it does feel like we have done an awful lot of thinking and planning around this conundrum.

Of course I welcome anything that will get us to at a conclusion where we start to get spades in the ground to deliver for the people of West Yorkshire. However, I would hope it is not a waste of money and that we finally come around to the conclusion that we have already known: that we need HS2 coming into Leeds. I would welcome that conclusion; I am hoping we can get there swiftly with local involvement.

Chair: Thank you, unless any other members have any questions. In terms of our inquiry on the Integrated Rail Plan, we will finalise our inquiry, which always includes having the Minister before us. A lot of what you have given to us will be put back to the Minister to seek answers. We will then be making our recommendations and will continue to follow the HS2 progress of scrutiny that we do as well. We are very much looking forward to going to Bradford this afternoon.

Huge thanks to you, Mayor Brabin and Mr Still. You have given us very interesting and insightful evidence. We wish you well with your endeavours, and it is quite clear to us that you are not giving up and you are going to be on this. Thank you very much.