

Railfuture brief on the government's integrated Rail Plan

It is easy to conclude that George Orwell, when he wrote "Animal Farm" in 1945, had an eye for UK government consultancy. There are two ways to look at the announcement, ie as a decrement from years of promises and millions wasted, or as an increment from the present position where we are starting to see a return to our overcrowded rail system.

This commentary is a brief on what specifically has been announced and how this responds to our campaigning for a more well-connected railway with more capacity to address economic, social and environmental issues and bring benefits to whole regions.

Railfuture therefore looks at these developments incrementally from the current ability of the rail network to deliver these needs rather than lament decrements from earlier plans.

So, to the facts announced:

Three new high speed lines, covering 110 miles.

- **Complete HS2 from Crewe to Manchester, with new stations at Manchester Airport and the adjacent HS2 station at Manchester Piccadilly.** This is confirmation of continuation of previously consulted plans and provides a continuous high speed railway from London to Manchester.
- **A new high speed line between Birmingham and East Midland Parkway. Trains will continue to central Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield on an upgraded electrified Midland Main Line,** as advocated by Railfuture (<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1884>).
- **Delivering NPR through a new high speed line between Warrington, Manchester and Marsden as the first of the options originally put forward by TfN in 2019.** Railfuture has been aware for a long time that the Standedge route is to be chosen for an upgrade rebadged as NPR. The issue is the significance of the upgrade. This is not NPR as originally envisaged but addresses some capacity issues in Manchester and the poor alignment of the current route between Manchester to Stalybridge and onwards through the Standedge tunnel to Marsden. Railfuture has long contended that Liverpool should get more of the action given the two overcrowded routes to Manchester.
- **A study to look at the best way to take HS2 trains into Leeds, including capacity at Leeds station.** First mention of the word study. However, an HS2 terminal station at Leeds is not good in terms of through service connectivity. If the study concludes, which is likely, that Leeds City station can be expanded to cope this would be hugely welcomed. The current routes from Leeds to Sheffield are slow so commitment to a faster exit from, hopefully a central, Leeds station is to be welcomed.

The upgrading or electrification of 3 existing lines

- ***The complete electrification of the Midland Main Line from London to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield.*** Electrification of the Midland Main Line from St Pancras is a key Railfuture campaign. This is a major commitment, not previously confirmed with the original HS2E scheme, bringing benefits also to Leicester as well as Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield.
- ***A programme of rapid upgrades to the East Coast Main Line---Journey times up to 25 mins faster.*** The East Coast Main Line serves seriously important intermediate towns up to Doncaster and will continue to be the principal route to York and northern cities and also linking these to Scotland. The recent timetable fiasco on the ECML has demonstrated just how tight ECML capacity is. Railfuture recognises this in campaigning for an upgrade of this route
- ***Full electrification and upgrade of the Trans Pennine Main Line between Manchester, Leeds and York -£625m upgrade.*** This is a serious upgrade providing many of the benefits of the original high speed proposal, although not serving Bradford. It also provides additional benefits including better provision for intermediate services between Manchester and Huddersfield and for freight.
- ***Electrification total 180 miles.*** Quite a significant contribution to electrify the rail network following COP26. A key Railfuture campaigning objective.
- ***Freeing up money to improve local services.*** At one level these can be seen as consequences of this more careful approach to the high speed projects or even consolation prizes. However against Railfuture's objectives they are significant.
- ***A new mass transit scheme for Leeds and West Yorkshire.*** We would be sceptical about this as a long term future idea (studies etc.), but for the fact that the announcement includes £200m specifically for this. Good news as this is necessary and the process of planning it has to be gone through.
- ***Halving journey time between Bradford and Leeds.*** Good news and not surprising. We need now to see how this is to be achieved.
- ***Greater connectivity between the West and East Midlands in comparison to the previous plan.*** This is potentially a major benefit from the change to give greater emphasis to the needs of the West and East Midlands and indeed integrate their economies better by dramatically improved rail links- the same economic argument as used in the North. Railfuture West and East Midland branches will be studying the detail of this and providing commentary as the plans emerge and how they respond to Railfuture campaigning objectives
- ***The announcement does not mention Sheffield.*** However Sheffield gets an improved service ie high speed to the Midland Main line and onwards to Chesterfield and Sheffield. In the previous plan many high speed services were to miss Sheffield.

- **Investment to deliver a programme of fares, ticketing and retail reform.** This has been announced many times before and Railfuture has been active in the discussions. A further briefing on this particular initiative is below.

Please note, this is a briefing on the initial headline announcement. A more in depth response will be provided as the detail emerges.

Ian Brown CBE Policy Director Railfuture. 18th November 2021

IRP – Contactless pay-as-you-go ticketing briefing

Within the IRP there has been a repeat, and some very limited detailing, of the Autumn Statement promise of £360m for the further deployment of contactless Pay as You Go payment for rail travel (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/360-million-investment-to-transform-rail-ticketing-across-the-country>).

Whilst definitely to be welcomed – and an important step, as Railfuture has previously commented (<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1884>), this continues the theme of focusing on ticketing – and technology – rather than any detail of fares reform.

Fortunately, though, there has been a best fare promise, which raises interesting questions on split ticketing and the presence of Advance tickets (as an important ticketing choice are an important element. GTR has shown that it is possible to roll out PAYG without fares reform (albeit without tackling Split Tickets, nor Advances [which are not an important product for the TOC]), and so a near term focus for Railfuture has to be to continue to campaign for fundamental fares reform (there are also promises for better integration with tram & bus, which are to be welcomed, but the devil is in the detail).

Given mention of 700 more stations outside London & SE to get contactless, this presumably implies that a good portion of stations will not receive contactless in this roll out, so we need to continue to lobby for suitable digital tickets for these stations.

Neil Middleton, Director Railfuture. 18th November

Railfuture's local contacts are listed at <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display626>