

£589 million to kickstart rail upgrades across the North

- over £600 million worth of investment in northern rail network will drive improvements across the region, including release of £589 million for work to upgrade and electrify Transpennine main line
- new council, led by Grant Shapps as Northern Powerhouse Minister, will give northern leaders 'direct line' to ministers to accelerate transport projects
- body's work to drive progress across the North will be supported by Department for Transport (DfT) staff based in northern cities

To kickstart work on the Transpennine main line between Leeds, Huddersfield and Manchester, £589 million has been confirmed today (23 July 2020) by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps. The establishment of a new Northern Transport Acceleration Council dedicated to accelerating vital infrastructure projects and better connecting communities across the North's towns and cities has also been announced.

The most congested section of the route will be doubled from 2 to 4 tracks, allowing fast trains to overtake slower ones, improving journey times and reliability for passengers across the North. Most of the line will be electrified, and our ambition is to go further. Full electrification, digital signalling, more multi-tracking and improved freight capacity are now under consideration as part of an 'Integrated Rail Plan' due to report in December.

These improvements will allow all-electric services between Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, York and Newcastle, bring longer and more frequent trains, and create significantly more local capacity along the line.

Improvements to allow more freight on the route, replacing thousands of diesel lorry journeys with electric freight trains, will also be considered in the plan.

Work is also underway to tackle the bottlenecks at either end of the route without which the upgrade's potential cannot be fulfilled. Leeds station is being resignalled and a new platform is being built. In central Manchester, development funding was [awarded last month](#) to tackle rail congestion.

The council launched today will ensure northern leaders have a direct line to ministers and has been formed with the desire to cut bureaucracy and red tape so passengers can get the modern, reliable transport network they deserve as quickly as possible.

As part of the government's wider strategy to level up communities and strengthen devolution, the council's work will engage with DfT staff based in northern cities and dedicated to delivering for the North.

This follows the announcement of a range of investments to level-up

infrastructure across the North including £20 million to deliver infrastructure renewals on the Tyne and Wear Metro, following the announcement of £15 million to upgrade Horden, Darlington and Middlesbrough stations.

Transport Secretary and Northern Powerhouse Minister Grant Shapps said:

People across the North rightly expect action, progress and ambition and this government is determined to accelerate improvements as we invest billions to level up the region's infrastructure.

We are determined to build back better at pace, and this new council will allow us to engage collectively and directly with elected northern leaders to build the vital projects the region is crying out for.

The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, said:

Levelling-up opportunity will be key in our recovery from coronavirus and our long-term success will rely on having world-class infrastructure in all parts of the country. The Transpennine rail upgrade shows we are delivering on our promises to the North.

Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, said:

This feels like a gear change from the government in the delivery of transport improvements in the North of England and I welcome the new drive that the Transport Secretary is bringing to this.

People here deserve a modern, reliable public transport system and it is my hope that the Northern Transport Acceleration Council will bring forward the day when that is a reality. It is crucial that the council listens to the voice of the North and is accountable to people here through their elected politicians and bodies such as Transport for the North.

The additional funding for the Transpennine route upgrade is a welcome sign of intent from the government. The North has long argued for the existing scheme to be upgraded to bring the full range of passenger and freight benefits and we are glad that the government has listened to this. But it is important to be clear that upgrading the existing railway between Manchester and Leeds does not diminish the need for a new line in Northern Powerhouse Rail nor does it solve the capacity issues in central Manchester which require a separate solution.

As we look to recover from COVID-19 and build back better, I am

ready to work in constructive partnership with the government to get visible transport improvements as quickly as possible. My top priority is to build a London-style, integrated public transport system in Greater Manchester and I look forward to working with the Secretary of State on making this vision a reality.

The Northern Transport Acceleration Council will hold its first meeting in September and will be made up of mayors and council leaders with the Transport Secretary as chair. It will work closely with the Northern Powerhouse Growth Body to improve outcomes for people and places in the North.

Its establishment and the announcement of funds for upgrade works are the latest in a range of investments this government has put into northern transport.

In March, the DfT took over the running of rail services on the Northern network to deliver vital improvements and ensure that passengers are given the level of service they deserve.

At Budget the Chancellor confirmed over £720 million investment in local transport across the North through the Transforming Cities Fund.

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen said:

As the country begins its economic recovery following the coronavirus pandemic it's vital that Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool have the tools and infrastructure to play their part and achieve their potential.

This new body will not only give leaders like me another avenue to press our transport case to ministers. DfT staff based in the North will also see first-hand the challenges and opportunities we face, and the improvements and projects needed to unlock further growth and prosperity, with the ability to act on these.

It's also great to see more funding for the critical upgrades necessary to the Transpennine Route, which are desperately needed to bring about transformational change across the network. This will help increase capacity, reliability and connectivity between Redcar and Middlesbrough to York, Leeds and Manchester, giving our passengers, businesses and, ultimately, freight services the links they deserve.

Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government Simon Clarke MP said:

Improving infrastructure to help better connect communities is key to this government's mission to level up every region.

The new Northern Transport Acceleration Council is an important step and will help to accelerate and deliver the tangible improvements people across the Northern Powerhouse want to see.

In May ministers gave the go-ahead to the A63 Castle Street scheme, which will better connect Hull's city centre with the city's retail and docks area and help boost economic growth in the region.

And earlier this month the government provided £1 million to fund a business case to transform the Queensbury Tunnel into a greenway cycling and pedestrian link between Halifax and Bradford.

At the end of this year the government will publish the Integrated Rail Plan, specifically looking at how to deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail, HS2 and other rail needs as quickly and efficiently as possible for the North.