

Speech: Government invests in northern transport infrastructure

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to this conference today.

I particularly wanted to come and talk to you today because I care deeply about developing and strengthening the north...

And I want to make absolutely clear what this government is doing to modernise, expand and improve transport across the region...

Something that has not been reflected in recent coverage of our plans.

Let me start by saying that I know a bit about transport here in the north west.

I wrote my university dissertation on the first transport improvements in and around Manchester and how they drove the growth of the city.

I did my research in Manchester Central Library after getting the bus in from Worsley each morning. I used to live less than 20 miles from here, under the flight path into and out of the airport.

I have been travelling up and down the M6 since I was 8 weeks old to my family's home area in Lancashire. And while my politics are not red, I do enjoy supporting the red side of this city on a Saturday afternoon.

And let me be clear, I am proud to be Transport Secretary in a government that is in the middle of implementing the biggest transport investment programme in the north west for decades.

Yet in recent weeks you may have read that we spend far more in the south than in the north.

But the figures used were misleading, and certainly do not represent the true picture of investment. They give a very partial view of what is happening.

Let me give you just one example.

One of the most important new transport schemes completed by this government is the new link road between the M6 and Heysham in the north-west, unlocking a part of the economy of north Lancashire which has been held back by poor infrastructure.

It was promoted and secured by two local MPs who sit on the government's benches, David Morris and Eric Ollerenshaw, delivered by Lancashire County Council, but almost entirely funded by this government. Because it was a locally driven project rather than a national scheme, it and scores of

schemes like it weren't counted in the IPPR figures.

But the road is completed and serving the people and businesses of north Lancashire.

The reality is that when you include those centrally funded and locally delivered projects, this government is spending more per head on transport in the north west than we are in the south east. There are regional discrepancies, but they are nothing like those suggested by critics.

And promoting them only serves to misinform the travelling public and risks undermining confidence in the north. That's incredibly frustrating when we're working so hard to overcome decades of underinvestment in the north. What we are actually delivering is somewhat different:

- crucial road schemes completed and underway all across the north
- the biggest upgrade of railways in the north since the steam age
- better road and rail connections to our regional airports, opening up global possibilities for the local economy

Let me start with the roads. Projects completed. Projects being developed on both sides of the Pennines.

- that Heysham link.
- the new link road between the M56 and the M6 near my old home in Cheshire
- the smart motorway schemes, on the key motorways of the north, which includes widening on the M6, the M1, the M60 and the M62
- the A1, a rolling programme of much-needed improvement, next stage about to open
- dualling the rest of the A66 so that we create another proper route across the Pennines to link our great northern cities
- the Mottram Moor Link Road. To help meet that Transpennine challenge
- the road links to the Port of Immingham
- the A5036 Princess Way access to the Port of Liverpool
- the Manchester Airport relief road
- the vital bypass on the A585 at Fleetwood

Part of the biggest road building programme that this region has seen for a very long time.

In the next few months I will be starting work on another dimension of that programme. The Major Road Network, focusing attention on roads of most importance to regional economies...

Significant new investment on local and regional schemes...

Including much needed bypasses to tackle problems in places that have been missed out in the past.

Many of these crucial routes were detrunked between 2001 and 2009 and have received too little investment since.

So I'm determined to address this.

And for those who really believe that our opponents have the smartest approach to transport, let me share one fact with you about roads.

In the 13 years up to 2010, the government of the day cancelled as many road schemes as they actually completed.

We aren't just announcing these projects, we are working nationally and with local authorities to deliver them.

Then there's the trains.

Let me give you one statistic on the topic of the moment, electrification.

And I'll talk a bit about our strategy on that in a moment.

Since 2010 – at a time of financial challenges – we have electrified 4 times as many miles in the north-west alone than the previous government did in the whole of England and Wales in 13 years of office, when the money flowed freely.

And here's the truth on the railways of the north.

This government has launched the biggest modernisation programme of railways in the north since the steam age. An age that started here in the north.

It includes better infrastructure now, new trains, more services, more seats and bold plans to carry on that expansion for the future.

Let's start with those old Pacer trains.

The hideous old noisy trains that were built on the cheap in British Rail days. They have no place on a modern railway. And so they are off to the scrap yard. By the end of 2019, all of them will be cut up for recycling, to be replaced by the kind of modern replacements that this region needs so badly. This isn't a vague promise. It is already happening.

Under the new Northern and Transpennine franchises every single train in the North West- some of the oldest carriages in the country- will be replaced or refurbished.

And there will be more of them, with extra seats and carriages for commuters into Manchester in the rush hour. There will be more services and new services.

Not just here in Greater Manchester, but across the North West.

Trudy Harrison, the new MP for Copeland, excitedly stopped me in the corridor recently when she discovered that the Cumbrian Coast line is going to get a Sunday service for the first time.

Because these are real improvements for people.

Then there are the radical upgrades happening now to some of the oldest train tracks in the world.

We are upgrading Liverpool Lime Street, delivering a new platform, extending two platforms, straightening track and improving signalling to support more train services across the region from 2019.

It is part of a £340 million railway investment programme. A major upgrade which is starting next week with more work to follow next year.

Here in Manchester, the Ordsall chord – a world-class piece of engineering to finally connect Piccadilly and Victoria.

The Victorians didn't do it. We did.

So let's not hear any rhetoric from our opponents about us not caring for Liverpool or Manchester.

In Leeds we are building new stations.

We modernised the Calder Valley line.

We are working on plans for new Metro trains in Newcastle.

Let me say a couple of things about the two issues that created most noise over the summer.

Firstly the expansion of Piccadilly station.

I am limited in what I can say because this is subject to a live planning application. However, I am ambitious for Manchester and its vital connections, not least to the North West and the Airport and I am keen to see Manchester have connections as good as London.

My ambitions for the link for the Piccadilly to Victoria link, and the route through Oxford Road – so vital for the connections between much of the North West and the Airport – are to do more than is currently planned to allow more services through Manchester.

The current plan involves expanding the route to take up to fifteen trains an hour.

But in London the new Thameslink core uses digital technology to take up to 24 trains an hour, on just two tracks with two platforms.

Why does Manchester have to settle for an analogue solution in a digital age? Why does Manchester have to get an old-fashioned solution where London gets state of the art technology?

So I have asked Network Rail to look at better solutions.

Then there's the question of the Transpennine modernisation.

All the talk seems to be about electrification.

And let's be clear. Our programme of electrification is continuing, and soon we will have electrified not three times, but dozens of times more railway than were electrified in the years between 1997 and 2010. That means more electrification in and around Manchester, and looking at electrification as part of passenger improvements across the Pennines.

But people have got to stop only thinking about how a train is powered, and focus instead on getting the best possible improvement for passengers.

And what delivers better journey times is primarily the way you upgrade the tracks and the signalling, and how you invest in trains.

If you take the case of the Midland Main Line, we have an ambitious modernisation plan in place for between now and 2020.

We are adding extra tracks for part of the route. We are putting in place better signalling. We are working on straightening the curves on the route right now, so that trains can run faster. We are buying brand new 125 mile an hour hybrid/bi-mode electric trains for the route. We will electrify those parts of the route where it will make the biggest difference.

And by doing all of that we will reduce the journey time from London to Sheffield by up to 20 minutes in the peak. It will be the biggest set of improvements to journeys on that route since it opened in 1870.

Improvements that passengers can see and feel.

Easier and more comfortable and quicker journeys.

But then if you want to electrify the whole route, every inch of the way, it will cost the taxpayer nearly a billion pounds more than our current plan and it will save one extra minute on the journey time to Sheffield.

Yes that's right. A billion pounds to save one minute.

How many people would think that should be a transport priority for us?

The thing that makes the difference is the arrival of a new generation of bi-mode, hybrid trains. Like hybrid cars they can run on electricity or diesel or for that matter battery or hydrogen. And they switch seamlessly between different technologies. We're bringing these trains to the Great Western mainline to Penzance.

To the East Coast Mainline to Aberdeen. To cross-country routes in East Anglia. Even to the tram system in Birmingham. And to Manchester, to this City, in 2019. Brand new trains running from Liverpool to Hull. On electric tracks where they are present. Using diesel when they are not.

For passengers, it's the train and the timetable that really matters.

So this government will deliver the improved journey times promised. And of course there are plenty of electric tracks for them to run on. We've just completed the electrification between Liverpool and Manchester.

We're electrifying Manchester's suburban railways, because that makes a real difference for commuters. And we are cracking on with the modernisation of the Transpennine railway line.

With straighter tracks. Faster journey times. But it also means that places like Scarborough can have access to the electric trains as well meaning they can keep their direct access to Manchester Airport.

And ask this question. If the trains can run seamlessly in diesel and electric, do we really need to cause disruption and close the Standedge tunnel for weeks to put wires through it, as we did with the Severn Tunnel, if the trains can run through it anyway?

But there's something more.

I am ambitious for the transpennine routes. I want a big increase in transpennine capacity. On roads. And on rail. It's why we are pressing ahead with the A66, and looking for new road corridors.

And it's why I want the modernisation of the transpennine rail route to use the latest technology to maximise its potential for the future.

We're already seeing how digital technology is transforming the London underground. And some metro lines.

Digital technology and digital control rooms mean a more reliable service, an even safer railway, and more capacity for passengers.

With this in mind, I have asked Network Rail to put together a plan setting out how they could embed digital technology in the transpennine upgrade, and I have set aside an initial £5m of development funding to scope this work.

This means that the trans Pennine route could be Britain's first digitally controlled intercity main line railway. My goal is simple.

I want to put the passenger first, and use the newest, best smartest technology to disrupt their lives as little as possible.

To be honest, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been baffled by the accusations coming from some of our opponents.

They have been telling us that we are doing nothing.

And yet some of those same opponents are sitting at the table with us, in Transport for the North, planning the detail of this modernisation programme.

They co-designed the transformation of Northern and TransPennine.

They help us manage the franchises and the replacement of all those trains.

They are also sitting beside us planning the detail of Northern Powerhouse Rail.

A commitment to the North that was in our manifesto.

I am waiting for TfN to tell us where they believe the priorities for that project lie, so we can begin to plan in detail. That's why I'm surprised to hear some accuse us of doing nothing, while they are a part of the work to deliver transformational and exciting improvements to the North.

Then there's the biggest project of all.

Our commitment to bring HS2 to Manchester.

A project that will join up North and South – but equally importantly will create the opportunity for thousands of extra seats on commuter trains south of Manchester and will help take lorries off our roads and onto the existing railway.

One of the biggest transport infrastructure projects happening anywhere in the world right now, all conceived to help build connectivity in and to the north.

The development of HS2 will create a link between the Midlands and the North unparalleled in the history of our transport system.

But before then we will continue to see the transformation of the road network in the north.

A future that will see the biggest modernisation of rail in the North since the steam age. Not to mention the private sector's ambitious plans for Manchester Airport's new terminal, and ours for more links to an expanded Heathrow. I am very happy to stand up and be counted on our record on transport in the North. Yes there have been decades of underinvestment. Yes things needed to change. Between 1997 and 2010 the transport system of the north stood still. But today there's amazing work going on across Northern transport. Bold, visionary work. Fantastic engineering. But also lots of local upgrades to make everyday journeys better. All backed by unprecedented investment. With northern authorities, northern businesses and northern people working with Government to deliver that vision. I'm proud to be part of that effort. To put transport right at the heart of the Northern Powerhouse.

Thank you.