

Speech: Securing HS2 for the Midlands and north

Thank you and good afternoon everyone. I'd like to thank you all for inviting me to this event.

It's a real pleasure to be here today (24 January 2019) and to see so many familiar faces from the world of transport, as well as across the political spectrum.

This government's plans for projects such as High Speed 2 will not only revitalise the north and the Midlands, they will have a transformational effect on Britain.

And many of you in this room have the responsibility of not only bringing these plans to fruition but also ensuring the entire country enjoys the full benefits.

For it's no exaggeration that good transport connections can have an extraordinary impact on people's lives. They bring communities closer together, provide [new work and educational opportunities](#) and help businesses to thrive. But I am all too conscious that the last time we built new rail links to the centres of our great northern cities, Queen Victoria was still on the throne.

Back then the north was home to some of the earliest railway innovations.

For instance, in 1830 the first modern intercity passenger railway in the world ran between Liverpool and Manchester.

The 35-mile trip was a thrilling experience for travellers, if not a rather bracing one – as many passengers sat in carriages virtually open to the north-west's weather.

But it inspired real excitement among the public about the potential offered by railways and it's my aim to create that same sense of enthusiasm towards the benefits of our modern railway projects.

However it is a great shame that half a century of underinvestment means cities in the north and Midlands don't just have poor rail connections to the rest of the UK – they have poor connections to each other.

These inefficient links have meant that opportunity is less accessible for people than in other parts of the country, such as the south-east.

I am proud to be part of a government that has called time on that trend.

And I believe the creation of HS2 will super charge economic growth for the north and the Midlands while providing the extra capacity required on busy north to south rail routes, which are currently among the most intensively

used in Europe, and encouraging employers and businesses to not just focus on London and the south-east but the country as a whole.

I've been delighted to see the progress HS2 is making.

Last autumn [I joined West Midlands Mayor Andy Street to meet the team delivering the HS2 station at Curzon Street in Birmingham](#) where the railway will help transform the city centre, and could unlock up to 36,000 jobs and 4,000 new homes.

But as people in this room know, HS2 is not just about improving train links between London and Birmingham.

It's a project that will benefit the whole country, boosting opportunity and breathing new life into towns and cities.

You may have seen media stories suggesting that the second stage of the project might not happen. Those stories are completely inaccurate.

Let me be very clear. High Speed 2 is vital beyond Birmingham and failure to deliver it would be a dereliction of our duties to improve the life chances of everyone in this country, an abandonment of our ambition for one of the most extraordinary engineering projects since the Victorian age and a huge betrayal of the people in the Midlands and the north.

Some of you may have been at the event, where I was reported to have made these remarks.

In fact I said we must keep on making the strategic case for HS2 and work hard to win over the public about its potential benefits.

Let me reiterate. We are committed to a second stage [between the West Midlands and Leeds and between Crewe and Manchester](#), completing the 'Y axis' and it is very heartening to see that the positive impacts of HS2 – both the first and second stage – are already being felt all over the UK.

So far it has already created 7,000 jobs and 100 apprenticeships. While over 2,000 contracts for the railway are being delivered by businesses large and small everywhere from Colchester to Coventry.

So HS2 is a project that will transform our country, regenerate our regions and rebalance our economy. But I want to be clear that it will not come at the expense of other transport projects for the north. And conversely nor will other railway projects come at the expense of HS2.

It's a complete misnomer to say we can only have either Northern Powerhouse Rail or HS2. We need both. In fact there are strong reasons why HS2 should actually pave the way for NPR and why the case for NPR is actually bolstered by HS2.

That's why we are integrating HS2 into the emerging proposals from Transport for the North for Northern Powerhouse Rail, as well as with our Midlands transport plans.

I'd like to conclude by thanking our hosts TFN, Midlands Connect, Core Cities and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership for organising this event.

Your help is vital in achieving our ultimate goal of a transport network that is fit for the future.

We are committed to delivering HS2 for you and the businesses, people, passengers and local authorities that you represent.

It's your work today that will help ensure the growth and prosperity of the whole country for generations to come.

We have a fantastic opportunity with HS2 to transform capacity, boost connectivity and spark even greater economic growth. Let's seize it with both hands. Thank you.