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A new chapter for northern transport

It's great to join you all this morning and thank you to Transport Times for inviting me.

As we all know we're in one of the world's great cities.

This is a city of science, culture and history, business, enterprise and commerce.

A city of bars and nightclubs and music.

And of course world-beating sport is played here every week.

It's a bold city, it's a booming city, it's a brilliant city.

It encapsulates every bit of the vibrancy, the success and ambition of the north and its great cities.

And like everybody here today (12 February 2020) I am determined that Manchester and the rest of the north achieves even greater things still.

Good connections to Leeds and to other northern cities and towns are just as important I think as the all-important spinal connection down to London.

That's why yesterday when we [announced that not only would we go ahead with building HS2](#), but we would also fully integrate it with east-west connections of the Northern Powerhouse rail as well – brought together in a new masterplan called High Speed North.

I'll talk about that just a little bit later.

Today what I wanted to do is not just talk about those gleaming new trains and gleaming new stations which will eventually come.

I'm going to talk about the buses, local trains, the bikes and crucial roads that link and connect people together.

And, I'm not just going to talk about the big cities like Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Newcastle.

But I also want to talk about places like Fleetwood and Poulton in Lancashire, which I visited recently.

Their railway line there hacked away by the very brutal Beeching Cuts in the '60s.

Now it takes an hour and a half to travel just 18 miles to Preston by public transport. And an hour to cover 7 miles to Blackpool by bus.

I want to talk also about places like Ashington in Northumberland, that I visited recently – once a very busy pit town, served by trains on that Northumberland Line. Those passenger trains went years ago through the Beeching reversal. We're going to bring them back again. Such disconnection has increased isolation both within and between our communities, and it's why this government is determined to ensure that no community is locked out of this country's growth going forward.

Not just because we want to repay the trust of the millions of people across the north who voted for us at the last election.

But because levelling up infrastructure, opening up opportunity, and ensuring that no community is left behind, is our driving force for this government.

We've got to transform our transport system in the here and now, from the bottom up, not just from the top down.

Of course we've got to focus on the big, national projects necessary for the UK to achieve its potential.

But in the same way we must also be unrelenting in improving local services too, that people living in towns and villages across the north use every single day.

People need to be confident, for example, that their bus to town really will arrive on time. Or arrive at all, if it's the weekend or in the evenings.

And their train to work must be on time, and mustn't be cancelled or ridiculously overcrowded.

And yes, it should be clean as well.

And people should have confidence their roads won't be jammed with traffic, unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists.

That's why this week, we did not just commit to High Speed North.

We also committed to transforming the system – in which we are investing unprecedented sums in buses and bikes, bypasses and those Beeching Reversals I was referring to a moment ago.

And we are taking steps to improve train services on the Northern and Transpennine lines.

Buses

But I want to turn to yesterday's announcement on buses in particular.

Buses are our most popular form of transport in this country.

They carry an astronomical 4 billion people a year just in Britain. Not 4 billion different people – obviously lots of people taking journeys many times over – but it is extraordinary to think how important buses are.

That's almost 3 times the number of people who travel by train and over 100 times the number of domestic air passengers.

But I know passengers in the north and in the rest of the country wonder why they have to wait half an hour and pay an arm and a leg to travel just a few stops and can't get anywhere often at weekends.

While Londoners enjoy a bus service that run every few minutes, often 24/7 and they pay about £1.50 to cross the entire capital city.

I think that's a fair question. And so does the Prime Minister, who you may know is very passionate about buses.

We're determined to give the north and the rest of the country the tools to replicate the capital's bus success.

We've already handed local authorities new powers to work with operators to run services.

And last week we were announcing the detail of what was a £220 million package of a series of different ground-breaking projects. For example the [superbus networks across the country](#), where passengers will benefit from London style cheaper fares and more efficient services.

I'm convinced that if we have buses that you get on and are warm in the winter and air-conditioned in the summer, if they have got USB ports to charge your phone, wi-fi and 5G then people will use buses because they are just convenient. But they've got to turn up and they've got to be reliable.

But yesterday we went a lot further. That £220 million announcement is but a nothing compared with the [£5 billion for buses](#) we have now launched to go alongside the HS2 announcement, for buses everywhere outside of London.

It's money that will make services much more frequent – just as they are in

the capital – allowing people to turn up and go.

It's money that will make routes more efficient and better value – so buses also won't be snarled up in traffic because we give them more priority to sensibly plan routes.

And it's money that will make buses greener, funding the roll out of something like 4,000 new zero carbon buses. I'm particularly interested in those electric buses but also in hydrogen buses.

There is no other government that has invested on such a scale in recent times. Perhaps with the exception of what's going on in China.

Railways

Nor has any other government invested in the railways like this since Victorian times and perhaps ever. We're not only pumping £48 billion into this 5 year period on our railways – that's just Network Rail, that's just the regular stuff if you like.

But we're also taking really decisive action on our railways.

Let's talk about Northern for a moment if we can.

As you know, just last month I said it was time for this [Northern service to be sorted out, and we've brought it back into the public sector at least for the time being.](#)

Realistically it's going to take time. Simply handing it to the operator of last resort is not going to resolve Northern's problems.

But I know that Robin Gisby and Richard George, who are heading up this public sector operator, are going to be wholly focused on delivering real and tangible changes, and I've asked them to do it as quickly as possible, whilst understanding they won't be able to work overnight miracles.

And while they're doing that we are of course [working towards what I call the Williams world white paper,](#) where Keith Williams has been working on those plans to dramatically improve services across the entire network. I'm absolutely convinced that the level of fragmentation that exists in our railways at the moment, whilst successful in for example doubling the number of passengers, doubling the passenger miles and making our railways go through this extraordinary renaissance that we are seeing today, it's just too damn complicated to run a railway with this level of capacity constraint because of all those extra services in the modern world.

And that's why what Keith Williams is doing is absolutely essential and I'm looking forward to publishing that white paper before too long.

Now those of us who spent our formative years during the 1980s, will know it was a great time for music.

It was great time for fashion – at least for some.

But I'll put it out there, I don't think it was a classic moment for train design in UK and particularly in the north of England.

I am of course talking about the pacers.

I would echo the Prime Minister in saying:

I like buses but not when they're supposed to be trains.

And that of course is the pacer, they are finally coming off the network. Three of them have just gone to a variety of different charities – a mental health charity, a school, a library, so we can remember them and future generations can come and see what it was like when we ran buses on the rails. But I will be very pleased to see the back of those trains.

But I have to say there are 2 things that strike fear into my heart every time I hear that the railway is going to be improved – and those are:

Don't worry minister we are going to improve the timetable.

Which means the timetable won't be running for quite some time. And:

Don't worry we are going to introduce new trains.

Yesterday on the way here I had the pleasure of being on I think a class 331, which of course was brand new, lovely, warm, comfortable, with wi-fi, plug in for your phone. And broken down.

But I do find that we have a problem when we introduce new trains, that they go through these very significant teething problems which always means we over-estimate the improvements the public will see.

Those problems aside, the renaissance of the railway I think is very significant as I have been trying to describe.

Beeching

Beyond just the improvements in rolling stock we also have our [massive programme of reversing those Beeching cuts](#).

Nearly a third of Britain's railway was wiped away by Beeching after his 1964 report.

2,300 stations, 5,000 miles of track obliterated.

As you know we've already pledged half a billion to begin reversing the cuts – rebuilding old lines, upgrading freight lines, and even creating brand new lines through this process.

Because I believe that by restoring these crucial links, we'll take an important step in restoring the sense of connection too many communities have lost.

Roads and cycling

We're also continuing our programme of improvements on the north's roads.

The £1 billion duelling of the A66, which can't come a moment too soon, is going to be a welcome boost to safety and convenience for communities in the Pennines.

While the £600 million we've put into the new Mersey Gateway Crossing between Runcorn and Widnes, is making the daily commute much easier for hundreds of thousands of people.

Now we will tackle the well-known congestion hotspot on Simister Island – near Manchester and Rochdale.

And we'll take the A34 in Cheadle, just south of Manchester, to the next stage of its development.

While also working out how to make it easier for drivers using the A1 north of Newcastle.

Of course fewer traffic jams are not just good for drivers though, it's also great for productivity, the environment and air quality as well.

Last week we announced we'll consult on bringing forward the date by which we would ban the sale of fossil fuel powered cars to 2035.

As we seek to reach this country's legally binding 2050 net zero emissions goal.

We now have more charging locations than petrol stations in this country and it's expanding at an enormous rate.

We also need to boost cycling and walking.

We've already set ourselves the target of doubling these by 2025.

But I think too often bikes sit in the garage and start to rust and you ask why it is that people do ferry their kids to school rather than taking bikes.

Essentially, I think it's safety that really worries parents. As a parent myself that would be my main worry about my kids cycling to school.

We're addressing this issue through our [cycling and walking investment strategy](#).

While the [£2.5 billion Transforming Cities Fund is helping to pay for new cycle ways and footpaths](#).

Such as the fantastic Bee Network here in Manchester.

But that is just the start.

Yesterday in addition to that £5 billion for buses we announced a huge increase in the cycling budget which is going to pay for something like 250 miles of new separated cycle routes and safe junctions in towns and cities across England.

Now I know towns across the north may not have thought of this before, but we want to turn lots of our areas into mini-Hollands. These are low traffic neighbourhoods with reduced lorry traffic, so that everybody can get around much more easily.

Regional connectivity and major projects

So in essence I make this the 4 B's – buses, bikes, bypasses and Beeching.

This unprecedented package of spending and reforms is going to transform the daily lives of millions of people here in the north, from Southport to Sunderland.

So today as we stand in Manchester.

Along with Liverpool, home to the first inter-city railway and the canals that catapulted this country through the industrial revolution and into the modern age.

We can contemplate a new chapter of the north's transport story.

It's going to be a story about giving towns a new lease of life, while bringing big cities closer to each other.

It's going to be a story about gleaming state-of-the-art stations and high-speed trains.

But it's also one about new buses, cycle paths and better local rail links.

It's going to be a story about giving the young and ambitious the chance to shine in our cities.

But it's also going to be a story about flinging open the doors of opportunity to people who believed their communities had been forgotten.

And it's a story in which every one of us in this room will play our parts.

As we use the power of transport to build an even better and brighter future for the Northern Powerhouse.

Thank you.

Sellafield scientist makes global top 20

She has been included in the Global Shaker Women in Science list which introduces the top 20 women in science to know, all of them amazing and inspiring females who are paving the way in science for future generations.

A Senior Technologist and Chartered Chemist at Sellafield, Rebecca is joined on the list by astronauts, chief scientists and quantum physicists, to name just a few.

Rebecca said:

I work as part of the Technical and Strategy Team for the Analytical Services Programme on the Sellafield site. I'm involved in instrument method development and technical problem solving to support the work we do with the analytical laboratories.

When she isn't problem solving and developing technical solutions, Rebecca is passionately working to encourage more girls and women to consider science as a career.

She said:

Many areas that I've worked in have a noticeable lack of female graduates and I'd like to encourage more girls to explore the sciences as possible career choices.

STEM subject choices at school and university, can lead onto fast paced and challenging professions like mine.

Her commitment to STEM and women in science were both recognised last year as Rebecca scooped the 'Outstanding contribution to widening participation, diversity and inclusion in STEM' at the STEM Inspirational Awards and 'Outstanding contribution to Science' at the Women of the Future Awards.

Rebecca Weston, Chief Operating Officer Sellafield Ltd, said:

We're very proud of the commitment of many of our workforce in their commitment to the STEM agenda and the development of young people and opportunities.

It's fantastic when they're getting recognised more widely for this

and Rebecca is a brilliant role model in this regard. I congratulate her, she deserves this recognition her hard work and commitment has brought.

Rebecca says:

To now be recognised on an international stage as being within the top 20 female scientists is amazing. I feel incredibly proud and humbled to be listed alongside such inspirational women. I feel empowered to continue my work to challenge stereotypes and facilitate change not just in nuclear but across all STEM industries.

[Collision between mobile elevating work platforms at Rochford](#)

At around 10:57 hrs on Saturday 25 January 2020, a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) travelling at about 9.2 mph (14.8 km/h) collided with a similar, but stationary, machine, on the railway between Rochford and Southend Airport stations. The machine had travelled over 150 metres at around 10 mph (16 km/h) immediately before the collision. At the time, the railway was closed to normal traffic and the two machines were part of the equipment that was being used to renew the overhead electrical power lines.

There were two people in the stationary MEWP, working on the overhead line equipment, and they were thrown against the railings of the machine's basket. They both suffered severe bruising and back injuries which prevented them from working for some time. The single person in the moving MEWP was unhurt. Both machines were slightly damaged.

Our investigation will identify the sequence of events which led to the accident. It will also consider:

- The arrangements for managing the movement of the MEWPs, including the planning and organisation of the work that was taking place
- The management of the competence of machine operators and controllers
- The braking performance of the MEWP
- Any underlying factors.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry or by the industry's regulator, the [Office of Rail and Road](#).

We will publish our findings, including any recommendations to improve safety, at the conclusion of our investigation. This report will be available

on our website.

You can [subscribe](#) to automated emails notifying you when we publish our reports.

[CMA to examine water regulator's price review after appeals](#)

Every 5 years Ofwat must decide how much money people should pay for their water and the level of service they should receive. As part of this, Ofwat considers a range of issues to ensure that water companies serve their customers effectively by keeping bills low while continuing to deliver sustainable services now and in the future.

In December 2019, Ofwat published its final decision on price control for the next five years. Companies that are unhappy with Ofwat's decision have until 15 February to tell Ofwat that they want the case to be referred to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Any appeals submitted before the deadline will be included in Ofwat's reference.

The CMA's role is to form its own conclusion on the price controls for the individual companies that appeal. When carrying out this review, the CMA has the same duties as Ofwat.

An Inquiry Group of independent panel members will be appointed to review Ofwat's price determination decision, supported by a team of staff within the CMA. The CMA expects Ofwat to give it 6 months from the date of the reference to complete its review, although this can be extended if the CMA needs more time.

Kip Meek, CMA Inquiry Group Chair said:

Everyone needs water, so it's really important that customers' bills are not set too high, but at the same time the water companies have enough money to deliver an efficient and high-quality service. The CMA will look closely at whether Ofwat's decision strikes the right balance in this and other areas and will make changes if not.

Ofwat will refer the price control for each water company that appeals. Once the reference is made, further information will be available on the CMA website. At the end of the review, the CMA will publish a report with its final decision on Ofwat's price controls including any changes that it deems necessary.