

○ Restoring Your Railway:

○ **Promises vs Progress in
Northumberland and
Nottinghamshire**

○ February 2024



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○ Introduction



Our interest in Nottinghamshire

This research piece has been adapted from elements of our previous work in Project Development under Sustainable Transport Midlands (STM). Our Project Development team were working on initial assessment of potential projects to develop, following our work in Daventry. We present some of that work here, regarding a project that would have incorporated two freight-only (formerly passenger) lines, draw some comparisons with the project to restore passenger services to the Northumberland Line, and make some wider observations on the Restoring Your Railway (RYR) scheme.

CrossNotts would have been our proposal under STM to create a new regional rail corridor to the north of Nottingham, linking a string of local communities in a deprived, formerly industrial area to employment opportunities in Nottingham and Mansfield, and improving connectivity to Lincolnshire and the East Coast Main Line.

This would be achieved by restoring passenger services to two lines currently used by freight traffic, known as the Maid Marian Line and Dukeries Line (Robin Hood Line Extension). Our proposal would have built on current proposals to reopen these two lines, led by Ashfield District Council (2021a, 2021b) and Nottinghamshire County Council (2015) respectively, which despite showing promise appear to be stuck in a loop of re-assessment and re-announcement.

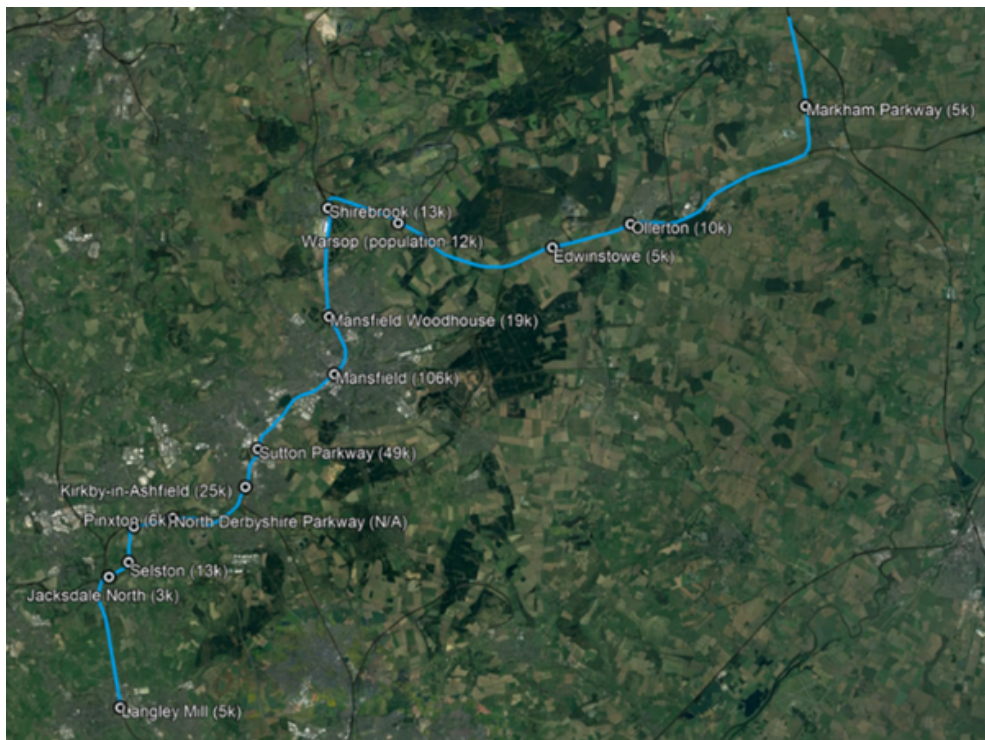


Figure 1: Daventry and Rushden are located in West and North Northamptonshire respectively (Source: Google Earth)

The Project Development team outlined how the two lines could be linked together with the East Coast Main Line (ECML) and identified some potential obstacles, including continued capacity constraints on the ECML without High Speed 2's (HS2) eastern leg.

The analysis included an overview of the progress made so far on the two line reopening proposals (and lack thereof). The purpose of the analysis was to ascertain whether it would be productive for STM to invest time and energy into developing our proposal. We ultimately concluded that local support was already there for the two individual reopening proposals (as we elaborate on below), and that ultimately there was little opportunity for STM to gain support for modifying these proposals or contribute meaningfully to campaigning for them.

In this adapted research piece, we analyse the slow and seemingly cyclical progress on line reopening schemes in Northumberland (now in delivery) and in Nottinghamshire (still proposed) and their politics. These schemes fall within the wider context of the 'Restoring Your Railway' (RYR) scheme, which we introduce below.



Restoring Your Railway (RJR)

The RJR fund of £500m was first announced by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps in January 2020 (DfT 2021a, House of Commons 2023), ostensibly with the aim of 'reversing the Beeching cuts' of the 1960s-70s, during which time some half of Great British railway stations and a third of the network's mileage were closed, leaving towns such as Blyth, Fleetwood, Daventry, Rushden and Okehampton cut off from the rail network.

Ahead of its announcement, rail engineer Gareth Dennis and others noted that actually reversing these closures would cost significantly more than £500m, which would be enough to open 'around 25 miles of track' (Shropshire Star 2019). Rather, the RJR scheme has mainly been oriented around providing funding for feasibility studies, with local councils, MPs and other groups submitting bids to the fund to develop studies into local schemes. Schemes that have received funding for such studies would still require new sources of funding to actually be delivered.

The scheme is split into three funding pots: The Ideas Fund (for feasibility studies), Advanced Proposals (for directing funding towards schemes already in development), and the New Stations Fund (source: House of Commons 2023). The scheme stopped accepting new submissions in November 2021.

There are two full-line projects that have been or are being part-delivered under RJR: The Dartmoor Line (Exeter - Okehampton), which opened in 2021, and the Northumberland Line (Newcastle - Ashington), which is due to open in 2024 (see below). Both schemes mostly predate the RJR scheme but have become its 'flagship' projects.



○ Promises & Progress



The Northumberland Line

The Northumberland (Blyth & Ashington) Line is an 18-mile line in the North East of England, currently carrying freight traffic. Passenger services were previously withdrawn in the 1960s (Network Rail 2022, Northumberland County Council 2022, RAIL 2022). The line is now in the process of being reopened to passengers, at an approximate cost of £167m (as of 2022). Work started in 2021, and services are due to restart in 2024, connecting Newcastle and Ashington via five intermediate stations (Northumberland Park, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Blyth Beside and Bedlington) every half-hour.



Figure 2: Northumberland Line map, including additional aspirations. The line is currently being reopened as far as Ashington (Source: SENRUG, 2024)

The scheme was first assessed by Northumberland County Council in 1996 (AECOM 2019a, 2019b), which considered heavy rail alongside a potential extension of the Tyne & Wear Metro or a bus priority scheme as various options for improving public transport between Blyth/Ashington and Newcastle; the report concluded that heavy rail was the best option, a conclusion which subsequent reports have upheld (ibid).

The South East Northumberland Rail User Group (SENRUG) (2024) put forward their plans for reopening in 2005 and gained support from local MPs. Multiple studies, including progression through Network Rail's Governance for Rail Investment Projects (GRIP) stages, took over ten years, despite strong political support. An initial £34m was allocated from the Department for Transport (DfT) under the RYR scheme (Northumberland County Council 2022), with the council providing £27.2m (RAIL 2022) towards development. The scheme is being led by Northumberland County Council (ibid, SENRUG 2024).

In early 2021, it was reported that the DfT were considering options to cut costs, including potentially cutting Blyth Bebside station from the programme, as well as reducing frequency to one train per hour instead of two (Walker 2021).

These cuts did not materialise, partly due to pressure from SENRUG. SENRUG is continuing to push for an additional station at Seghill, as well as a further extension to Woodhorn and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea (which have always been part of their campaign). Although they dispute the council's arguments for omitting these two additions, they have agreed to wait to revisit the issue until the line is reopened (ibid). SENRUG are developing proposals for further extensions (including Bedlington to Morpeth, re-joining the East Coast Mainline – see Figure 2).

SENRUG (2024) and Northumberland County Council (2022, see also AECOM 2019a, 2019b) have argued the line would help regenerate an economically deprived former mining area by opening up access to employment in Newcastle, as well as connecting it to the rest of the country. The line would be particularly beneficial to young people lacking access to cars in an area where public transport connectivity is poor, as well as relieving road congestion on the A189/A19 corridor.

New stations will be kept simple and unstaffed to minimise cost. The line will interface with the Tyne & Wear Metro at Northumberland Park. Trains and stations will be operated by Northern Trains (2023), who are acting as delivery partners to the scheme, including input into station design. Facilities will be provided for conductors at Ashington station.

The company have run a number of test and crew-training trains on the line over the last few years, and have recruited and trained new drivers and conductors in order to operate the new service.

Preparatory works began in summer 2021 (Modern Railways 2021), with the Full Business Case being completed that November (DfT & Network Rail 2022). The Transport and Works Act Order was approved in June 2022, allowing main works to begin, including work on Newsham and Ashington stations (Kanaris 2023, SENRUG 2024). A further, final commitment to fund the full scheme was confirmed by the DfT in March 2023 (DfT 2023a).

In July 2023, it was reported that following an exchange of contracts between Northumberland County Council and contractor Morgan Sindall, construction was ready to commence on Bedlington, Blyth Bebside and Seaton Delaval stations (ibid). In December 2023, it was reported that construction was behind schedule on Bedlington and Blyth Bebside stations, potentially delaying the scheme (Robinson 2023). According to Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENRUG (quote provided), a significant factor of delay at these stations has been due to former mine workings; it appears that early-stage ground investigations failed to reveal the extent of the problems and their implications for the project.

On the 16th January 2024, Northumberland County Council (2024) confirmed that services were due to begin in 'Summer 2024', although Northumberland Park, Blyth Bebside and Bedlington would open later. The BBC (Robinson 2024), however, have reported that the line potentially may not open until December 2024.

“ With the entire route an existing, working freight line, this should have been the simplest re-opening in the country to implement. The fact that it took so long to get to final sign-off, and that the scheme has cost so much, does not look promising for other schemes elsewhere in the country – plus of course some of our proposed Northumberland Line extensions (where some new track might be needed). However, we are very pleased, after a 19-year campaign, to see this scheme finally come to fruition.

Dennis Fancett

Chair of SENRUG

(quote provided)

In our early assessment of the 'CrossNotts' scheme (under STM), we noted some key points and learnings from the Northumberland Line, which we have since updated here:

- There are abundant opportunities to reconnect deprived, isolated communities (particularly formerly industrial areas) using existing freight-only infrastructure. Actual project construction can be delivered quickly (2-3 years) at relatively low cost.
- Despite low cost and strong local and political support, even when the case for a scheme may seem rock solid, it can take years to gather enough funding for feasibility studies and progress through the various stages of the planning process (in this case, significantly longer than the actual construction time).
- Campaign groups can succeed in 'picking their battles' when it comes to influencing rail schemes. In this case, SENRUG (2024) succeeded in overturning proposals to phase the reopening and omit two stations but compromised on its ambitions to add further stations and extensions in order to see the initial scheme delivered. SENRUG will continue to push for its proposed further developments once this is complete.
- Local councils are able to lead on and contribute to rail schemes, but schemes will suffer if they are seen as a low priority by Network Rail and Central Government.
- Partnership with Train Operating Companies, from the early stages of the project, is essential in order to factor operational needs into scheme design (such as facilities for traincrew), set realistic expectations in terms of service provision, and coordinate preparation for launching new services, including crew recruitment and training (which can come with a significant lead-time).
- Even 'flagship' schemes are not immune from potential cuts. Reporting of potential cuts can undermine confidence in the delivery of these schemes.
- Despite widespread publicity, transparency over funding commitments, contract finalisation and construction delays can still be poor, resulting in timeline slippage and reluctance to confirm potential delays.



The Maid Marian Line

Proposals to reopen the Maid Marian Line in north Nottinghamshire (which is currently freight-only) are being developed by Ashfield District Council (2021a, 2021b, see also Lichfields 2020). These include a new station in Pinxton/Selston (Figure 3). Services would initially run hourly over the route, from Mansfield Woodhouse to Derby or Leicester via the Erewash Valley line (running through the site of what was proposed to be HS2's East Midlands Hub station), with an additional new station between Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Mansfield at Kings Mill (Figure 4). With the (previously) planned opening of HS2's eastern leg, frequency would increase to half-hourly.



Figure 3: Maid Marian Line, running from Pye Bridge Junction to Kirkby South Junction (Source: Google Earth)

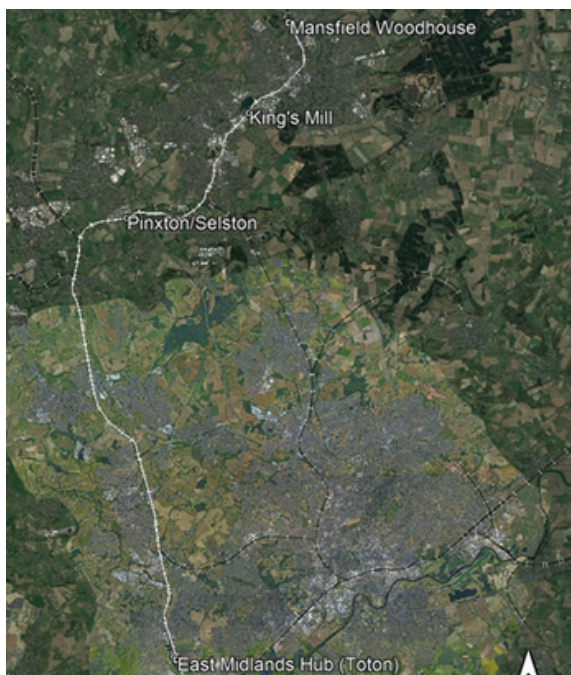


Figure 4 (left): Proposed Maid Marian Line service, linking Toton, Pinxton/Selston and Mansfield Woodhouse (Source: Google Earth/Enroute, based on Ashfield District Council) (2021b).

The reopening plan has received strong support from Ashfield MP Lee Anderson (Ball 2022). He has, however, criticised a previous proposal to phase the scheme with the new service launching before a station was added in Selston, arguing this would 'leave communities behind', and the lack of direct services from Pinxton/Selston to Nottingham (Topping 2020).

Ashfield District Council (2021a, 2021b) submitted a bid for funding through the RYR scheme. The proposal appears on the list of approved bids published in October 2020 (DfT 2021a). However, by 2022, it was reported in media outlets (Ball 2022, BBC 2022) that the DfT were not progressing the proposal through RYR; according to councillors, the Government were concerned about the high level of subsidy required to run services on the line.

Proposals are reportedly now being developed as part of the Toton Masterplan, with the East Midlands Development Company being awarded £2m over two years to develop the project (BBC 2022). Ashfield Independent councillors have argued that developing the project down this route could cause unnecessary delay (ibid).

The Maid Marian Line was mentioned in the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) (DfT 2021b) in connection to a hub station at Toton. Despite the cancellation of HS2's eastern leg through East Midlands Parkway, the IRP suggests a hub station in Toton should go ahead, though it expects 50% of funding to come from the private sector.

In 2023, a mention of the Maid Marian Line (spelled incorrectly as 'Maid Marion') appeared in the 'Network North' whitepaper (DfT 2023b), given as an example of a scheme that could be funded from a £1.5bn pot awarded to the incoming East Midlands City Region 'redirected' from HS2 funding. Despite this, neither the Integrated Rail Plan nor Network North contain any specific funding commitment for the scheme.



The Dukeries Line (Robin Hood Line Extension)

The reopening of part of the 'Dukeries Line' from Shirebrook to Ollerton, also referred to as the Robin Hood Line Extension, is being developed by Nottinghamshire County Council, which first commissioned a feasibility study into the scheme in 2009 (Silverwood 2021). The council has long been lobbying for funding for their proposal, which would see new stations at Warsop, Edwinstowe and Ollerton (Nottinghamshire County Council 2015). The proposal has strong support from local MP Mark Spencer (Silverwood 2021).



Figure 5: Dukeries Line (Robin Hood Line Extension) from Shirebrook to Ollerton (Source: Google Earth/Enroute)

Nottinghamshire County Council (2015) contributed £200k towards early development up to 2015, including Network Rail GRIP stages 1-3. In 2015, the Council reported that a further £1m was required for development, with no funding source identified as the Government were unwilling to make a financial contribution (ibid).

Media reports state that the scheme has been estimated to cost £40m (Silverwood 2021). It has been suggested the council could apply for funding through the Levelling Up Fund (ibid).

The scheme has been earmarked as 'Priority 1' by the Campaign for Better Transport. However, there is no submission to the RYR fund listed on the government's website (DfT 2021a). The line did appear on a map of potential schemes in a promotional video produced by the government, alongside the Maid Marian Line (DfT 2020). It is also mentioned in the Strategic Outline Business Case for the Maid Marian Line, suggesting potential synergies between the two schemes (Ashfield District Council 2021b).

The line was mentioned alongside the Maid Marian Line in the Integrated Rail Plan (DfT 2021b), but again with no specific announcement or funding commitment. Analysis by the Rail Industry Association (RIA) suggests a concerning lack of transparency over schemes listed within the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP), including the Robin Hood Line Extension, with significant uncertainty over whether the scheme is progressing and whether it will receive funding (Hakimian 2022).



Points of Comparison and STM's Analysis

In our early assessment of the 'CrossNotts' scheme (under STM), we noted some key points of comparison between the Northumberland Line and our own, which have been summarised and updated here:

- These are both heavy rail projects, involving Network Rail infrastructure.
- Both projects involve restoring passenger services to existing lines used by freight traffic, including building new railway stations.
- Both projects are located in deprived, formerly industrial areas near a major city.
- Both projects would benefit local communities in these areas by opening up employment and leisure opportunities in their respective major cities. The major cities would also act as gateways between the communities served and the wider rail network.
- The successful proposal to reopen the Northumberland Line, and existing proposals to reopen the Maid Marian & Dukeries Lines, have been led by local councils.
- The Northumberland Line project was part-funded by the Department for Transport through the RYR fund. Proposals to reopen the Maid Marian & Dukeries Lines theoretically fall under the criteria for consideration for this funding pot (a bid for the Maid Marian Line was submitted unsuccessfully - Ball 2022).

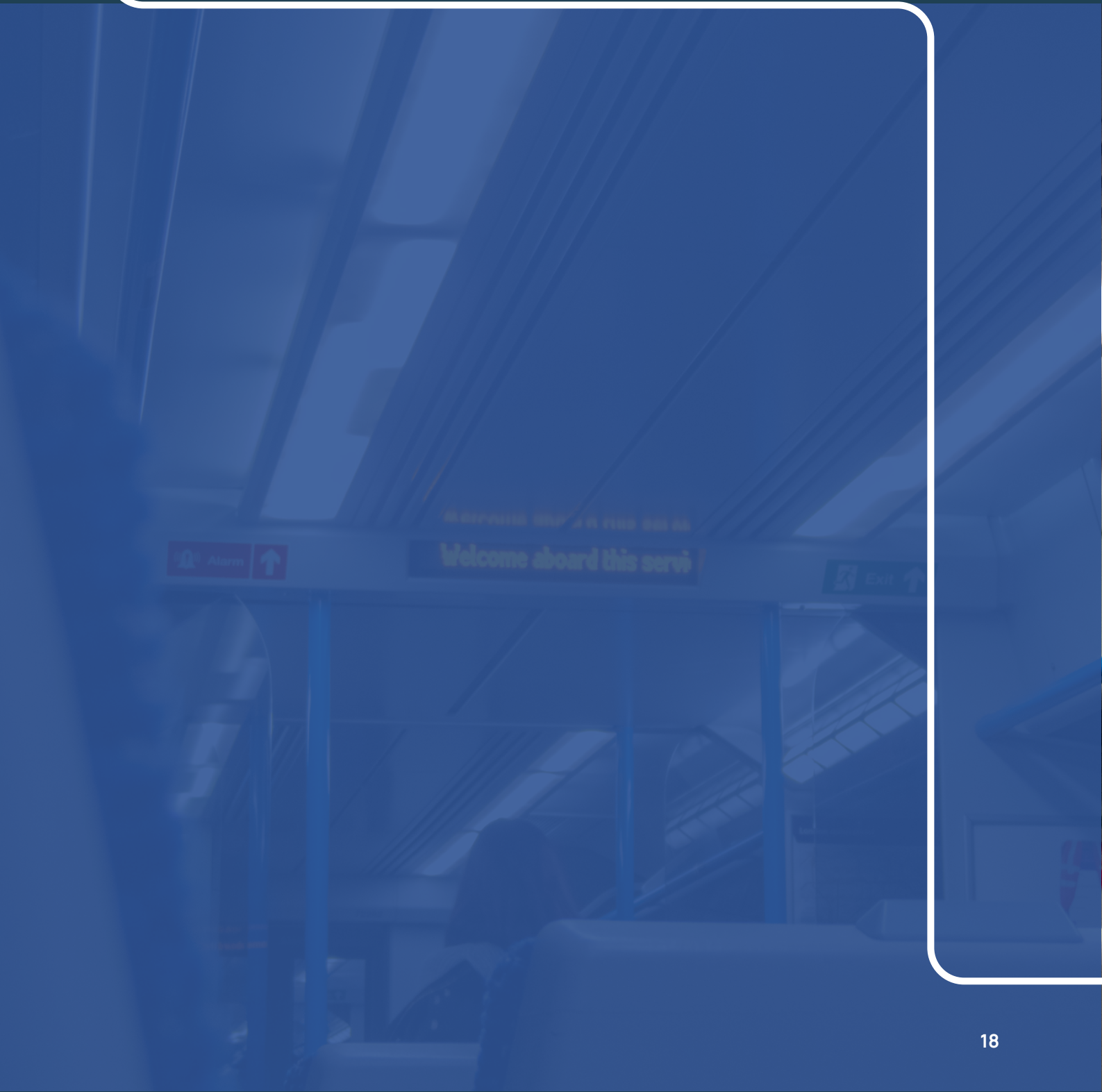
In our assessment of the 'CrossNotts' scheme, having reviewed the progress made on the reopening of the Maid Marian and Dukeries Lines, we noted that:

- The two lines are already earmarked for reopening, with their respective local councils having already funded multiple feasibility studies and lobbied for funding for over a decade.
- These schemes are already at a mature stage; the main barrier is now confirming government funding. Despite both schemes being mentioned in the IRP (DfT 2021b), suggesting government support, both schemes appear to be stuck in a cycle of re-assessment and re-announcement.
- Given the difficulty attracting funding, it is unlikely that STM would successfully convince the local councils to modify their plans to add new stations, or an extension eastward to the East Coast Main Line.
- The viability of this eastward extension to link up to the East Coast Main Line would likely be reliant on the delivery of HS2's eastern leg, which is not currently going ahead (DfT 2021b).

We therefore concluded that STM's potential role in developing 'CrossNotts', as we envisaged it, would be either duplicative or otherwise very limited. From a Project Development perspective, despite CrossNotts' potential merit as a scheme, it was therefore not viable or productive for STM to develop this proposal further. In repurposing this analysis, we now turn to some broader observations and critiques of the RYR scheme.



○ Analysis



Restoring Your Railway: Good policy meets good politics

“The name Dr Beeching evokes strong passions even 60 years after the publication of his first report, and the very fact that I do not have to mention the subject or the title of the report, simply his name, speaks to the special place our railways hold in the nation’s heart and the impact of the proposals that followed [...]. When people talk about what had been the signs of decline in a once-prosperous town, many local residents include in the list the words, “Then the station closed.” A rail service is often seen as a sign of literally being on track to better prospects. Hence the excitement when a long-lost service returns.”

Kevin Foster

MP, Conservative

(Hansard 2023)



Video: Restoring Your Railway (DfT 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jq3T7eAXfxM>

In his opening remarks in a parliamentary debate on the RYR fund in January 2023 (see Hansard), Foster contextualises RYR within an emotional history of towns across the country. In the discussions that followed, various MPs from across parties argued the case for 'reopening' projects in their home constituencies, some on the RYR list and others not; these projects were both framed as economic projects that would benefit their areas in the future, and emotional-political projects that sought to redress their areas' grievances about losing their rail service in the past.

“Connectivity is not just about the UK's great cities. To help communities across the country, we will restore many of the Beeching lines, reconnecting smaller towns such as Fleetwood and Willenhall that have suffered permanent disadvantage since they were removed from the rail network in the 1960s”

Conservatives 2019 Manifesto

The RYR scheme has been framed by the Government as a redress to the legacy of the Beeching cuts (Conservative Party 2019, DfT 2020). Although the scheme has been criticised on the basis that £500m is not enough to fully 'reverse the Beeching cuts' (Shropshire Star 2019), this is arguably a question of semantics; the government has never specifically claimed RYR will reopen every line closed under Beeching, and indeed some of the station projects that come under the scheme are entirely new (such as White Rose in West Yorkshire) (House of Commons 2023). The question of scale is an important one, as we turn to below.

It is important first to understand the political context and discourse of the scheme, which is subtly different to the primarily future-looking and sustainability lens with which [we \(STM/Enroute\) justify network expansion projects such as 'CrossNotts'](#), or the lenses used by the Campaign for Better Transport (see [report](#) - focusing on overall transport network coverage and mobility) or the Trades Union Congress (see [report](#) - focusing on both emissions reduction and employment).

A full discourse analysis of RYR and its associations with the Beeching cuts, the notion of 'left-behind' towns, Brexit, the 'Red Wall' and the 2019 General Election could be a major project of its own – perhaps the topic of an undergraduate dissertation! We will make a few observations here from our case studies, and from the parliamentary debate that took place in January 2023 (see Hansard).

It is no coincidence that many of RYR's most enthusiastic champions, from Lee Anderson of Ashfield and Ben Bradley of Mansfield to Jonathan Gullis and Jack Brereton of Stoke-on-Trent (MPs who STM may have contacted as key stakeholders in some of the projects we might have developed) are 'Red Waller' Conservative MPs, many of whom won their seats for the first time in December 2019.

The promise of bringing the railway back to communities, particularly ex-industrial communities such as Blyth & Ashington, who feel 'cut off' from the rail network and the wider economy, carries political currency. The RYR scheme has both allowed the Government to make a national-scale promise to these 'left-behind' towns and allowed individual MPs to use potential railway schemes as a means to champion their constituencies' past grievances and future ambitions (Hansard 2023).

In short, RYR is good politics. And, on paper, the object of expanding the railway to towns such as Fleetwood, Blyth, Ashington, Selston and Ollerton very much aligns with the policies Enroute ([see Our 2050 Vision](#)) and other pro-sustainable-transport organisations support. Therefore, it is no surprise that our own 'CrossNotts' proposal significantly overlaps with ongoing schemes and the wider RYR agenda. This only leaves the question: If Restoring Your Railway is both good politics and good policy, almost four years on from its announcement (more than the actual construction time of the Northumberland Line), where are all the new railways on the map in the DfT's 2020 promotional video?



So, why does it take so long to get anything done?

“The Restoring Your Railway scheme has noble aims of connecting long-neglected towns and villages to the railways and investing in local infrastructure. Indeed, successful bids can deliver real opportunities for locals. However, the scheme’s execution, just like that of the so-called levelling-up funding across our nation, has been a competitive, chaotic and careless mess. Sadly, the reality of the scheme is that it barely scratches the surface. I commend the principle of expanding our network, but the fund fails to tackle the major issues that affect UK rail. It lacks vision, coherence and a long-term plan.”

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese

MP, Labour (former Shadow Minister for Rail)

(Hansard 2023)

Dhese, as we do, draws a distinction between the ‘noble aims’ and the execution of RYR. In regard to the latter, to paraphrase, he highlights three issues which we elaborate on here:

- **Competitiveness/lack of vision:** The nature of the pot as one that councils or other groups have to compete for, rather than a top-down vision that awards funding to the areas that need it most, or a bottom-up approach that gives councils or other groups more certainty that well-developed proposals will gain funding from RYR.
- **Small budget/lack of long-term plan:** The fact that, as has been widely noted (Shropshire Star 2019), the initial £500m budget is only enough for ‘around 25 miles of track’, and that there is no long-term plan for allocating the funding required to actually deliver more than a small number of schemes that pass through the planning process.
- **Chaotic/careless execution:** Even when criteria are clear, government indecision over committing funding contributes to uncertainty and delay.

The Maid Marian Line and Robin Hood Line Extensions are archetypal candidates for reopening under the principles of RYR and the wider political context:

- They make use of mostly existing (freight-only) infrastructure and therefore can be delivered quickly and at low cost.
- They serve ‘left-behind’ communities that would benefit especially from reconnection to the network.
- They have the enthusiastic backing of local (Conservative) MPs.
- Their proposals align with the spirit of RYR and the broader political impetus to redress the grievances of ‘left-behind’ communities.


Despite this, and the clear synergies between them, the Maid Marian Line has failed to progress under RYR, even after initial selection for the scheme (Ball 2022, BBC 2022) (no submission to the RYR was ever made for the Robin Hood Line Extension). Four years on from RYR's launch, and many more years since the start of local efforts to reopen both lines, neither has any guaranteed funding or clear timescales for completion.

Despite promises that funding 'released' from cancelling sections of HS2 would be released for local schemes 'such as' the Maid Marian Line and the Robin Hood Line Extension - as referenced in the documentation for both the IRP and Network North (DfT 2021b, 2023b) - neither document allocates funding nor guarantees delivery for either scheme. In fact, the loss of the planned East Midlands Hub station in Toton (even if a Toton Hub is still built without HS2, which is uncertain) has arguably weakened the economic case for the Maid Marian Line, which Ashfield District Council (2021b) had based their proposal around.

The Northumberland Line (development of which, along with the other 'flagship' Dartmoor Line, predates the RYR scheme) has fared better, though its execution has also not been without issues. It is unclear why it took until March 2023 for the Government to make a full and final commitment to funding the scheme's delivery (DfT 2023a), despite previous strong signals of support; it is clear, however, that this indecision has contributed to construction delays; as noted, the opening of at least some stations will be delayed beyond Summer 2024 (Northumberland County Council 2024), if not potentially the entire line (Robinson 2024).

Clarity over the actual status of schemes such as the Maid Marian Line is not helped by conflation, whether accidental or deliberate, between development of a scheme through the planning process or actual delivery, whether by journalists, MPs or the Government itself. Such conflation lies at the heart of contention over the RYR's general promise to 'reverse the Beeching cuts' (Shropshire Star 2019). Ahead of the publication of the IRP, it the Sun reported that the plan would include both the Maid Marian Line and Robin Hood Line Extension (Cole 2021); the report (DfT 2021b) in reality mentioned both but did not commit to either. Following the publication of the IRP, in response to councillors questioning whether the schemes would go ahead, Councillor and MP Ben Bradley reportedly said he "understood that this guarantee had been made by the fact that these two regional projects were both named in the report" (Smith 2021); two years on this has clearly proven not to be the case.

In January 2023, the Sun (Reilly 2023) reported that the government were considering reducing the £500m budget for the RYR scheme and redirecting funding to buses. This particular budget cut did not materialise; Rail Minister Huw Merriman reaffirmed the government's commitment to the scheme days later in Parliament (Hansard 2023). This did, however, tell us two things: firstly, it shows that in the previous three years, the £500m pot (already criticised for being too small) had not yet been all spent; secondly, despite the favourable political context from RYR, it remains vulnerable to potential budget cuts in the future.



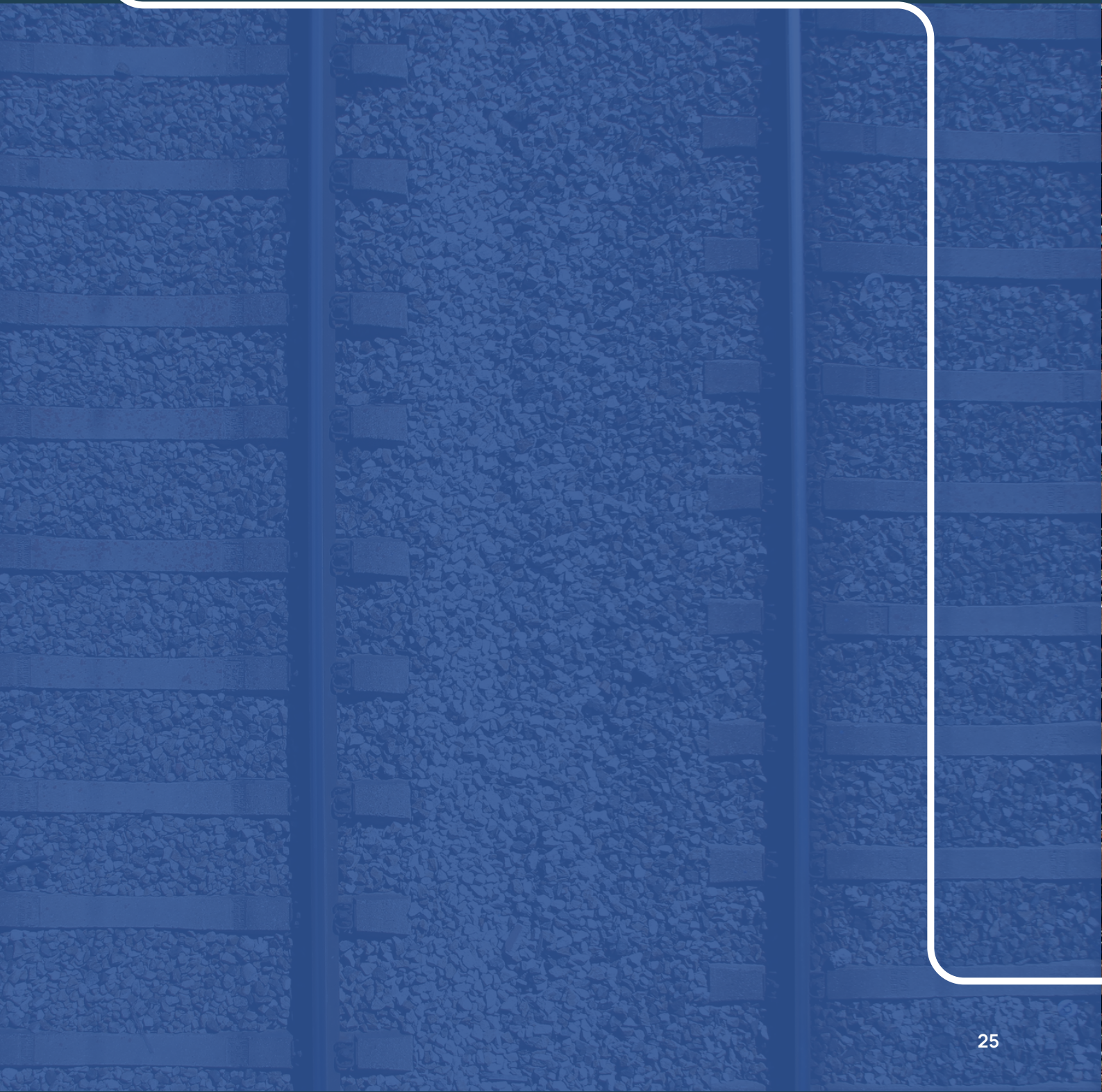
In addition to our analysis of RYR, it is also useful to note Fancett's (2019) critique of Network Rail's GRIP process, which stipulates the stages that line reopening projects involving Network Rail infrastructure (including all three lines analysed here) must go through. Fancett contends that Network Rail apply an 'internal project management' framework and mindset towards these projects even when led by an external partner (such as Northumberland County Council). Rather than the project lead being seen as a 'customer', with Network Rail the 'supplier', the onus is placed on the project lead to produce extensive documentation (in the form of Outline and Strategic Outline Business Cases), bear the costs for this and absorb the financial risk of any overrunning. The root causes of this, Fancett argues, are that Network Rail fundamentally do not view line reopening schemes as an opportunity to grow their business, and that they essentially have a monopoly over 'supplying' schemes that involve their infrastructure.

As such, in addition to the flaws we posit in RYR as a mechanism for providing funding for scheme development, we note the effect of the GRIP process on the complexity and cost of that development itself, adding a further barrier to the delivery of line reopening schemes.

We can therefore provide at least a partial answer as to why the dozens of schemes mapped in the DfT's (2020) promotional video have not yet appeared in real life:

- The initial promise of the RYR fund to 'reverse the Beeching cuts', and much of the wider discussion and media coverage of schemes since, conflate planning and delivery of these schemes.
- Schemes such as the Maid Marian Line and Robin Hood Line Extension, despite appearing to fulfil the technical and political criteria of the RYR fund and wider agenda, may still not pass the bidding process. Hopes for their delivery can be kept alive with suggestions that they may gain funding from other sources, such as the Integrated Rail Plan (Cole 2021), even if this does not materialise either.
- The case for the Maid Marian Line, partly based on synergies with HS2's eastern leg, has been damaged by the cancellation of the latter.
- Development of reopening schemes involving Network Rail infrastructure, including the Northumberland and Maid Marian Lines, and the Robin Hood Line Extension, is made more complex and expensive than necessary by the requirements of Network Rail's GRIP process (see Fancett 2019).
- Delivery of schemes such as the Northumberland Line can run into delays during construction.
- Even when it comes to schemes such as the Northumberland Line, when the Government signals strong support, indecision over committing funding can further contribute to delay.
- The £500m pot announced in January 2020 is small in size, is being released in small instalments, still has not been fully allocated or spent, and remains vulnerable to potential future cuts (Reilly 2023).

○ Conclusion



Conclusion

Enroute's predecessor organisation, STM, carried out some of the case-specific analysis presented here under our guise as a transport development and advocacy group. Although under our new model, we no longer envisage our role being the lead on further development of schemes such as 'CrossNotts', we believe our initial work here and our case study analysis of the Northumberland Line, Maid Marian Line and Robin Hood Line Extension provide some insight into the politics and the execution of 'Restoring Your Railway'.

We believe the economic and political case for delivering all three lines discussed here is self-evident, and that therefore the planning and appraisal process which has held up progress on the Northumberland Line, and seemingly blocked progress on the Maid Marian Line and Robin Hood Line Extension (including Network Rail's GRIP requirements), is too slow and too stringent. In line with other groups such as the Campaign for Better Transport (see [report](#)) and Trades Union Congress (see [report](#)), we believe expansion of the rail network to towns such as Blyth, Ashington, Selston and Ollerton, and [towns such as Daventry and Rushden](#), is an urgent project across the country, in order to facilitate sustainable modal shift, rebalance the economy and make the public transport network accessible and convenient for all.

We agree with Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi's comments (Hansard 2023) on the RYR scheme; whilst it is laudable in its aims, and has helped facilitate a much-needed conversation about expanding the railway and reconnecting 'left-behind' towns, it is fundamentally too small in size, and its execution has been far too slow and piecemeal to actually achieve those aims.

We believe RYR should be expanded and reformed, with the planning process significantly sped up, in order to create a system where local authorities and other groups can collaborate in developing schemes which synergise with each other and build up to a broader vision of a sustainable transport network for Great Britain, rather than a system in which individual schemes are forced to compete with each other for funding pots that are too small in size, released too slowly, and remain vulnerable to future cuts.

Enroute is grateful to Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENRUG, for his insight, comments and feedback.



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