David Frankal

Wednesday 16th December 2020

Rt Hn Grant Shapps MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

HS2 Eastern Leg

Dear Grant Shapps MP,   
 I am writing today to express my alarm at the recommendations from the National Infrastructure Commission suggesting an indefinite delay to the ‘Eastern Leg’ of HS2 Phase 2B between East Midlands Hub and Leeds. This project, connecting Birmingham, Nottingham, Derby, Sheffield, Chesterfield, Leeds and, by extension, York and Newcastle, is vital to improving connectivity between the Midlands and Yorkshire, along some of the most poorly served rail routes at present.

Many have criticised HS2 as a whole for only decreasing journey times along already well-served routes such as London to Birmingham and Manchester. Yet it is the Eastern Leg which truly delivers the most significant journey time benefits, not only to/from London but crucially between cities in the Midlands and the North (eg Birmingham – Leeds down from 1hr58 to 49min, Birmingham – Nottingham down from 1hr12 to 33min or Leicester – Leeds from 2hrs to 46min). Unlike the West Coast Mainline, which has already been extensively upgraded and electrified, the existing routes between these cities are some of the slowest in the country, which would be far better utilised to provide more local services to the smaller towns and villages they serve, which is precisely what HS2 will enable them to do.

Critics of the Eastern Leg, and of HS2 as a whole, repeatedly argue that “the money should be spent on upgrading the existing rail network instead”. As someone who myself has campaigned tirelessly for such upgrades (such as Platforms 15/16 at Manchester Piccadilly), I simply cannot see why this must be presented as an either-or question. The reality is that HS2 is needed to better connect these major cities, and existing rail routes (such as the Midland Mainline) *also* need upgrading and electrifying, in order to serve more frequent, faster and cleaner regional and commuter trains to local stations.

The North of England, especially the city of Leeds, has been left behind by successive governments, red and blue, for decades. HS2, under the current plan, would deliver the first major piece of public transport infrastructure to the city since the reign of Queen Victoria. It simply cannot be right that, after all these years, Leeds and the wider region should once again be left at the back of the queue for infrastructure investment. A government that is truly committed to investing in and “Levelling Up” the Midlands and the North would never allow this to happen. Neither cities across the Midlands and the North, nor urgently needed rail infrastructure projects, should be arbitrarily pitched against each other. HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and a wider and more ambitious transport package are all needed to level up the country – no city or region should be left behind.

I sincerely hope the government will remain committed to the promises it made earlier this year to deliver HS2 in full, and won’t let the people of the Midlands and the North down.

Yours sincerely,

David Frankal