

South Yorkshire MCA IRP Submission to Transport Select Committee

Introduction to South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) is a formal partnership of councils that shapes strategy and policy. Formed in 2014, the constituent members of the SYMCA are Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster Councils.

In May 2018, Dan Jarvis MP was elected as Mayor of the South Yorkshire and became Chair of the SYMCA, which works at a regional level to invest in delivering business growth, skills and economic development related projects, in addition to transport, housing, climate change, and the Mayor's wider policy agenda, alongside the South Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership which forms an integral part of the MCA.

Reason(s) for Submitting Evidence

Like many of the UK's city regions, South Yorkshire has the potential to significantly increase its economic productivity towards the levels seen in European counterparts. However, despite faster than expected economic growth in the last decade, South Yorkshire still falls below national and regional averages in terms of economic performance.

Without a step change in strategic transport investment, our objectives for inclusive and sustainable economic growth are at risk. We will also fail to achieve the higher value and more productive jobs and agglomeration benefits we are seeking to deliver in our region. Transport should be at the heart of improving access to opportunity for all our residents, driving transformation and creating a more vibrant and resilient city region.

Transport across the region is responsible for approximately 2,770 tCO₂e, equating to 39% of the total carbon footprint, which needs to be tackled to meet our net zero target. The decarbonisation of our transport network will also have the added benefit of significantly improving air quality and reducing nitrogen oxide gases.

In 2019, SYMCA published an Integrated Rail Plan (our Plan) for South Yorkshire (Appendix A), setting out a 25 year vision for how rail improvements can support the delivery of our Transport Strategy and the Mayor's Vision for Transport (Appendix B). It sets out how the region needs access to a properly planned high-speed rail network that is well connected to the conventional network and serving a wider spread of towns and cities to deliver agglomeration and growth.

Our Plan was a fundamental part of our submission to the National Infrastructure Commission when they were developing their Rail Needs Assessment (RNA) for the Midlands and the North on behalf of Government in 2020. This included a clear summary of what is needed for rail in South Yorkshire, showing how an integrated, sequenced approach to programming rail services and infrastructure improvements can deliver greater benefits, more quickly and support wider plans for sustainable economic development, jobs and skills. We have appended our RNA Prospectus to this submission for information (Appendix C).

Through our Plan, and our ongoing involvement in the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) project with Transport for the North (TfN), we hoped that the Government's Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) for the Midlands and the North would provide a clear and ambitious pipeline of improvements in rail connectivity that would support local, regional and national growth ambitions.

Not only was the IRP published with a significant delay from the original timetable, only a limited number of the interventions that SYMCA identified as key priorities in its RNA Prospectus are included in the IRP. This means that the IRP as published:

- Falls significantly short of what is needed for South Yorkshire to achieve the economic potential of the region, particularly on NPR
- Introduces continuing uncertainty for our businesses and communities, such as the proposal for further studies on HS2
- Undervalues the level of joint working that has been undertaken over 10 years between the SYMCA, its constituent councils, DfT, HS2 Ltd and TfN on the technical proposals and the growth strategies around the main stations for NPR and HS2.
- Misses one of the key points of our Plan – to show how major rail investment may benefit communities in areas of high transport poverty – by ignoring our plans for new stations in Barnsley Dearne Valley and Rotherham, which have had devolved funding allocated to them in anticipation
- Fails to acknowledge some of the wider network capacity issues, such as at Doncaster and Sheffield stations
- Overlooks some obvious ‘gaps’ in the network to form a coherent programme.

For these reasons, SYMCA is submitting this evidence to the Committee.

We have based our submission around the questions posed in the call for evidence, expanding on these issues with examples. Further detail on our IRP aspirations is also contained in our RNA Prospectus and HS2 and NPR Growth Strategy summary attached as appendices. However, we would wish to state at the outset that the lack of detailed analysis and evidence provided by Government to support the decisions made in the IRP hampers our ability to develop a comprehensive response.

The contribution that the IRP will make to rail capacity and connectivity for (a) passengers and (b) freight in (i) the Midlands and the North and (ii) the UK

The previous proposals for HS2 and NPR were intended to create a ‘step-change’ in the connectivity of South Yorkshire, and particularly Sheffield, to adjacent centres across the North as well as to the Midlands and London. The fact that both networks have been broken up within the IRP and only individual elements taken forward means that the IRP now has only limited plans to enhance capacity and connectivity in South Yorkshire.

The electrification of the Midland Mainline to Sheffield that was cancelled in 2017, and the plans to run HS2 services through to Sheffield with a journey time of 87 minutes, are both welcome. The plans for HS2 are broadly in line with the previous HS2 proposals for connecting South Yorkshire to the Midlands and London, albeit with a pared-back HS2 line and more conventional line running.

The re-stated commitment to improvements to the Hope Valley Line that have been awaiting implementation since 2017 is also welcome.

Potential future electrification of this line is mentioned in the IRP, as is the possibility of a third fast train from South Yorkshire to Manchester that the upgrade scheme will enable. However, these remain only proposals and there is no commitment to undertake them.

The refocusing of the core NPR network solely on the east-west axis between Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds means that South Yorkshire will have one of the largest disparities between the preferred NPR network supported by TfN and Northern Leaders, and that included within the IRP. Indeed, Sheffield and South Yorkshire have been effectively cut off from the NPR network,

after many years of engaging constructively in the development work by TfN, in conjunction with the DfT.

There is little mention of further improvements between Sheffield and Manchester, other than to identify potential barriers on the approach to Manchester but without any solutions proposed. This means that journey times will still be nearer to an hour than the aspirational 30 minutes. Furthermore, the planned NPR journey time improvements to Manchester Airport and Liverpool will also not be realised.

The NPR corridor between Sheffield and Hull, where journey times could be reduced to around 60 minutes, is not mentioned at all, despite this being a key route serving Doncaster.

Perhaps the most serious omission that affects South Yorkshire is the lack of commitment to improving high-speed connectivity between Sheffield and Leeds, despite the significant amount of scheme development work that has been undertaken in the last few years to develop a credible and deliverable preferred NPR option for this corridor. Instead, the IRP simply proposes a further study into how to enable HS2 trains to serve Leeds – this is a major step backwards and undermines our plans to improve connectivity between South and West Yorkshire, and onwards to York and Newcastle.

Just 30 miles apart, the cities of Sheffield and Leeds, along with their surrounding conurbations, have a combined population of around 1.4 million people and support 2 million jobs, making them together one of the three biggest regional economies in the UK outside London. Yet despite their proximity, the current rail journey between the two city centres takes around 40 minutes for the fastest trains – only one per hour – with most much slower. Bringing the collective assets, resources, institutions and skills of both Sheffield and Leeds closer together is essential to their continued growth as an economic engine.

The preferred NPR network included a series of interventions north of Sheffield including a connection to the HS2 line at Clayton Junction that would have enabled a 4 train per hour (tph) service between the two cities with a journey time of 24 minutes. Two new NPR stations on this line were identified to enhance regional connectivity for Rotherham and Barnsley Dearne Valley, and the proposals would also enhance connectivity to the North East and Scotland.

Given the IRP decision to curtail the Eastern Leg of HS2 at East Midlands Parkway, there is still a strong argument for implementing the improvements between Sheffield and South Kirkby Junction, including electrification, in the near term as these are not dependent on the approach to Leeds, and would speed up journeys for existing trains between Sheffield and Leeds. Furthermore, there is a case for extending the Midland Mainline electrification scheme through to the East Coast Main Line at Doncaster. This would provide a second electrified route between London and Yorkshire / North East, adding resilience into the network and accelerating the decarbonisation of the railway network.

This systematic, integrated and sequential approach to delivering much needed and long-awaited transformational enhancements to the rail network in South Yorkshire does not seem to have been a feature of the IRP and this undermines the aims and objectives that underpin it and the importance of an integrated plan for rail investment.

Whether and how the IRP will “level up” communities in the Midlands and the North

Our Plan set out what investment is needed on our rail network and how plans at a local, regional and national level need to be aligned in order to realise the Mayor’s Vision for Transport and to help deliver a transport system that works for everyone. The interventions that we identified were

critical to 'level up' South Yorkshire and achieve the wider objectives of our Strategic Economic Plan (Appendix D) and HS2/NPR Growth Strategy (Appendix E).

As noted above, the fragmentation of HS2 and NPR means that achieving these outcomes is not possible as the IRP stands, putting South Yorkshire at a relative disadvantage when it comes to connectivity with neighbouring cities in the Midlands and North and onward connections further afield, such as the South and South West, Wales and Scotland.

More importantly, the IRP could increase the disparity between some of the areas within South Yorkshire by omitting our proposals for two new stations in South Yorkshire – in the Dearne Valley to the east of Barnsley and at Rotherham on the mainline.

Both of these stations would provide access to regional and long-distance rail services to a far greater proportion of the South Yorkshire population, spreading the benefits of the investment and helping to support SYMCA's economic and housing growth plans. Initial analysis by TfN shows how Barnsley Dearne Valley and Rotherham stations can grow the rail market in South Yorkshire and both provided positive contributions to the NPR business case.

Indeed, a new station at Rotherham shows a positive revenue case and a high value for money even without the planned NPR and HS2 services. For the IRP not to recognise this clear benefit and seemingly move consideration of this enhancement into a longer-term study of HS2 services to Leeds runs contrary to the desire to 'level up' communities.

The omission also undervalues the complementary investment that devolved funding within South Yorkshire was seeking to align with the proposals. SYMCA included further work on the new mainline station at Rotherham in its recent City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement programme and Rotherham Council is seeking to purchase the required land as part of its agreed Towns Fund programme. Lack of recognition in the IRP of the new station puts this complementary investment, and the overall outcomes envisaged, at some risk.

The diagram below, reproduced from our Plan, shows how we envisaged HS2 and NPR and other rail investment working with locally led proposals to deliver the required outcomes. *(N.B. This diagram was developed in 2019 for our Integrated Rail Plan and some items are now superseded by the Government's IRP or other developments).*

How the IRP will affect rail infrastructure and services outside the Midlands & North

The proposed HS2 and NPR networks provided significant benefits for South Yorkshire in terms of onward connections to the North East and Scotland, bringing Newcastle within 95 minutes of Sheffield and Edinburgh just over two hours away, linking a series of advanced manufacturing hubs along the eastern spine of the UK. These benefits will now no longer be realised, reducing collaboration potential for our businesses in these fields.

The impact of the IRP on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) is also uncertain – one of the benefits for South Yorkshire of HS2 was the released capacity on the ECML and the potential to run additional services via Doncaster, enhancing connectivity to the east of our region. Without such released capacity, it is difficult to see how such benefits can be realised.

Indeed, this highlights another failing of the IRP – that it sometimes fails to recognise the knock-on effects of the recommendations. The recent Continuous Strategic Modular Planning (CMSP) work undertaken by Network Rail at Doncaster highlights a number of capacity constraints with future demand. The timing and nature of the required interventions was, to some extent, dependent on the opening of HS2 Phase 2b. The IRP fails to recognise that without HS2, enhancements at Doncaster will be needed sooner than previously anticipated.

Enhancements at Doncaster (and electrification from Sheffield to Doncaster) may actually offset the lack of HS2/NPR services to the North East and Scotland, but without a recognition that improvements are needed at Doncaster, the IRP seems to miss both this impact and the opportunity.

The challenges to central Government, Great British Railways, regional and local authorities, transport bodies and other stakeholders in delivering the IRP

The IRP was intended to herald a long-term pipeline that would allow businesses to invest in the skills needed to deliver the enhancements. The rail sector is an important element of the South Yorkshire economy. For example, between 3,400 and 5,910 people are employed in the rail industry in Doncaster, the higher figure representing 4.2% of total employment in the town, generating around £898 million of economic output. The town has already seen considerable investment in its rail cluster and the presence of assets including the National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure. The further uncertainty created by the IRP does not necessarily support the plans to grow the skills base with any degree of certainty.

The reversal of the previous devolution of responsibility with the transfer of NPR client role from TfN as co-client to DfT as sole client, means that there is a consequent reduction in political accountability and input from Partners in the North. This seems at odds with the devolution of transport funding and responsibility through the SYMCA and results in an even more fragmented governance arrangement that does not bode well for efficient delivery and can cause a misalignment of funding and planning priorities, as well as accountability.

For example, it is not clear what the impact of the IRP will be on the collaborative growth strategies that have been developed around the main station locations, such as the one for South Yorkshire attached for information. The Sheffield Midland Station and Sheaf Valley Development Framework, part of our HS2 Growth Strategy, sets out an integrated plan for the long-term regeneration of the station and the surrounding area.

Modelling suggests increases in development areas in the vicinity of the station over and above the baseline of 186,060 sq. m of commercial space, 1,220 residential units and 4,440 sq. m of retail units. The delivery of the Framework is intrinsically linked to the future growth of Sheffield, yet the IRP induces more uncertainty for the public and private sector.

The disruption involved in upgrading existing railway lines will be very significant, compared to the creation of new segregated infrastructure. The period of disruption has been noted in reports to be up to 15 years in duration. Nowhere have we seen the cost in productivity and GVA loss factored into decisions on IRP projects and the impact of decarbonisation ambitions of forcing many millions of passengers into road vehicles has been completely disregarded.

How the rail schemes in the IRP will integrate and interact with HS2

The reduction in the HS2 network in South Yorkshire means that there is very little interaction between the 'new' HS2 network and the IRP schemes that affect the region.

We do not believe that the IRP integrates very well at all with our local and regional aspirations and seems to create a greater divide between the remains of the HS2 and NPR networks than previously when all parties were working together to provide a truly integrated solution.

We note that the IRP states that the line of route of HS2 Phase 2b should be safeguarded until further work is done on how to serve Leeds using HS2 services, which continues to create blight and uncertainty for some of our communities. This serves to emphasise the need to conclude this study as soon as possible, building on much of the work done to date rather than a lengthy re-evaluation that would simply extend this uncertainty. It is important that this study is commenced as soon as possible, yet two months after the IRP was published, we have yet to see the scope or hear anything from DfT about it. Given how long the IRP was delayed, we would have expected the scope for this study to already be drafted and ready to commence.

How the rail improvement schemes in the IRP were selected, and whether those selections represent equity between and within regions

The lack of suitable and robust supporting evidence for the IRP makes it difficult to answer this question.

We are aware of the political importance of equity between and within regions as fundamental to the aims of the Levelling Up agenda. However, our understanding was that the IRP would examine and determine the right schemes to marry local, regional and national needs and set out a clear pipeline that would help the industry deliver in an efficient manner and also allow local and combined authorities to develop their economic and spatial plans in a complementary way and prioritise local investment accordingly. As we have tried to demonstrate in this submission, the IRP as it stands fails to achieve this.

Whether the IRP represents value for money for UK taxpayers

Again, without more detailed evidence and assessment, it is not possible to answer this question. However, drawing on the previous response regarding a lack of efficiency and co-ordination in complementary investment, including the private sector, the ability of the IRP to represent value for money and maximise economic outcomes must be in question.

The abandoning of the full NPR and HS2 network does not recognise the £millions that have been spent so far on the development of that network by DfT, HS2 Ltd and TfN, including substantial value for money and cost saving exercises. That investment now seems to have been wasted and the full benefits to the North and Midlands will not be realised.

Appendices

Appendix A – Link to South Yorkshire Integrated Rail Plan - https://southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/Explore_Transport

Appendix B – Link to Mayor’s Vision for Transport - https://southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/Explore_Transport

Appendix C – SYMCA Rail Needs Assessment Prospectus

Appendix D – Link to Strategic Economic Plan - <https://southyorkshire-ca.gov.uk/explore/policy>

Appendix E – SYMCA HS2 and NPR Strategy for Growth Summary