

Rt Hon John Healey MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

22 July 2021

Dear Secretary of State

I write to follow up the meeting we had in April with Ed Miliband, Andrew Stephenson and Nick Bisson. Thank you for taking the time to meet us and talk through our concerns directly.

We discussed the “phased approach” for the eastern leg proposed by the National Infrastructure Commission’s rail needs assessment report, delivering the West Midlands to East Midlands section first. Andrew said this would give Government the opportunity to publish the delayed Integrated Rail Plan and would offer more flexibility to revisit the line of the route to Leeds, including establishing whether the current route remains the right one.

As Nick Bisson said, the cost of HS2 has increased so we should look at whether it is still the right option or whether upgrading existing infrastructure would provide similar or better benefits for the north.

Three months on from our meeting the HS2 chief executive Mark Thurston said this week that work on the eastern leg had halted, and they were waiting for advice from DfT.

South Yorkshire communities are already grappling with HS2 blight and uncertainty. It is vital the IRP is published as soon as possible, and the Government makes clear its plans for improving rail connectivity in the north and its commitment to funding.

The NIC report finds that a package of regional improvements – rather than the eastern leg – would result in more rail capacity on the routes that people need, giving greater productivity benefits to the economy and faster journeys for travellers. This was a point that Ed Miliband and I made to you and the HS2 Minister in our meeting.

I have supported the principle of HS2, based on its promise not only to connect London to the North but to connect communities, reduce inequality and grow local economies. It is an opportunity to invigorate the South Yorkshire region, raise productivity, better connect us and allow the region to share in the prosperity that the project can bring.

But this opportunity will not be realised with the M18 route. It is a badly thought-out compromise that will have a heavy impact on local constituents, who face years of disruption for no share in the promised benefits. It would leave us in the worst of all worlds, with the mainline HS2 running right through South Yorkshire without stopping.

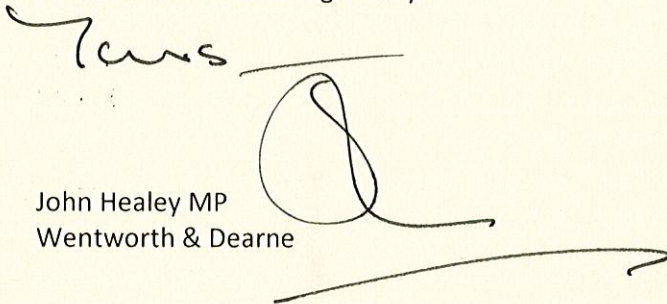
The original Sheffield Meadowhall route is far superior: with faster journey times, better prospects for regeneration and jobs, excellent connectivity and more capacity. This view is shared by Rotherham and Doncaster councils.

There should be new, post-covid remodelling of the business case and passenger demand for high speed rail, and any further consideration must be an open process drawing on local expertise and the views of South Yorkshire councils and community groups. All route options should be on the table but if South Yorkshire is to get any benefit in return for the disruption we may face we need a mainline HS2 station.

Regional rail improvements are vital and must not be a casualty of HS2 and its spiralling costs. I am keen that South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire do not simply get abandoned by the IRP – so any commitments to upgrade must include the East Coast, not just Midland Mainline.

This is the last day before the summer recess, and it is disappointing to read about the 'halt' to HS2 Phase 2b in the media, instead of Ministers coming to Parliament before now to level with the public about the Government's plans for their communities.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Healey', is written over a horizontal line. Below the line, there is a large, stylized circular flourish or scribble.

John Healey MP
Wentworth & Dearne

ⁱ [Department for Transport orders halt to work on the North East section of HS2 high speed rail line - Chronicle Live](#)