

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Prime Minister  
By Email

4 March 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

**Leeds City Station and land safeguarded and for future growth.**

We are writing to draw your urgent attention to the future of rail connections to and capacity within Leeds City Station - the North of England's busiest rail station – and the huge strategic risks that any hasty release of HS2 safeguarded land in Leeds would bring to securing the long-term economic potential of our railway for the North as a whole.

Plans to develop the station have been uncertain since the Government's decision to cancel the eastern leg of HS2 in 2021 and were put further at risk by your statements last autumn to accelerate the release of land safeguarded for HS2 delivery. Our concerns were further heightened by the *Network North* document published at that time which, whilst including welcome commitments to the West Yorkshire mass transit and Bradford station schemes, did not include any commitments to Leeds City Station.

Nonetheless, we had been led to believe that the Government shared our ambition to secure the right solution for Leeds and that this would be provided by thorough a robust evidence-led study of rail connectivity between the Midlands, Yorkshire and the North East ("the MYNE study"). This was required by the Transport Select Committee and committed to by the Rail Minister. However, we now understand that a decision to release HS2 safeguarded land, that could provide new south-facing platforms and onward rail connections, is to be taken imminently, before the MYNE study has even commenced.

Leeds City Station is the busiest and most congested rail station in the North of England. Sitting at the centre of the rail network, which connects Liverpool, Manchester, York, Hull, Sheffield, Newcastle, Birmingham, and Edinburgh. As such, the station provides the same national hub role on the east of the Pennines as Manchester Piccadilly does to the west.

It is also at the most important hub for the West Yorkshire economy. Services into Leeds from Bradford, Kirklees, Wakefield, and Calderdale have shaped our modern economic footprint. Towns such as Ilkley, Halifax and Hebden Bridge, alongside places such as Harrogate beyond our boundaries, now providing some of the greatest concentration of higher skilled communities due to their rail connections.

Collectively, Leeds City Station and its connections provide perhaps the greatest single example of how transport connectivity to our Northern cities can genuinely unlock economic agglomeration and transformation. The city of Leeds continues to grow, with an average of 3,000 new homes delivered annually, population growth higher than the national average, and GVA projected to increase by £12.9 billion by 2040. To support this growth, Leeds rail station must expand, with passenger numbers forecast to exceed 43 million users within the next twenty years alone.

Hence, it was a major surprise that commitment to increase the capacity at the station was not part of the *Network North* plans. The station's potential to secure further economic benefit is currently constrained. A third of delays on the rail network in the North can be found here, and 50% of passengers travelling through the station have their trains delayed or cancelled. This situation will worsen if improvements are made elsewhere on the railway without addressing the Leeds hub properly.

However, the land is safeguarded by HS2 Ltd only until this Summer. We understand that a decision is in front of you to not extend this safeguarding, well ahead of the MYNE study work that is required. We are aware of some hasty work within government, with some headlines from which DfT officials only very recently revealed to our officials. That work falls well short of the study commitments that have been made and would bring strategic risks for West Yorkshire and the North for the remainder of this century.

Therefore, we have to implore you in the strongest terms to instruct HS2 Ltd to extend the safeguarding on the corridor between Clayton Junction and Leeds City Station for a period to allow the MYNE study to be completed. We would be grateful if you could confirm this decision at the earliest possible opportunity and would ask that you discuss with us if you are not in agreement with safeguarding the land.

We and our officials remain committed to working with you and your officials, to determine the parcels of land which needs to remain safeguarded, so not to delay disposal of land that is no longer required. We can work co-operatively on this matter to ensure the residents of Leeds, the commuters of West Yorkshire, and passengers across the North have the appropriate transport infrastructure to reach our full potential.

Yours sincerely



**Tracy Brabin**  
Mayor of West Yorkshire



**Councillor James Lewis**  
Leader of Leeds City Council

CC Rt Hon Mark Harper, Secretary of State for Transport