

Call for HS2's Eastern Leg to be Delivered in Full



A group of 53 MPs, civic and business leaders from across the Midlands and the North have written to Boris Johnson calling for the full delivery of HS2's Eastern leg from Birmingham to Leeds. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the cross-party group cites a new report which demonstrates stark social and economic inequalities between the Eastern and Western regions of the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine.

The letter which references "Mind the gap: The role of HS2's Eastern leg in bridging England's east-west divide", a document authored by campaign group HS2 East, states: "For generations the people living in these areas have been overlooked." The letter highlights that communities surrounding the Eastern leg of HS2 Phase 2b suffer from lower productivity, poorer social mobility and receive lower levels of transport investment than communities surrounding its Western leg, set to run between Birmingham and Manchester. In fact, the disparity between the two sides of the country shows that productivity along the Eastern Leg of HS2 Phase 2b is 10% lower than along its Western Leg. However the letter states it does "not wish to create divisions with the regions on the Western leg" and highlights that the delivery of HS2 "has a significant role [to play] in this country's recovery from Covid-19".

Signatories state that HS2's Eastern leg is an essential investment to address these inequalities, which will catalyse huge regeneration schemes across the East Midlands, Yorkshire and North East, creating over 150,000 highly-skilled jobs.

Writing ahead of the Government's Integrated Rail Plan, which is examining how best to integrate Phase 2b of HS2 with Midlands Engine Rail and Northern Powerhouse Rail, the leaders are clear that all HS2 phases must be delivered in full, with both the Eastern and Western Legs built to the same time scale.

Hilary Benn, MP for Leeds Central, said: "We know that the full economic potential of the North is not being tapped and that children who grow up poor in the eastern regions of the Midlands and the North are more likely to stay poor and less likely to achieve social mobility. We need to do something about this, and investment in HS2's eastern leg will help to create jobs, unlock regeneration and increase productivity that our communities need if these divisions are to be reduced."

Henri Murison, director of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, said: “Unless HS2 is delivered in full to both Manchester and Leeds, and integrated with Northern Powerhouse Rail, the North will never see the economic transformation it needs and deserves and the Northern Powerhouse will remain a pipe dream.

“If we are truly to level up the UK and create a country where young people have the same prospects wherever they come from, HS2 will have a major role to play. The Prime Minister guaranteed in February that HS2 would be delivered in full; Northern businesses and communities will not look kindly on any wavering on that commitment.”