

Rail link backed by transport experts

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Building a high-speed line between London and Yorkshire would "offer the best return for investment", a powerful consortium of transport officials have concluded.

The teams behind transport management in South and West Yorkshire are working on a strategy for persuading the Government to fund a new 200mph line from the capital to the region ahead of alternative plans to build it along the West Coast.

That work will form part of a concerted lobbying effort of key Government advisers and Ministers by leaders in the region, where the Yorkshire Post has launched its Fast Track to Yorkshire campaign calling for the new line.

Ministers have announced that a high-speed rail line will be built from London to Birmingham, which will then be extended north. While that route will likely see it go via Manchester, the Yorkshire Post is also calling for a line via Sheffield and Leeds in order to prevent Yorkshire being blighted by second-class transport for a generation.

South Yorkshire Integrated Transport Authority (SYITA) and West Yorkshire's transport commissioners, Metro, have hired consultancy firm Arup to build the case proving the benefits a high-speed line would bring to Yorkshire's economy.

It will also draw up options for the route of a new line, which will probably involve the creation of new stations in the two cities to serve double-decker high-speed trains that can then run directly onto the Continent.

In Sheffield that could be in Attercliffe, Tinsley or Meadowhall, passengers being transported into the city centre on bus or Supertram. One option that has been discussed for Leeds – though not by Metro – is a new station on land directly to the south-west of the existing main line station.

That could then herald a move for the bus station away from its current site in the east of the city centre to create a new integrated transport hub for Leeds.

Metro director general Kieran Preston said: "A network capable of serving Leeds and other key cities would be capable of stimulating economies to achieve growth, recovery, regeneration and wide productivity benefits."

Arup will report back to SYITA and Metro by the end of June, who will then pass on its findings to Rail Minister Lord Adonis and Sir David Rowlands, chairman of High Speed 2, the quango set up to draw up the route for a new line.

In a briefing note to Yorkshire Minister Rosie Winterton ahead of a recent meeting she had with Sir David, SYITA said high-level analysis suggested there was a strong economic case for high-speed rail serving the region.

It would transform the regional economy by bringing businesses within an easy day's travel time to London and build on the successes of the financial services sector.

"We have started work to examine our belief that better connecting Yorkshire would offer the best return for high speed rail priority investment," it concludes.

The SYITA director of customer experience, David Young, said: "A high-speed line...at a stroke, would plug us into the economy of the capital and the European markets beyond. We cannot afford to be left behind."