TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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***promoting quality public transport*……….**

Transport Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

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Dear Committee Members,

Rail investment pipelines: ending boom and bust

1. TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views to this inquiry

a) What have been the barriers to establishing stable and transparent long-term investment pipelines in the past (such as for track enhancements, station upgrades, and rolling stock orders) and how can they be overcome?

2. Long term investment in rail has constantly been impeded by a lack of vision and an inability to capture the long term (20-40 years) value of such investment. Investment in rail transport always achieves positive results in environmental terms, vital in today's need for sustainability and conservation. To comment on specifics, a fundamental barrier for track enhancements, station upgrades, rolling stock as well as electrification has been high perceived costs and a falsely low value interpretation of benefits.

3. Rail has not been enthusiastically promoted as an environmentally friendly, low carbon alternative to cars and internal airline services. The overriding impression has always been an emphasis on rail's expense to the taxpayer rather than the radically enhanced contribution it could make to easing road congestion and giving a safer travelling environment for people. We are not convinced that the railways are fairly compared with road transport when the wider costs of road construction, policing, accidents, time lost in traffic delays and environmental impact are taken into account.

4. We do welcome the commitment to electrification of the whole Transpennine route together with infrastructure enhancements. However, an important Trans Pennine route - the Calder Valley line – is largely ignored. We strongly advocate the electrification of that line throughout. In the 2015 "Northern Sparks" report of the North of England Electrification Task Force, the Calder Valley was ranked as number 1 in terms of social and economic

return. It is regrettable that this worthy report has had very little success in terms of progress with electrification schemes. It should be revisited.

b) What funding sources need to be drawn on to plan such pipelines and is an appropriate framework in place for the allocation of funding to different projects?

5. Government is the primary source. We have concerns about the commitment of the present government to transport infrastructure spending. These include the Old Oak Comon – Euston link and, in our part of the country, several schemes listed as part of the previous government's Network North package of transport upgrades, which were to be funded by the regrettable scrapping of phase 2a and 2b of HS2. Examples are the Castlefield bottleneck, electrification schemes such as the Oxenholme – Windermere line.and others.

c) How could a potential pipeline provide transparency and certainty for industry? For example:

i. what time period should it cover?

ii. what level of project specification should it include?

iii. what commitments from Government should it include in both the short and long-term?

iv. what budgets and sources of public funding should it encompass?

v. how should it engage private investment?

6. A potential pipeline should cover at least 30 years, given the long term nature of rail investment. Timescales are for far too long in the implementation of investment schemes e.g. TransPennine Route Upgrade, Northern Powerhouse Rail, electrification schemes.

7. Government commitment is vital, particularly for long term schemes. The budgets for investment schemes should take full account of all benefits especially those relating to health (pollution) and environmental including climate change. The role of private investment may be tempered by long term payback on schemes not well suited to many business ventures.

d) What role should the industry play in the development of this pipeline and how should Government engage with industry in its delivery?

8. A strategic, co-ordinated approach is essential. We trust that Great British Railways will play a major role in this. We have already referred to the essential role of government.

e) What role would a long-term rail investment pipeline play in developing the railway supply workforce?

9. Proper resource planning including human and material resources is essential.

f) How should a pipeline interact with the Government’s development of a wider long term rail strategy, rolling stock strategy, infrastructure strategy, and the Invest 35 industrial strategy?

10. A long term rail strategy has been sadly lacking from government policy for a long time. Now is the opportunity to redress this.

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John Moorhouse
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