

Grayling pledges key HS2 strategy document in March

GOVERNMENT needs to press ahead with High Speed 2, Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling told his party conference in Birmingham on October 2.

Speaking at his first party conference since being appointed SoS by Prime Minister Theresa May in July, Grayling said that in March a strategy document will be published detailing plans regarding maximising growth from HS2, how journey times will be reduced, and how connectivity with local and regional trains will be improved.

Construction of HS2 should start next year once Royal Assent is granted - this is expected in early 2017. The process for ordering trains also begins next year, ahead of the opening of Phase 1 between



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London and Birmingham due in 2026.

Grayling (pictured) praised his party's schemes to build transport schemes that are "needed". A leading campaigner for Britain to leave the European Union, he told party delegates that investment in infrastructure and transport projects, such as airport expansion, will show that Britain "remains open for business".

On the subject of recent train orders, Grayling claimed that when the Conservatives took office in 2010 as part of the

coalition, Britain's biggest train manufacturing plant - Litchurch Lane in Derby - was "on its knees".

He spoke of his pride at announcing in August a £1 billion deal for 665 vehicles to be built by Bombardier at the site (RAIL 807). He also praised construction of the Class 345s at the site, which he described as "state of the art trains for Europe's biggest infrastructure project, Crossrail".

Grayling also lauded projects to modernise the existing rail network, which he said would result in "more space, more seats".

The unions came under attack from the Transport Secretary, with Grayling saying that they were standing in the way of modernisation of the UK's rail



network's need. He specifically named the RMT.

Grayling also denounced the Labour party's calls for renationalisation, calling the plans "dangerous". [@Clinnick1](#)

McDonald: "We'll put an end to Britain's rip-off railways"

Labour will "take back control of our railways", Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald told the Labour Party conference in Liverpool on September 25.

McDonald said passengers, not profit, should be at the heart of Britain's railway, telling delegates: "What we have now is a government clinging to a failed model for purely ideological reasons, and passengers and taxpayers are being made to pay an ever-increasing price."

"We are clear about this. We'll put an end to Britain's rip-off railways. So as private contracts expire, the routes will return to public ownership so profits can

be re-invested to improve services and hold fares down. Let us have the same confidence as other countries like the Netherlands, Germany and France."

McDonald said the UK's transport networks should form a genuinely integrated, high-quality, socially just, greener and cleaner transport system that brings together families and friends while meeting the needs of business.

He highlighted the situation on Southern, calling it "officially the country's worst rail service but a nice little earner for Go-Ahead Group". He claimed the owners "registered a £99 million profit while thousands of trains were

cancelled or delayed with the approval of Tory ministers".

Passengers suffered unbearable overcrowding, he said, with "parents having to say goodnight to their children by phone from a train carriage, and people losing their jobs, unable to arrive at work on time".

He added: "Is the company stripped of the contract? No, it gets the total support of the Government to hack away at services and jobs, and the benefit of £20m more taxpayers' money for good measure."

"They won't be stripped of the contract no matter how bad services get because the

Government is more interested in defending train companies than defending passengers, taxpayers and staff - and they have the nerve to describe us as ideological."

McDonald claimed East Coast showed what could be achieving, telling the conference: "We can have a successful railway run in the public sector. East Coast, placed in state ownership after the private operator walked away, delivered over £1 billion to the Treasury, kept fares down, had record passenger satisfaction, and engaged the workforce with unparalleled success before the line was re-privatised."

Preston-Blackpool electrification works under way

Work on electrification of the Preston-Blackpool North route began on October 3, with some late night and early morning services replaced by buses to enable overnight engineering to take place. The project is due to be completed by May 2018 as part of the £1 billion Northern Programme.

As well as installing overhead line equipment, seven miles of track will be replaced along with track layout and signalling improvements. Blackpool North and Kirkham and Wesham stations will be remodelled, with Network Rail claiming that the simplified layouts will allow trains to run more

efficiently. A series of weekend closures will also take place in 2017, although dates for these are yet to be confirmed.

On Tuesdays to Fridays buses will replace trains until the 0539 departure from Blackpool, while on Mondays to Thursdays buses will be in operation after the 2245 departure from Blackpool and the 2219 from Preston.

From October 4 until December 9, a bus will replace the 0521 Blackpool North-London Euston as far as Preston on Tuesdays to Fridays. Passengers will be able to join the 0600 Preston-Euston, which arrives in London at 0834

(the same time as the direct train). The return working - the 1633 to Blackpool North - will run direct to the resort.

NR Programme Manager Alison Rowley said: "We are working closely with Northern and Virgin Trains to minimise the disruption to passengers and raise awareness of these changes to morning and evening train services between Preston and Blackpool. There is never a good time to affect journeys, but we have planned the work to affect the least amount of passengers for the shortest amount of time. This is essential work."

"The upgrade and wider

investment will result in a better and more reliable railway that will serve passengers for many decades to come and help boost the economy across the north of England."

Northern Regional Director Sharon Keith added: "This essential upgrade of the route between Preston and Blackpool is key to helping us develop better journeys for our customers. Our advice is to remind customers to check before they travel."

■ Alliance Rail plans to run six return trains per day between Blackpool and London from 2018 using a fleet of new tilting trains.