



On the Right Track for Growth

A 2050 vision for the future of rail in Greater Manchester



BEE NETWORK

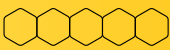


Transport for
Greater Manchester

GMCA

Greater
Manchester
Combined
Authority





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Foreword

Mayor of Greater Manchester and Transport Commissioner

Greater Manchester's rail network plays a vital role in supporting our communities, powering our economy, and opening doors to opportunity. It connects people to jobs, businesses to markets, and provides essential access to Manchester Airport—our international gateway. It moves freight sustainably, eases congestion, and drives regeneration across the city region.

Despite recent challenges, more people are choosing rail, but planning and management have too often been driven from the centre, overlooking local priorities and holding back progress.

That is now changing.

Rail reform and a stronger role for Mayoral Combined Authorities give us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape rail for Greater Manchester. With the creation of Great British Railways and a shift toward place-based planning, we can build a network that puts passengers and communities first.

This Greater Manchester Rail Vision, developed in partnership with GMCA, TfGM, the rail industry, and endorsed by the Greater Manchester Rail Board—sets out a bold and collaborative plan to deliver a modern, integrated, and zero-carbon rail system.

It commits to new trains, better stations, more frequent services, and seamless ticketing—connecting intercity, regional and local rail, Metrolink, and bus services through the Bee Network. It also unlocks new capacity for rail freight to support sustainable logistics and economic resilience.

We are determined to create a rail system that works for everyone, improving access, inclusion, and connectivity. That means expanding services to underserved areas, improving stations, and ensuring more people can reach jobs, education, and opportunities by rail. It also means strengthening connections to international gateways and supporting efficient freight movement across the North.

The level of ambition for the nation's railways must now match that of its city regions, with innovative new thinking to attract more passengers to rail and focus public subsidy where it delivers the greatest social benefit. Rail should be recognised as a key enabler of Central Government's missions—driving sustainable growth, productivity, and investment. Working in

harmony with integrated local transport, rail must offer affordable, reliable access to jobs, homes, education, and opportunities.

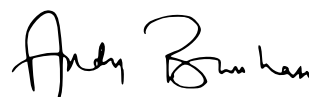
Greater Manchester is leading the way. As the first city region outside London to deliver bus franchising, home to the UK's largest light rail network, and with a rapidly expanding active travel system, we have laid the foundations for a fully integrated, safe, reliable, and efficient Bee Network. Integrating local rail is the missing piece of the jigsaw.

Our region is poised for further growth. Our £100 billion economy has grown by over 50% since 2000, yet productivity still lags 35% behind London. Closing that gap could add £13 billion to the national economy every year.

We are already seeing the benefits of greater local control and accountability. Metrolink ridership is at record levels, and bus patronage has increased by 5% since franchising began. Rail is the next frontier. That's why, working with Government and industry, we are integrating our core rail corridors into the Bee Network, simplifying fares, introducing pay-as-you-go ticketing, and driving regeneration around stations. The first lines will join in 2026, with 8 lines brought into the Bee Network by 2028, and full integration by 2030.

To fully unlock the benefits of rail for our people, businesses, and economy, we need a long term plan that unlocks generational growth. That is how we will deliver a system that works for Greater Manchester.

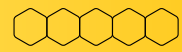
Nearly 200 years ago, Greater Manchester launched the world's first inter-city passenger railway. Today, we are ready to lead again—building a network fit for the next century of growth and creating a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life.



Andy Burnham
Mayor of Greater Manchester



Vernon Everitt
Transport Commissioner for Greater Manchester



Rail Industry Partners

The Greater Manchester Growth Led Rail Vision sets out a bold and collaborative approach to shaping the future of rail in a region of national and local significance. As one of the UK's largest economic and population centres outside London, Greater Manchester plays a vital role in supporting regional connectivity, productivity, and opportunity.

As industry partners, we are grateful to have been active partners in the development of this vision and the opportunity it presents to work together in delivering a rail network that is reliable, inclusive, and future-ready. It reflects our shared ambition to reform and improve the railway through long-term, place-based planning and deeper collaboration with devolved authorities.

Our approach—grounded in local priorities and aligned with wider strategic objectives—offers a clear pathway to improving everyday journeys, connecting more people to opportunity, and strengthening links across the North. The integration of national long distance rail, local services, and Metrolink into a single, joined-up network is a model for how rail can support thriving communities and inclusive economies.

The vision also recognises the critical role of rail freight in supporting economic resilience and decarbonisation. By enabling modal shift and expanding freight capacity, Greater Manchester is helping to deliver on national ambitions and reduce pressure on the road network. Addressing freight constraints in and around the city region will unlock wider benefits for supply chains, construction, and trade across the North and beyond.

This vision builds on a significant programme of work already underway. By 2028, Greater Manchester will have integrated much of its commuter rail network into the Bee Network, delivering contactless ticketing, simplified fares, upgraded stations, and improved accessibility. These changes are being delivered alongside wider industry commitments—from the Transpennine Route Upgrade and new rolling stock investment, to station enhancements and expanded freight capacity. Together, these interventions are laying the foundations for a more affordable, accessible and future-ready network that can support the next phase of growth.

We recognise that delivering the ambition of the scale of service set out in this vision will require infrastructure that is both strategic and transformational. As existing capacity in central Greater Manchester reaches its limits, we must explore and make the case for new approaches—such as underground connectivity and major station enhancements—that can support the next generation of growth. Addressing these constraints will not only benefit Greater Manchester, but also unlock wider connectivity and economic potential across the Northern Arc and neighbouring regions.

As partners, we remain committed to supporting Greater Manchester in taking this vision forward. Together, we will ensure that reform delivers a system that works for the people and places it serves—and contributes to a simpler, better railway for everyone in Britain.



Greater Manchester's Rail Industry Partners



Jake Kelly
Regional Managing Director, Network Rail



Tricia Williams
Managing Director, Northern Trains Ltd.



Chris Jackson
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Maggie Simpson OBE
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Director, Transport Focus

Executive Summary

On the right track for growth

A 2050 vision for the future of rail in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester is growing and becoming more productive

As the UK's fastest growing city region, Greater Manchester is emerging as a competitive and high-value economic powerhouse with a regional economy that is expanding at twice the national rate. However, decades of historical underinvestment mean that the productivity per worker in the region remains over 5% below the national average¹. Continuing the city region's impressive growth trajectory means embracing the locally-led strategic approach to development and investment that is driving positive impacts and ambitions in Greater Manchester and beyond.

Rail has a critical role in supporting growth

The rail network is an essential component of Greater Manchester's ongoing growth transformation. With heavy rail spanning 318km across the city region,² rail links residents to jobs, connects businesses with markets, supports new housing delivery, and provides critical international connectivity for both passengers and goods.

Our passengers and businesses are constrained by the realities of our rail network

Years of limited investment have left parts of our Victorian era rail infrastructure struggling to keep pace with the city region's growth. As a result, passengers often experience delays, congestion, and services that do not fully meet their needs. The absence of a single, integrated strategic plan for rail, combined with limited local powers and integrated place-based public transport decision making has made it difficult to resolve these challenges effectively.

Together, these factors have created constraints that prevent the network from fully supporting local, regional, and national ambitions. Tackling these issues through co-ordinated investment, governance reform, and long-term planning is essential to unlock the full potential of rail for Greater Manchester.

This is the right moment to be bold

While there has been limited rail investment in Greater Manchester, this has been piecemeal, addressing short-term pressures rather than long-term needs. To unlock the full potential of our city region, we need a coherent, forward-looking plan that secures the infrastructure and service improvements essential for growth. With Central Government committed to deeper devolution, we have a unique opportunity to shape a place-based rail model that reflects local priorities and drives prosperity across Greater Manchester and beyond. Now is the moment to build on momentum and set out a bold vision—one that makes rail central to Greater Manchester's future success and positions the region as a key driver of the UK's wider economic ambitions. Our vision is anchored by four pillars which articulate the outcomes we aspire to deliver.

Our Rail Vision pillars





Roadmap to 2050

Our long-term vision cannot be realised overnight. Our Roadmap to 2050, structured in three sequential phases, sets out how, by working in partnership, we will transform rail travel across Greater Manchester phase by phase. This vision is about more than major infrastructure projects; it is about fundamentally reshaping how rail is planned, delivered, and operated through a place-based model rooted in the new, integrated Bee Network.

Each phase is underpinned by a set of ‘key moves’ which, while not exhaustive, demonstrates the scale of ambition required to unlock the network’s full potential and secure Greater Manchester’s long-term growth.

The journey has begun: integrating rail with the Bee Network.

Rail integration is underway. We are working to enhance safety, reliability, and affordability, while delivering seamless connections across the Bee Network.



IMPROVE to 2030

After receiving its first integrated funding settlement as part of the 2025 spending review, and following the Trailblazer Devolution Deal of 2023, Greater Manchester has entered a new era. The city region can now plan and prioritise for its future in a joined-up manner to begin delivering on the early priorities and investments needed to progress our Rail Vision.

The first phase of our vision will focus on improving passenger experience by integrating rail into the Bee Network—delivering better performance, services, stations, and connectivity. This includes working in close partnership with the rail industry and the Department for Transport to establish a new place-based model for planning, specifying, managing, and delivering the rail network. This period will also see the opening of a new station at Golborne.

GROW to 2040

Moving into the next decade, Greater Manchester’s rail network will continue to accelerate its growth. This will include expanding our network by investing in new Metrolink and local rail infrastructure, including rolling stock and new stations, to provide better connectivity and improved frequency across our growing city region. Growth will be further supported by the recently completed Transpennine Route Upgrade, with further schemes such as the Liverpool-Manchester Railway in delivery and already unlocking development—including around an underground Piccadilly station, one of the highest-value regeneration opportunities in the country.

TRANSFORM to 2050

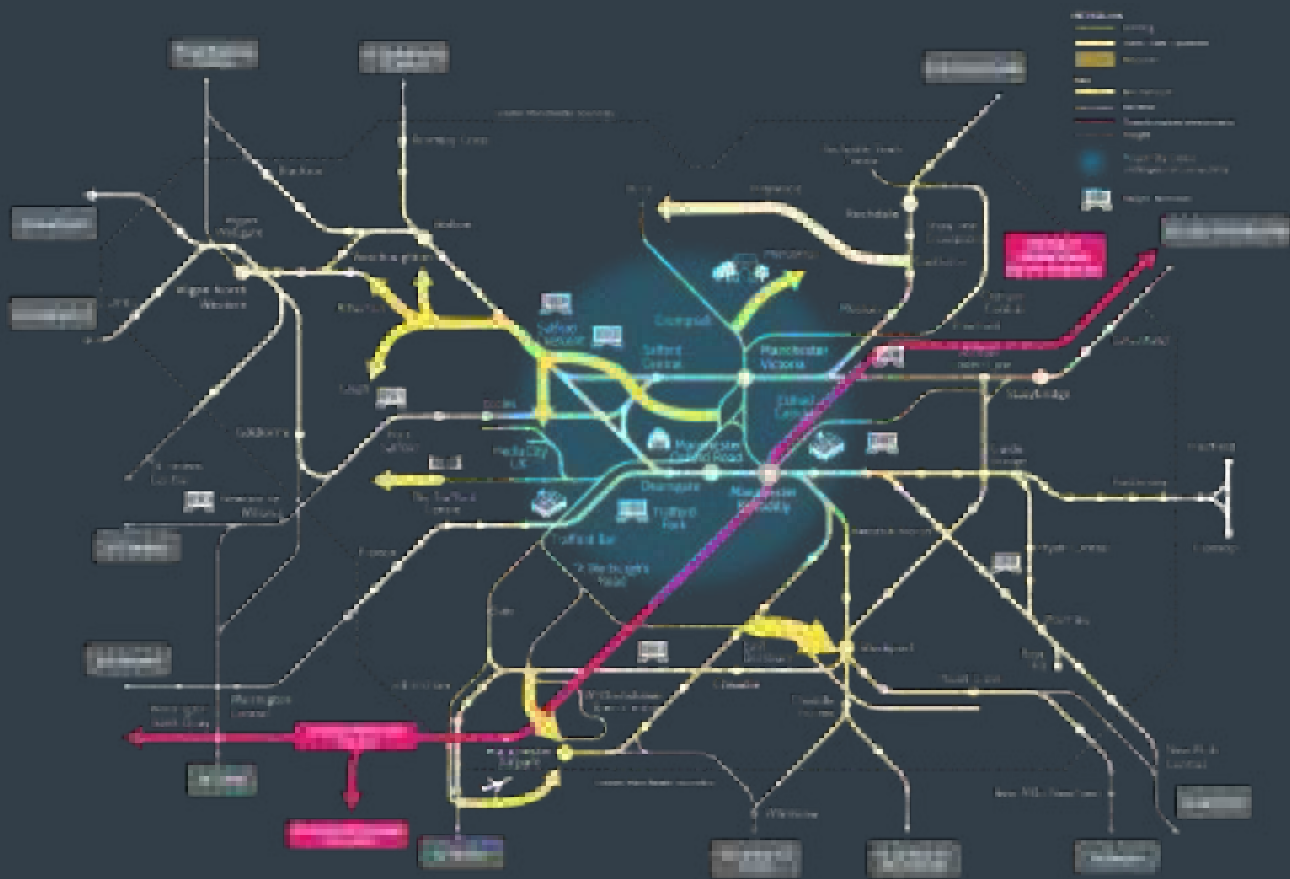
As we approach the middle of the century, the complete delivery of our Rail Vision will transform the way people and businesses move through and beyond Greater Manchester. This phase includes the completion of transformational national rail schemes, achieving carbon neutral across our network, significant rail freight expansion, and introducing underground connectivity through the city region. Together these investments will underpin the capacity, frequency, reliability, and quality of rail services necessary to support the next century of growth in Greater Manchester.

Going underground

The ‘key moves’ in our roadmap chart a path towards a generational transformation of rail, unlocking new capacity and connectivity by taking central Manchester’s network underground—**enabling the rail network and services we need to support the next century of growth.**



Our 2050 Vision Statement



By 2050, Greater Manchester’s rail network will be a cornerstone of the Bee Network and an ever-increasing driver of economic and housing growth. It will provide reliable, integrated, high-frequency, and high-capacity connectivity—locally, regionally, and nationally—supporting a greener, fairer, and more prosperous city region and beyond. The network will be shaped around the needs of people and places, with delivery and operations underpinned by greater local responsibility and accountability to ensure it maximises benefits for our communities and economy.

Greater Manchester

Connecting all ten boroughs through enhanced radial and orbital links, with seamless integration across public transport and active travel modes, and enabling more homes, jobs, and economic opportunities around our rail stations and Metrolink stops.

Our Nation

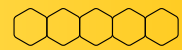
A network that is reliable, affordable, efficient, accessible, safe, and sustainable—backed by generational investments in nationally significant projects—to help support the Central Government’s mission for economic growth.

The North & Neighbours

Strengthening the frequency and reliability of services into the wider functional urban area. Working in collaboration with neighbouring authorities across the Northern Arc and beyond to enable and grow a borderless rail network to improve the economic flow of people, skills, and goods.

Freight

Supporting Greater Manchester’s freight sector in meeting the Central Government’s target of at least a 75% increase in rail freight by 2050 —helping to decarbonise the economy, improve air quality, and relieve congestion across the road network.



Realising our growth led rail vision

Delivering a common joint vision demands bold decisions, long-term commitment, and strong partnerships across government, industry, and local communities. It means adopting a place-based approach that puts people and businesses at the heart of planning and delivery, and securing the stability in funding needed to turn ambition into action. Our approach tackles challenges head-on through short-, medium-, and long-term action. At its core, the vision is simple: when you arrive at a station, you can expect a safe, reliable, frequent service—operating seven days a week, early until late, getting you to work, school, or a meeting with friends, and home again on time. For businesses, a commitment to deliver this common vision provides the confidence to invest in Greater Manchester and pursue new opportunities. A dependable rail system, integrated with wider investment in public transport, skills, and infrastructure, ensures access to talent and markets. It means businesses can grow knowing employees and customers can travel reliably.

Moving forward together

Greater Manchester stands at a pivotal moment. Our 2050 Rail Vision is more than a transport plan—it is a blueprint for inclusive growth, sustainability, and connectivity that will shape the future of our city region and the wider North. By integrating rail into the Bee Network, we will create a system that is reliable, affordable, and accessible for all, unlocking new opportunities for housing, jobs, and investment.

This transformation will not happen overnight. But with continuous commitment, collaboration, and investment from all levels of the government, we can deliver lasting change. Our Rail Vision is the vital starting point, identifying clear next steps to take delivery forward.

By 2050 we will have a rail network that is the backbone of growth for thousands of businesses and a cornerstone of daily life for millions of people—supporting Greater Manchester, the North, and the UK. The next steps are clear. We look forward to working together—the city region, the government, rail industry, and regional partners—so we can build a greener, fairer, and more prosperous future for today's communities and generations to come.

Outcomes of our Rail Vision



A growth led vision for rail

Greater Manchester is growing and becoming more productive

Greater Manchester is experiencing a period of remarkable growth, establishing itself as one of the UK's most high-potential regions. Since 2011, the population has increased by over 300,000 to reach 3 million residents—a growth rate that surpasses the national average and marks the city region's fastest expansion since the Victorian era.³

The regional economy is expanding twice as fast as the national rate and now contributes over £100bn Gross Value Added (GVA) per annum, making Greater Manchester the largest UK city region outside of London.⁴ In 2024 alone, its economy expanded by 2.1%—more than double the UK average.⁵

Notwithstanding recent growth, historical underinvestment in Greater Manchester has left a significant and persistent productivity gap, with productivity (GVA) per worker in the city region remaining over 5% below the national average.⁶ Poor connectivity is a particular issue hindering productivity. Nearly 2 million people living in the Manchester city region cannot reach their city centre within 30 minutes via public transport—costing more than £9bn in lost productivity.⁷

For example, Manchester Airport, the 3rd busiest airport in the UK and the principal international gateway outside of London, serves 31 million passengers and handles over 91,000 tonnes of goods annually.⁸ The airport has major plans for growth; with £1.3bn in investment underway, it is expected to contribute a further £6.3bn to the Northern economy by 2040.⁹ However, the airport remains underserved by rail and public transport with only 17% of passengers arriving by public transport, less than half the proportion at any of London's four largest airports.¹⁰ Without significant investment in public transport connectivity, the economic growth unlocked by Manchester Airport will be constrained.

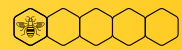
Ensuring good growth: a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life

Greater Manchester's position as the UK's fastest growing city region is aided by its autonomy in shaping strategic planning and investment to meet local needs. The recently published Greater Manchester Strategy¹¹ sets out the vision for a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life. This vision goes beyond economic expansion; it commits the city region to delivering a more holistic and responsible approach to development that is inclusive, sustainable, and balanced.

Progress is already underway, with transformative regeneration ongoing in Manchester city centre and across the city region including at Old Trafford and Stockport. Four new mayoral delivery vehicles (MDVs) have been proposed for Bolton, Ashton & Stalybridge, Atom Valley, and Leigh to drive forward development. The city region has also committed to delivering new housing and employment opportunities across six identified strategic growth locations.

Greater Manchester's strategic approach to growth and investment is driving positive impacts and





ambitions beyond its boundaries. Positioned at the geographic heart of the Northern Arc, stretching from Liverpool to Hull, the city region combines strengths in advanced manufacturing, digital industries, and life sciences, with international connectivity through Manchester Airport and the Manchester Ship Canal, making it uniquely placed to drive growth across the Arc.

 **£100bn**
annual GVA in Greater Manchester as part of
the national UK economy.¹⁶

 **6.6m**
tonnes of rail freight pass through Greater
Manchester each year.¹⁷



The role of rail in supporting good growth

Greater Manchester's population and economic growth has been supported by a substantial existing, largely Victorian, rail network. The network extends over 318km and 96 stations and facilitates the movement of 6.6 million tonnes of freight each year to and through the Greater Manchester area.¹²

With over 40 million annual passenger trips to Manchester's central stations,¹³ the rail network links people to jobs, connects businesses to markets, and supports concentrations of knowledge intensive jobs at high-value employment hubs. We know people want to be connected. Demand for homes near stations is strong, with a third of people in Greater Manchester willing to pay up to 10% more to live in an area with good transport links.¹⁴ Rail has unlocked major housing and regeneration schemes, while linking Greater Manchester to global markets through Manchester Airport, the Manchester Ship Canal, and the Trafford Park Freight Terminal.

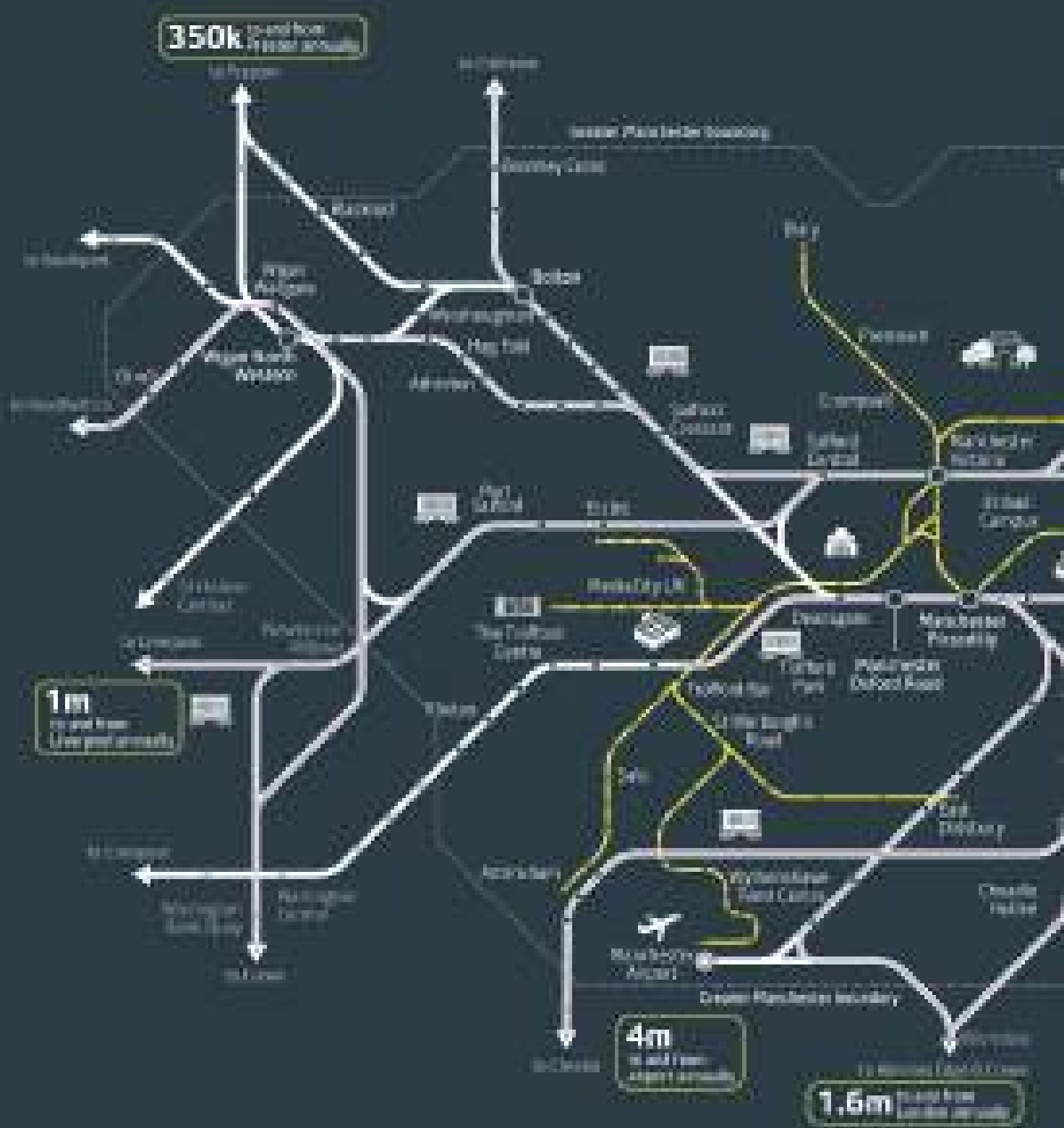
However, the current rail network is constrained and does not meet the needs of our customers today and our future aspirations. A modern, competitive, growing economy depends on high quality transport and delivering a greener, fairer, and more prosperous future for Greater Manchester will require transformative investment in rail.

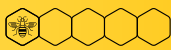
With the Northern Arc holding the potential to add a further £90bn to the UK economy by 2040,¹⁵ investing in Greater Manchester's rail network to support the broader pan-regional growth mission is not just a regional opportunity, but a national imperative.

What do we mean by the rail network in Greater Manchester?

This vision sets out our ambitions for Greater Manchester's intercity, regional, and local passenger services alongside rail freight. It also considers how Metrolink, including potential future light rail extensions and tram-train technology, can contribute to transforming the city region's rail network.

Rail plays an integral role in local and broader connectivity





Key facts and figures about today's Greater Manchester rail network



3rd highest number of weekday arrivals in the UK¹⁸



40 freight trains moving through Greater Manchester daily²¹



2/3 rail demand originating from outside of Greater Manchester²²



40m annual passenger trips to Manchester's central stations¹⁹



200 stations and stops across Greater Manchester²³

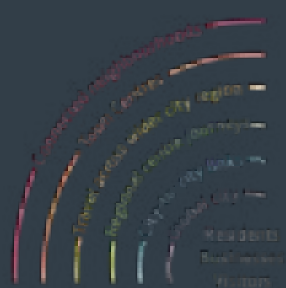


8 Metrolink lines extend through seven of Greater Manchester's local boroughs²⁰



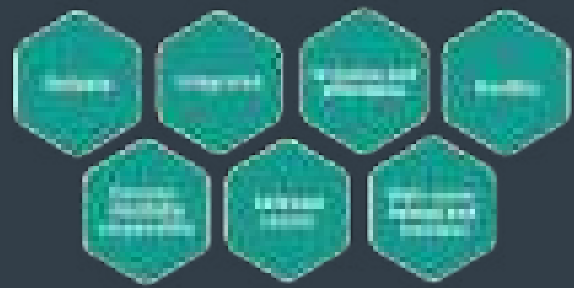
74m annual passenger entries and exits across the rail network²⁴

The Greater Manchester Transport Strategy sets out an ambitious future toward 2050



People & Places Approach

An ambitious, people-focused, and place-based approach to planning, operating, and maintaining the transport network, putting residents, businesses, and visitors at the heart of future investment and transformation.



Bee Network Ambitions

Seven network ambitions have been developed, centred around creating a world class, integrated transport system. These ambitions, at all times, guide our transport decisions—ensuring all policies, programmes, and schemes are aligned and working towards delivering consistent outcomes.



Right Mix Target

Improving our transport system so that, by 2040, 50% of all journeys will be made by public transport, supporting over 1 million extra journeys each day by walking, wheeling, cycling, or public transport.

A thriving city region where everyone can live a good life

Delivering Greater Manchester’s good growth objectives and the economic vision of the Northern Arc relies on a transport system that supports inclusive, sustainable, and far-reaching economic growth. Despite significant progress already being made, we know that transformational change is required across our transport network to meet and support our vision for the future of Greater Manchester.

The 2050 Transport Strategy, part of our Local Transport Plan, sets out a clear pathway for achieving Greater Manchester’s long-term ambitions. Supported by this Rail Vision, the strategy aligns investment in rail, road, and active travel with the broader goals of the Greater Manchester Strategy, to help create the conditions for growth.

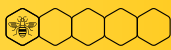
The role of rail in our Bee Network

The Bee Network is central to Greater Manchester’s ambition to drive inclusive, sustainable growth. As England’s first fully integrated, locally controlled public

transport system outside of London, the Bee Network brings together buses, trams, active travel routes, and local rail services, under a single, unified brand.

By bringing rail into the Bee Network, the city region has an ambition to grow patronage, drive efficiency, reduce costs, accelerate decarbonisation of transport, and deliver joined up services with integrated fares and easy-to-understand passenger information. The integration of rail into the Bee Network also aims to deliver modal shift, reduce carbon, and achieve carbon neutrality across its freight network. Investment will target overcrowding and deliver a better passenger experience, to offer a competitive alternative to road vehicles.





Our Rail Vision pillars

Four outcome-focused pillars anchor the development and delivery of our integrated Rail Vision for Greater Manchester. These pillars align with the ambitions of the Greater Manchester Strategy and the Greater Manchester Transport Strategy, to support inclusive prosperity and sustainable growth for those that live, work, and play in our city region.



Improving services across a growing network

Improving your ability to get from where you are to where you want to be. Providing access to more rapid, frequent, spacious, direct, and reliable services, which connect to every borough in Greater Manchester.

Create new high frequency rail and Metrolink services

Improve rail service reliability

Create a carbon neutral network



Quality stations to support growth in the heart of our communities

Stations and stops should act as anchors for new development, creating vibrant hubs that integrate high-quality commercial space within their surrounding communities. By planning spaces in and around stations to maximise regeneration opportunities, we can create places that support a growing population and economy, while promoting sustainable, healthy lifestyles, inclusivity, and expanded opportunities for all.



Ensure all stations are Bee Network standards ²⁵

Make all stations accessible

Enable new developments around railway



A seamless, safe, and accessible customer experience

Offering you a journey on our rail network that is safe, simple, comfortable, and accessible to all members of our community, no matter where you are travelling within Greater Manchester. Through the full integration of rail into the Bee Network, making the idea of travelling by rail a more attractive and reliable choice for more of our community.

Modernise trains

Next generation ticketing

Unify Bee Network experience



Strengthening our connections across the North, the UK, and internationally

Recognising that daily life, business, and the movement of goods extend well beyond Greater Manchester's borders, we are committed to working collaboratively with regional and national partners to plan and deliver the short-, medium-, and long-term investments that transform your ability to travel seamlessly beyond our city region.



Reduce intercity journey time

Improve connections to global gateways

Unlock rail freight capacity

The case for change

Each day our passengers and businesses are constrained by the realities of our rail network

Amidst the ongoing efforts of the rail industry to make the most of existing investments, delays, congested platforms, and inadequate services remain the unfortunate reality that our residents and visitors confront every day.

While approximately half a million people currently live within walking distance of a high frequency service, many people continue to choose not to travel by rail given the lack of reliability, affordability, and quality of the passenger experience. Currently, over 20% of passengers do not feel safe using our network,²⁶ and over half of our stations are not step-free.²⁷ Other areas of Greater Manchester remain unserved or underserved by the rail network with services that are infrequent and do not continue outside of peak hours.

A persistent investment gap

Over the decade to 2022/23, the North West of England saw £540 per person invested in transport each year; roughly half the amount spent on London.²⁸

This underinvestment manifests in very real ways. Central Manchester was identified as 'congested infrastructure' by Network Rail in 2019 but plans to deliver new platforms at Manchester Piccadilly and Oxford Road were never realised.²⁹ As a result, running new services across Greater Manchester, connecting, for example, Bolton and Stockport, remains impossible.

Poor governance hampers resolutions

A strategic plan for rail in Greater Manchester and across the North, one that is integrated with other Bee Network modes and supports our spatial strategy, would provide clarity for people and businesses.

However, the absence of that plan, alongside a lack of local powers and financial devolution, have meant many issues on our rail network remain unresolved.

The centralised planning, specification, and delivery of Greater Manchester's rail services does not appropriately take account of local ambition for the city region's places and economy. Too often, plans for the rail network are developed in isolation from

decisions about land use and local transport. The result is a disjointed strategy that limits the ability for rail investment to support local goals, drive patronage growth, and deliver economically sustainable services.

Critical infrastructure challenges remain

1. **Central Manchester's heavy rail network is full, causing delays and constraining growth**

Manchester Piccadilly, Victoria, and Oxford Road stations all have limited platform capacity and struggle to accommodate more trains. Several rail corridors are heavily congested, including the Castlefield Corridor, and South Manchester and Stockport—both operating at or above 90% of their capacity.³⁰

2. **Freight, local, and intercity passenger services fighting for the same track**

Unlike in London where many of the heavy rail lines are four tracks or more, our rail network is predominantly two tracks—limiting opportunities to effectively optimise its use for intercity, freight, and local services. As a result, frequencies are limited, and delays can spread across the network.

3. **Greater Manchester sits at the intersection of critical regional and national connectivity**

Capacity constraints through Manchester aren't just a regional issue; they have impacts across the North and the nation. For example, Sheffield lost its regular direct connection to Manchester Airport due to performance issues at Castlefield Corridor.³¹

4. **By mid-century, Metrolink in Central Manchester is unlikely to meet demand**

It is anticipated there will be insufficient capacity on a number of axes through central Manchester. This is caused by Metrolink trams needing to share space with other road users through the city centre and the limited capacity of the existing tram fleet.

Together, under-investment, poor governance, and critical infrastructure challenges mean the rail network in Greater Manchester is failing to meet our local, regional, and national needs—ultimately holding back growth.



Rail freight is delivering for a growing Greater Manchester — and must continue to do so

Greater Manchester's vision for growth, prosperity, and sustainability depends on a modern, efficient, and resilient rail freight network. Rail freight is not a background activity—it is a critical enabler of the city region's ambitions, supporting everything from new homes and infrastructure to the goods and services that underpin daily life.

The multiple ways rail freight is central to the Greater Manchester growth equation

Investment and growth = more construction = more demand for materials

As Greater Manchester invests in regeneration and new development, the demand for construction materials rises. Rail freight delivers aggregates, cement, and other bulk materials needed for new homes, offices, and civic infrastructure. Urban aggregate sites and terminals across the city region are vital to meeting this demand efficiently and sustainably.

Growing population = more waste = greater demand for efficient waste movement

A larger, more dynamic city region generates more waste. Rail freight enables the efficient, sustainable movement of waste from urban sites to processing and energy recovery facilities, reducing environmental impact and supporting a circular economy.

Thriving city = greater consumption = greater demand on supply chains

As Greater Manchester's population grows, so does the need for food, consumer goods, and raw materials. Rail freight keeps supermarket shelves stocked and supports the flow of goods into and out of the region. Intermodal terminals such as Trafford Park (existing), and ILP North and Port Salford (planned), are crucial for connecting Greater Manchester to national and international supply chains. Trains arriving from ports such as London Gateway deliver televisions, computers, clothing, and household essentials for distribution across the region—making the benefits of rail freight tangible for people and businesses alike.

The network in Greater Manchester plays an outsized role in national rail freight

A significant proportion of freight passing through Greater Manchester is not just for local use, rather the city region serves as a vital corridor for goods moving between different regions of Great Britain. For example, aggregates from Derbyshire can be transported by rail to London, supporting construction and growth in the capital, while there is a significant quantity of goods travelling between the South Coast Ports and Scotland. By improving railway capacity to enable growth in these long-distance flows, rail freight reduces road congestion on our motorways, delivers environmental benefits for Greater Manchester, and demonstrates that investment here supports growth across the UK.

Balancing the needs of freight and passengers

As we plan for the future, it's important to recognise that both freight and passenger services are essential to national growth and prosperity. Greater Manchester will work closely with industry and stakeholders to ensure rail investment supports both, now and in the years ahead. By designing flexible, resilient infrastructure and managing capacity carefully, we can ensure the benefits of investment are shared across the network—helping Greater Manchester and the wider UK to thrive.



A single freight train can carry enough materials to build **30 homes.**



An illustration of how rail freight is supporting Greater Manchester's growth today

A train glides between Crewe and Stockport on upgraded rail infrastructure. Each journey not only reduces road wear and tear but also supports local construction: this morning's load will help build 30 new houses and contribute to the new Liverpool-Manchester Parkway.

A freight train loaded with quarried stone departs from Darlington, heading for Breckbury. Reversing the A6, it removes up to 125 HGVs from the road, easing congestion and cutting emissions by 75%.



04:45



07:05



06:12



10:15

Meanwhile, at Trafford Park Freight Terminal, containers are being loaded for departure. Daily services connect Greater Manchester to key national ports, such as Felixstowe.



13:05

At Breckbury, aggregate is offloaded. By 7:30, it's already enroute to construction sites across Manchester.

A shuttle runs between Dean Cave and Frinta Heath, consolidating waste before heading to Farnworth, where the refuse is processed at an Energy from Waste (EFW) facility to sustainably power the region's homes and businesses.



15:26

A train from London Gateway arrives at Trafford Park, carrying imported goods for regional distribution. Efficient logistics reduce the carbon footprint of long-distance freight and support just-in-time delivery for local businesses.



18:00

As dusk falls, freight trains continue to operate in the background – ensuring thousands of long journeys from the south and improving connectivity for communities across the region.



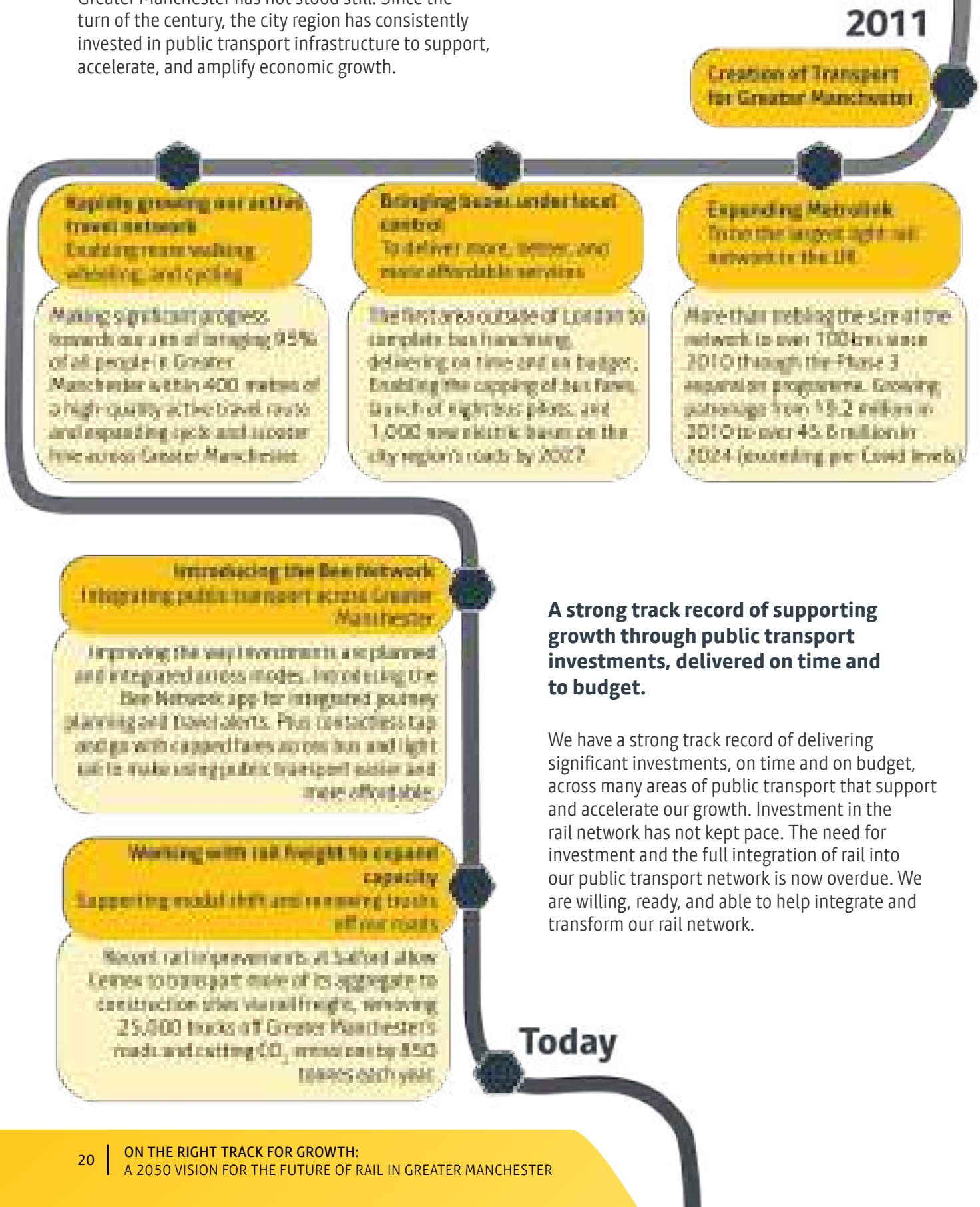
22:00

The first services of the day depart from terminals across Greater Manchester. By morning, new materials, goods, and resources will be ready to support the city's homes, infrastructure, and energy needs – quickly powering progress and journey of a train.



Building on Greater Manchester's successes to date

Greater Manchester has not stood still. Since the turn of the century, the city region has consistently invested in public transport infrastructure to support, accelerate, and amplify economic growth.



A strong track record of supporting growth through public transport investments, delivered on time and to budget.

We have a strong track record of delivering significant investments, on time and on budget, across many areas of public transport that support and accelerate our growth. Investment in the rail network has not kept pace. The need for investment and the full integration of rail into our public transport network is now overdue. We are willing, ready, and able to help integrate and transform our rail network.



The right moment to be bold

In recent years, rail investment in Greater Manchester has been a reactive patchwork of activity driven by the need to address immediate crowding and performance pressures. While this has delivered important improvements, it has lacked a long-term plan that anticipates the city region's future needs. The result has been a cycle of playing catch-up—responding to problems as they emerge rather than planning proactively for the homes, jobs, and quality of life that rail must support.

Now is the moment to be bold. A forward-looking vision for rail can secure the infrastructure required to expand labour markets, unlock new land for development, and position Greater Manchester as a destination for investment and innovation. Recent analysis by the Centre for Cities shows that modal integration can unlock an additional £4.5 billion pounds annually in economic growth for Greater Manchester. The single greatest opportunity for Greater Manchester to support modal integration is by bringing rail into the Bee Network—creating seamless connectivity that links people to jobs, education, and opportunities.³² By setting out a clear strategy, we can ensure that rail is not just a means of solving today's issues, but a driver of tomorrow's growth.

Central Government has expressed its commitment to expanding devolution and empowering local leaders to shape a rail network that better reflects local needs. This offers Greater Manchester the opportunity to directly shape how the rail network is planned, specified, managed, and delivered. By working in partnership directly with the rail industry, we can collectively tackle the issues we face on the rail network to drive growth in our city region and across the wider Northern Arc.

To ensure our local and regional networks are complemented by appropriate national infrastructure, there is a need for the government to now commit to two nationally significant projects that sit at the heart of our vision: an enhanced Birmingham–Manchester connection³³ and the Liverpool–Manchester Railway, including a new underground station at Piccadilly.³⁴

We have shown that, when given the tools and the trust, we can deliver. But to achieve the scale of transformation required, Greater Manchester's role must continue to evolve, with deeper partnerships across the government, the rail industry, and the private sector. Harnessing local expertise, investment appetite, and delivery capacity will be vital to shaping a network that works for both passengers and freight, driving productivity and opportunity across the city region.

With Local Growth Plans, an Integrated Settlement, and £2.4bn of new complementary public transport funding secured,³⁵ including investment in zero emission buses, new Metrolink lines and stops, tram-train services, and the integration of rail into the Bee Network, the foundations are already in place.

Now is the time to build on this momentum and set out a bold vision that ensures rail underpins Greater Manchester's future prosperity and plays a central role in delivering the UK's wider economic ambitions.

Why we need an integrated Rail Vision

To provide one, overarching vision for how Greater Manchester's intercity, regional, and local passenger services alongside rail freight, and Metrolink (including potential future light rail extensions and tram-train technology) will respond to current challenges and reach their full potential in the Bee Network and beyond to support good growth.

To communicate to passengers, people, and businesses that we have a clear short-, medium-, and long-term strategy to improve the rail network and services—building confidence and investment in our city region.

To signal and clarify our ambitions and priorities to partners and stakeholders, helping to support a collaborative approach and pipeline for future rail development.

The right rail network for Greater Manchester

Our 2050 vision statement

By 2050, Greater Manchester's rail network will be a cornerstone of the Bee Network and an ever-increasing driver of economic and housing growth. It will provide reliable, integrated, high-frequency, and high-capacity connectivity—locally, regionally, and nationally—supporting a greener, fairer, and more prosperous city region and beyond.

The network will be shaped around the needs of people and places, with delivery and operations underpinned by greater local responsibility and accountability to ensure it maximises benefits for our communities and economy.

Greater Manchester

Connecting all ten boroughs through enhanced radial and orbital links, with seamless integration across public transport and active travel modes, unlocking more homes, jobs, and economic opportunities around our rail stations and Metrolink stops.

The North & Neighbours

Strengthening the frequency and reliability of services into the wider functional urban area, and working in collaboration with neighbouring authorities across the Northern Arc and beyond, to enable and grow a borderless rail network, improving the flow of people, skills, and goods.

Our Nation

Supporting a national network that is reliable, safe, and sustainable—backed by generational investments in nationally significant projects—to help secure the Central Government's mission for economic growth.

Freight

Supporting the rail freight sector to expand and meet the Central Government's target of at least a 75% increase in rail freight by 2050³⁶ helping to decarbonise the economy, improve air quality, and relieve congestion across the road network.





Roadmap to 2050

Our long-term vision cannot be realised overnight. The roadmap to 2050 (outlined in the following pages) sets out how, in partnership, we will transform rail travel across Greater Manchester, phase by phase.

The roadmap is structured into three sequential phases, each building on the progress and investment of the last. Within each phase, an initial set of 'key

moves' illustrates the steps required to advance towards our vision. While not exhaustive, these moves demonstrate the scale of ambition needed to unlock the network's full potential and drive Greater Manchester's long-term growth.

GROW to 2040

Growing our network by investing in new Metrolink and local rail infrastructure, including rolling stock and new stations, to introduce services to new areas of Greater Manchester and improve frequencies across the city region and beyond. Expansion will be further supported by the recently completed Transport into Routes Upgrade, with further schemes such as the Liverpool-Manchester Railway in delivery and already unlocking developments—including around Piccadilly station, one of the highest-value regeneration opportunities in the country.

TRANSFORM to 2050

Transforming the way people and businesses move through and beyond Greater Manchester with the completion of generation 4 national rail schemes, achieving urban rail viability across the network, significant rail freight expansion, and introducing widespread connectivity through the city region. Together these investments will underpin the capacity, frequency, reliability and quality of rail services necessary to support the next century of growth in Greater Manchester.

The journey has begun:
Integrating rail with the
Bee Network.



IMPROVE to 2030

Improving passenger experience by integrating rail into the Bee Network—delivering better performance, services, stations, and connectivity. This included working in close partnership with the rail industry and the Department for Transport to establish a new place-based model for planning, specifying, managing, and delivering the rail network.

Going
underground
to support
the next
century of
growth.



IMPROVE to 2030

Improving your experience by integrating rail into the Bee Network for better performance, services, and stations.

After receiving its first integrated funding settlement as part of the 2025 spending review, and following the Trailblazer Devolution Deal of 2023, Greater Manchester has entered a new era. The city region can now plan and prioritise for its future in a joined-up manner to begin delivering on the early priorities and investments needed to progress our Rail Vision.

Initial priority investments through to 2030, many of which are already underway, will deliver immediate and visible improvements for passengers, while laying solid foundations for future growth and further transformation across the network.



The journey has begun:
Integrating rail with the Bee Network.





Greater Manchester

Integrating rail into the Bee Network will make local journeys easier to plan for, complete, and pay for, in a more recognisable branded environment.



The North & Neighbours

Partnerships with The Great North mayors and local leaders will align our regional rail visions, advance transformative investments, and enable reforms that work for all.



Our Nation

Establishing a new place-based model with the Central Government will bring better services to passengers and begin driving economic growth.



Freight

Working with the freight industry to bring freight planning and delivery and passenger improvements closer together through generational reform to rail governance.

New housing unlocked in 4 target areas

Delivering regeneration and unlocking housing around existing stops and stations, supporting government's affordable housing goals.

10,000 new homes delivered adjacent to rail stations.

New delivery model established

Establishing a local, place-based model, giving Greater Manchester more say in how its rail services are planned, developed, and delivered.

Planning for future major rail projects advanced

Planning for major programmes underway and advanced including the Liverpool-Manchester Railway, and cross-city underground connectivity to be delivered in future phases.

Contactless, tap-and-go ticketing, and simplified fares rolled out at all stations.

Providing more options for passengers, by improving rail capacity and offering more services on weekends and evenings.

Delivering a seamless multimodal travel experience for customers through further improving journey planning, travel information, safety, and customer service.

Stations in Greater Manchester upgraded with branding, accessibility, safety, customer experience, and information improvements to provide an integrated passenger experience.

5 new stops and stations

Rail stations at Cheadle and Golborne; Metrolink and guided busway at Sandhills, Elton Reservoir, and Cop Road.

30k more people connected into the rail network.

2030

A service you can trust

A reliable service that you can depend on, with at least 90% of passenger trains arriving on time.

At least **90%** of passenger trains arriving on time.

Starting construction on key extensions

Construction underway on Bury-Heywood-Rochdale-Oldham Tram-Train Pathfinder, and Metrolink to Stockport.



GROW to 2040

Growing our network by investing in new Metrolink and local rail infrastructure to introduce services which will improve connectivity and frequencies across the city region.

Moving into the next decade, Greater Manchester's rail network will continue to accelerate its growth by bringing improved services, new connections, and more reliable experiences across the city region to improve the journeys of passengers.

A headline change will be the expansion of Metrolink and tram-train services to all ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. This means more communities will have reliable, frequent rail connections to key regional destinations.

The 2030s will also see the completion of major regional and national investments including the Transpennine Route Upgrade, bringing improved services and a more sustainable railway across the North. Our ambition is for these new routes to be served by new trains, offering a modern on-board experience, improved performance, and environmental benefits.

Major regeneration at Old Trafford

Harnessing the home of Manchester United to deliver rail-led growth.



More trains to Liverpool, Leeds, and Sheffield

National connectivity improvements as Transpennine Route, Hope Valley, Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC), and Castlefield Corridor upgrades begin delivering benefits.

Trains every **10 minutes** east toward Leeds.

New heavy rail rolling stock

Delivering new rolling stock on current Northern and Transpennine routes to improve performance, capacity, and environmental footprint.

Up to **480** new carriages in operation



New light rail rolling stock

Delivering the next-generation Metrolink fleet with tram-train capability

Metro-style local rail on selected lines

Upgrading select local rail lines to allow metro-style services and accommodate growing demand.



Upgrade station accessibility

Going beyond our current Access for All programme to deliver inclusivity and accessibility upgrades on 50% of stations by 2040.

Upgrading **50%** of our stations by 2040.



Comprehensive station renewal programme launches

Investment across our station estate to bring all facilities to modern standards, replacing any life expired assets while preserving our railway heritage.



Greater Manchester

Extending Metrolink and tram-train services to all 10 boroughs and improving train service frequencies will bring more of the city region closer to opportunities and unlock new transport-oriented housing and development sites.



The North & Neighbours

Major east-west rail upgrades will improve frequency and reliability across the Northern Arc, alongside construction of transformative Northern Powerhouse Rail projects.



Our Nation

With improvements delivered and further transformative investments underway, Greater Manchester will accommodate more growth, investment, and productivity in support of the UK economy.



Freight

Major east-west upgrades will provide capacity for new and more frequent freight paths, with planning for freight improvements embedded into major schemes such as NPR.

5 station regeneration opportunities identified

Supporting future development and regeneration by identifying major transport hubs as gateways to new homes, jobs, and services.

Up to **35,000**
new homes
delivered adjacent
to our rail network

2040

Key role in major scheme delivery

Playing a key role in driving delivery of transformational programmes (e.g. Liverpool-Manchester Railway and cross-city underground) in collaboration with government and neighbouring authorities.



New freight terminals unlocked

Providing access to strategic freight terminals such as Trafford Park, ILP North, and Port Salford.



New connections

Opening the Bury-Heywood-Rochdale Oldham Tram-Train Pathfinder and opening the extension of Metrolink to Stockport – with further schemes including the completion of the Airport Western Leg and expansion via Salford towards Leigh, Wigan, and Bolton.



Wider UK connectivity improvements delivered

Improvements to the West Coast Mainline will enable HS2 trains to serve Manchester on the classic network. However, new infrastructure is needed to fully resolve north-south connectivity constraints.



TRANSFORM to 2050

Changing the way people and businesses move through and beyond Greater Manchester with transformational rail schemes and underground connectivity through Manchester.

Reaching the final phase of the Rail Vision and the mid-point of the century, the rail network is anticipated to welcome some of its most ambitious changes, transforming how people and goods move through the city region and beyond.

The introduction of underground connectivity in Manchester city centre, including a new underground station at Piccadilly as part of the Liverpool-Manchester Railway, will relieve congestion, unlock greater capacity for rail and Metrolink, and make

journeys both through the heart of the city, and elsewhere in the city region, faster, smoother, and more reliable.

The completion of national growth projects such as the Liverpool-Manchester Railway and progress on the delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) will make cross-regional travel more accessible and convenient, opening new opportunities for work, leisure, and business in cities across the North and North Wales.



Piccadilly transformed with underground station and improved East-West connectivity through NPR

An expanded Manchester Piccadilly station with new underground platforms will enable the transformation of Piccadilly into a dense, thriving, connectivity-led mixed-use hub. The station will support new fast, frequent, and reliable connections across the city region and beyond, making Piccadilly one of the most well-connected transport hubs and highest value locations in the country.

The growth opportunity at Piccadilly will be comparable in scale and impact to major UK regeneration schemes such as King's Cross in London, and international examples such as Antwerp Station and Hudson Yards, New York. Planned the right way, the scale of development at Piccadilly has the potential to support up to 40,000 new jobs, 13,000 new homes, and nearly 1 million sq ft of commercial floorspace. There are further opportunities to expand the development in the east of the city to bring a forward total of 52.5 hectares of land for development.

Delivering an underground station at Piccadilly is essential to unlocking the area's full regeneration potential. Surface level infrastructure would constrain net capacity, sever communities, and permanently remove around 15 hectares of prime development land – resulting in an estimated £3.5 to £4.2bn loss in economic value. Underground delivery will enable high-quality planning across large, contiguous sites, maximising land use and long-term growth. It will also support strategic east-west and north-south connections, driving greater economic return and transformative impact.



Liverpool-Manchester Railway delivers fast and frequent train services

Liverpool-Manchester Railway enhances connectivity to Manchester Airport, Warrington, and Liverpool, supporting wider Northern opportunities.



Greater Manchester

Resolving city centre heavy rail and Metrolink capacity constraints will transform services into and through the city centre, unlocking growth for generations to come.

The North & Neighbours

Delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail alongside major rail upgrades and complementary investments in every region will help close the national productivity gap and attract investment to the North.

Our Nation

A well-connected, productive North will be vital to the UK economy, with investment outcomes driving a new era of national growth and inclusive prosperity.

Freight

New partnerships with the industry and major upgrades to the whole regional network will unlock capacity to support the industry in meeting the UK's rail freight target.

2050

Greater Manchester rail reaches net zero

Decarbonisation achieved through electrification and deployment of zero-emission trains.

Metro-style services across whole network

Delivering large capacity upgrades in the city centre enables roll-out of metro-style services across more of the rail network.

New capacity for freight

Upgrading freight corridors to enable sustainable and efficient goods movement, supporting decarbonisation and economic resilience.

Further northern and national connections delivered

Further fast and frequent connections delivered underground east from Piccadilly towards Leeds. As well as strategic connectivity improvements to North Wales, the Humber, and Scotland, ensuring equitable access to national rail services and economic opportunities.

Just part of our story: there are gaps to be filled

The key issues articulated in the roadmap to 2050 will be transformative, only represent part of our ambitions. Guided by our Rail Vision pillars we know our roadmap will require further development. We will work collaboratively with our partners to identify the actions and investments needed to fully realise our vision and to ensure that these complex programmes, taken together, will realise benefits.

Going underground to support the next century of growth

The key moves in our roadmap chart the path to a generational transformation of rail, unlocking new capacity and connectivity by taking Manchester's network underground.

While incremental improvements can stretch the performance of existing rail infrastructure, the continued growth of our population and economy means that achieving our aspiration of reliable 15 minute or better services will require a major expansion of capacity through central Manchester. The same is true for Metrolink: even with new and lengthened vehicles, central city capacity will become a significant constraint in the coming decades.

To deliver the scale of additional capacity needed above ground would require:

- Decades of ongoing disruption, restricting services that are already unable to meet the demands of our city region today.
- The destruction of significant existing heritage and the loss of highly-valuable land and regeneration sites across Manchester.

This would still provide an end-state solution that does not allow for the level of connectivity or growth that would be possible through an underground solution.

It fails to capitalise on an economy already growing at twice the national rate which, with the right investment, is poised for further success. Poor connectivity will also have consequences beyond Manchester, undermining the reliability, capacity, and frequency of intercity journeys across the North.

Going underground changes the game.

Beginning with an underground Piccadilly station, creating one of the highest potential regeneration opportunities in the UK and opening the potential for an underground connection through central Manchester as part of the broader NPR programme. This connection unlocks fast and frequent services arriving from London and Liverpool to continue east from Manchester towards Leeds and Hull.

Going underground will create significant new capacity for Greater Manchester. Underground services will enable better segregation between local, regional, long-distance, and freight services. It will also help ease congestion on existing lines — particularly the Castlefield Corridor, one of the most overburdened rail routes in the country, as well as the city centre Metrolink network. This will support a more reliable and frequent service on the network, providing hundreds of thousands more people with direct connections to Manchester Airport and dramatically transforming the travel experience across the region.

Together, these investments will allow the rail network to support a generation of growth, including up to 75,000 additional homes in central Manchester by 2050 and an economy that continues to outperform the national average. Ultimately, they will help secure a more prosperous future for Greater Manchester, the North, and the UK.



A day in 2050 on our future network



Ali,
Apprentice from
Tameside

They quickly locate several available Bee Network bikes for hire at the end of their street. After dropping off their younger brother at school, Ali cycles along a dedicated Bee Network path towards the station.

6:30

Ali wakes up to one of the borough's new low traffic suburbs on a Monday morning and gets ready for the day.

7:30

7:53

Ali continues to Hatterley station, dropping the bike off at the neighbouring dock before catching a frequent stop-and-go suburban rail service to Manchester city centre.

An onboard announcement is made about minor weather delays affecting services across the Bee Network due to an incoming storm. Ali quickly checks their integrated Bee Network app to confirm their onward network connections are unaffected.

8:17

8:09

The train is clean and quiet, with comfortable seating, and allows Ali to complete their apprenticeship logbook and plan for the day ahead.

8:31

Ali arrives at Manchester Piccadilly station and transfers seamlessly onto the Metrolink line to MediaCityUK, arriving at the production space dry, stress-free, and on time for the today's script and segment review session.

13:20

In the afternoon, Ali and their production managers get back on the Metrolink to Manchester Piccadilly station. They catch a fast over 30 minute direct train to Liverpool to film the afternoon's feature segment—"Live from Liverpool: New Societies at the Docks".

16:58

When filming wraps for the day, Ali transfers to Manchester and catches a suburban rail service back to Hatterley station. The Bee Network app notifies Ali that the 387 bus is shortly departing from the rail station, which gets them home earlier than expected to finish their coursework.

Delivering our growth led Rail Vision

Achieving our ambitious vision requires new ways of working. A step-change in how we work together is needed so that passenger and freight outcomes are planned, designed, consented, delivered, operated, and maintained for the benefit of people and businesses in Greater Manchester and beyond.

Our mission is to achieve the benefits of our 2050 Rail Vision, as quickly and efficiently as possible - not only for Greater Manchester, but also to support the growth and prosperity of the Northern and UK economies. To do this we need effective, joined-up decision making and delivery closer to the communities involved—in other words, taking a place-based approach to delivery.

Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester and the rail industry share many of the same challenges and aspirations

Rail Industry Partners

Increasing fare box revenue
to re-invest in better rail services, and over time to manage subsidy requirements

Maximising the benefits of rail investment
by working proactively to bring forward regeneration and new homes and jobs around stations, leveraging investment across the public and private sectors

Planning and delivering
major medium- to long-term capital investments faster and more cost-effectively

Realise the economic and environmental benefits
of rail freight by supporting a higher rail freight modal share



Growing passenger numbers
by driving up demand for rail and achieving mode-shift



Integrating rail better with other transport modes
realising the benefits of integrated ticketing and investment in active travel, park and ride, and of bringing buses back under public control

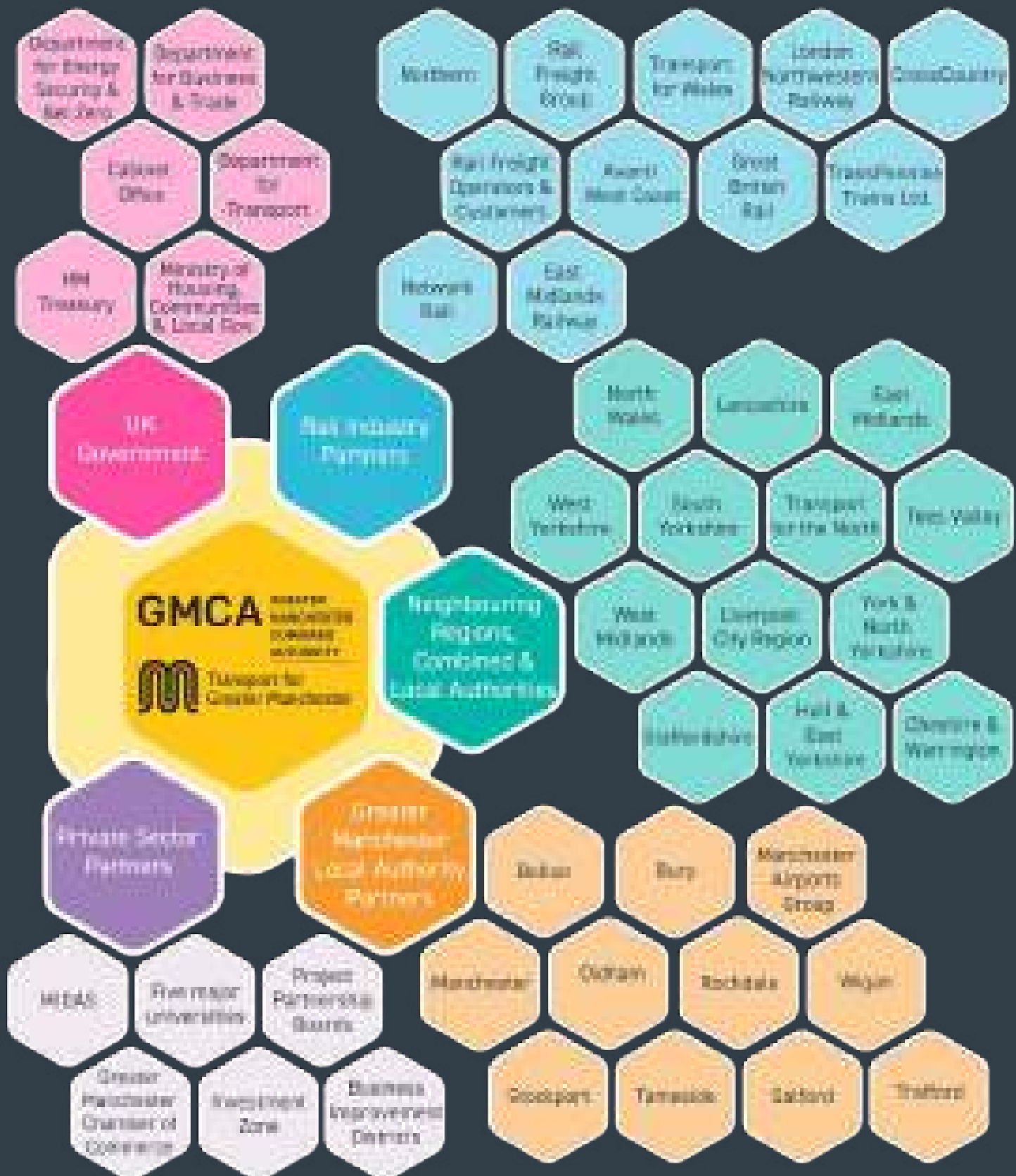


Securing investment
in specific schemes over the short- to medium-term in new train fleets, rail services, and improved infrastructure



Operating rail services cost-effectively
while improving the experience for passengers

A complex stakeholder, governance, and network environment



Building effective partnerships to realise the Rail Vision

Just as the improvements we strive to deliver through the Rail Vision extend to every corner of Greater Manchester and well beyond, realising our vision requires working in partnership with all local authorities in our city region, our neighbours, government, and most importantly, the rail industry.

We know that the journeys of our residents, businesses, and visitors are not defined by local or regional borders. We also know that delivering benefits means working together at every level to ensure our desired place-based approach is integrated from the needs of the local neighbourhood through to regional ambitions and ultimately supporting national ambitions for accelerated, inclusive, growth and prosperity.

Working in partnership with neighbouring authorities, the rail industry, and the private sector is not new for Greater Manchester. From the delivery of Metrolink in partnership with the private sector, through the joint funding and partnership delivery of a c.£50 million renovation of Manchester Victoria with Network Rail, to more recently working collaboratively with local and regional partners as well as the private sector to support the development of the Liverpool-Manchester Railway, Greater Manchester is an experienced, trusted, and capable partner.

Our Rail Vision will only be delivered if partners consolidate their knowledge and expertise to achieve common goals. This will require changes to the way we work together, including breaking down some of the adversarial arrangements that were a consequence of previous railway structures.

Government has set out the framework for how a future Great British Railways (GBR) will work with Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSA). This Mayoral Partnership framework emphasises the importance of alignment of railway planning with MSA Growth Plans, Local Transport Plans, and local investment. Greater Manchester has worked closely with the shadow GBR to help develop this model to success and embed the principle of a place-based focus in the design of the new GBR organisation.

Greater Manchester will work closely with the rail industry as they transition to GBR arrangements. We will support GBR in becoming the genuine outward-facing, place-based organisation that the rail reform programme intends to create. There are several factors that will underpin the success of Mayoral Partnerships.

Five conditions that underpin the success of Mayoral Partnerships





Bringing railways closer to business and passengers

Publishing 'A railway fit for Britain's future' in February 2025, the Department for Transport set out how the railway will be reformed. The plan is to create a unified, simplified outward-facing railway better able to deliver rail services for the people, businesses, and communities it serves.

A key element of this plan includes a statutory role for Mayoral Strategic Authorities, such as Greater Manchester, establishing place-based decision making as a key feature of the new railway. The Railway Reform Bill is expected to be deposited before the end of 2025, be enacted during 2026, with GBR formally being created in 2027.

We have a pedigree in delivering structural transport change. Greater Manchester is the first strategic authority in England outside of London to deliver a fully franchised, locally controlled bus network. Bus franchising is already delivering positive results to passengers and taxpayers with patronage having increased by 12% year on year, with a 14% increase on services that joined the Bee Network in March 2024.³⁷

Greater Manchester is working with the industry partners who will become part of the new GBR, and the DfT to explore deeper levels of Mayoral Partnership, including Local Commissioning, and Full Devolution.

It is too early to conclude on whether Local Commissioning or Full Devolution will best serve the people and businesses of Greater Manchester and support the realisation of our Rail Vision. Greater Manchester will continue progressing this work to maintain the critical debate around how and where rail services are funded, and where decisions about priorities for public transport spending take place.

Rail Reform is not only about delivering the vision for Greater Manchester. Addressing the failings of the railway in the past to serve people and places is a national imperative. We are keen, as we continue the journey with our peers and partners, to create a 'railway fit for Britain's future' to learn from our European neighbours such as Germany and Switzerland where a more devolved approach to governing, managing, and planning the railway has led to greater investment certainty and better services for passengers and goods.

CASE STUDY: Access for All programme (2018)

In 2018, TfGM worked with Northern and Network Rail to understand which stations across Greater Manchester were hardest to use for people who rely on step-free access. Whether it's someone using a wheelchair, pushing a pram, or carrying heavy bags, the goal was to make everyday journeys easier.

Together, they secured national funding to upgrade six stations. Now, more improvements are in the pipeline, supported by additional investment through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS). These upgrades are already helping more people travel independently and confidently.

TfGM leads the delivery, while Northern and Network Rail support operations—a partnership that plays to each organisation's strengths and keeps the focus on what matters: making rail easier to use.

Access for All is more than a programme. It's about removing barriers, opening up journeys, and making Greater Manchester's railway truly welcoming for everyone.

Commitment to continuous investment

At the heart of the Rail Vision is an aspiration to grow our economy in ways that directly create value across many different parts of society. For example: access to better job opportunities through easier travel, decongestion on the road network through people travelling by rail rather than car, increased income and corporate tax receipts from higher employment; increased fare revenues through more people travelling on services. The interventions we are proposing are targeted at increasing the overall size and efficiency of the economy.

Correspondingly, delivery of the 2050 Rail Vision will require commitment and investment from across the economy including all levels of the government, as well as private-sector stakeholders. This is not only about investing in railways and stations—although these are usually the most costly and significant schemes—but also in complementary investments. It is these associated and, importantly, co-ordinated investments that will enable the step change in connectivity and economic growth in the city region. MSAs, with their multimodal integrated transport and planning responsibilities are uniquely placed to orchestrate this portfolio of interventions.

Certainty and stability in funding

Certainty and stability in funding are critical to sustaining progress and achieving our long-term ambitions. The recent trailblazer integrated funding settlement for Greater Manchester is a crucial step forward, providing the city region with the stability and flexibility to deliver our near-term objectives with confidence.

As we work closely with industry and the government on rail reform, it is vital that longer-term devolved funding arrangements are put in place. These must give Greater Manchester and its partners the ability to plan and progress investments within the 2050 Rail Vision with certainty—a key requirement for turning our ambitions into reality.

A failing of rail planning in the past has been that projects have been run solely by Central Government. Greater Manchester understands that Central Government will be a key funder of major rail schemes.

It also acknowledges that planning for major schemes risks raising funding expectations from stakeholders prematurely. In the past, this has led to a degree of confidentiality and lack of transparency that has not helped efficient and co-ordinated planning.

This joint approach to planning—and the alignment of railway planning with local Growth, Transport and Business Plans will aim to eliminate the multiple versions of the future that have hampered effective decision-making and not provided suitable opportunities for competing demands to be resolved and/or mitigated in a transparent manner.

Leveraging funding certainty to unlock more innovative financing opportunities

Setting out a clear joint plan makes it easier for the government to have confidence in delivery thereby strengthening the case for funding commitment. The wider English Devolution agenda is consolidating devolved funding to MSAs in other sectors of the economy, and Greater Manchester is advocating for the Central Government to follow suit with rail.

Long term funding certainty does more than support delivery; it strengthens Greater Manchester's ability to attract diverse and innovative financing arrangements. Clear, stable commitments provide confidence to private and institutional investors that their capital will be deployed effectively and that projects will progress as planned.

With this certainty, Greater Manchester can work directly with private-sector partners—including pension funds, infrastructure investors, and specialist financing institutions—to design bespoke investment structures. These may blend public and private capital, share risks appropriately, and accelerate delivery. By creating an environment where investors have the assurance they need, we can open the door to a broader range of funding and financing solutions that not only help fund our Rail Vision but also stimulate wider economic growth across the city region.



Greater Manchester Rail Board: forward together

As part of the Trailblazer Deal between Greater Manchester and Central Government in 2023, the Greater Manchester Rail Board (GMRB) was established to take a strategic view of the railway in the city region. The GMRB brings together colleagues from train operating companies, local councils, Transport for Greater Manchester, the Department for Transport, Great British Railways, and Transport Focus. The role of GMRB is to advise the government and Great British Railways on decisions about the Greater Manchester network, oversee implementation of the agreements in the Trailblazer Deal, and bring together all relevant senior rail stakeholders to maximise the potential of the local rail network.

Our 2050 Rail Vision is an early critical step in this process, representing a shared view of our collective aspirations for the future of the Greater Manchester rail network. As an active document, this vision will continue to develop under the leadership of GMRB, as we progress forward with implementation. In the near term, this means:

1. Co-designing a shared investment plan with our partners to deliver the Greater Manchester Rail Vision. This vision focuses on the key moves needed between now and 2050. Together with our partners, further work is needed to define and develop the programme, and fund the specific schemes we need to bring forward to

meet the aspirations of our vision. Setting this out in a clear investment plan will give the government, businesses, and our supply chain confidence in delivery, thereby further strengthening the case for funding commitment.

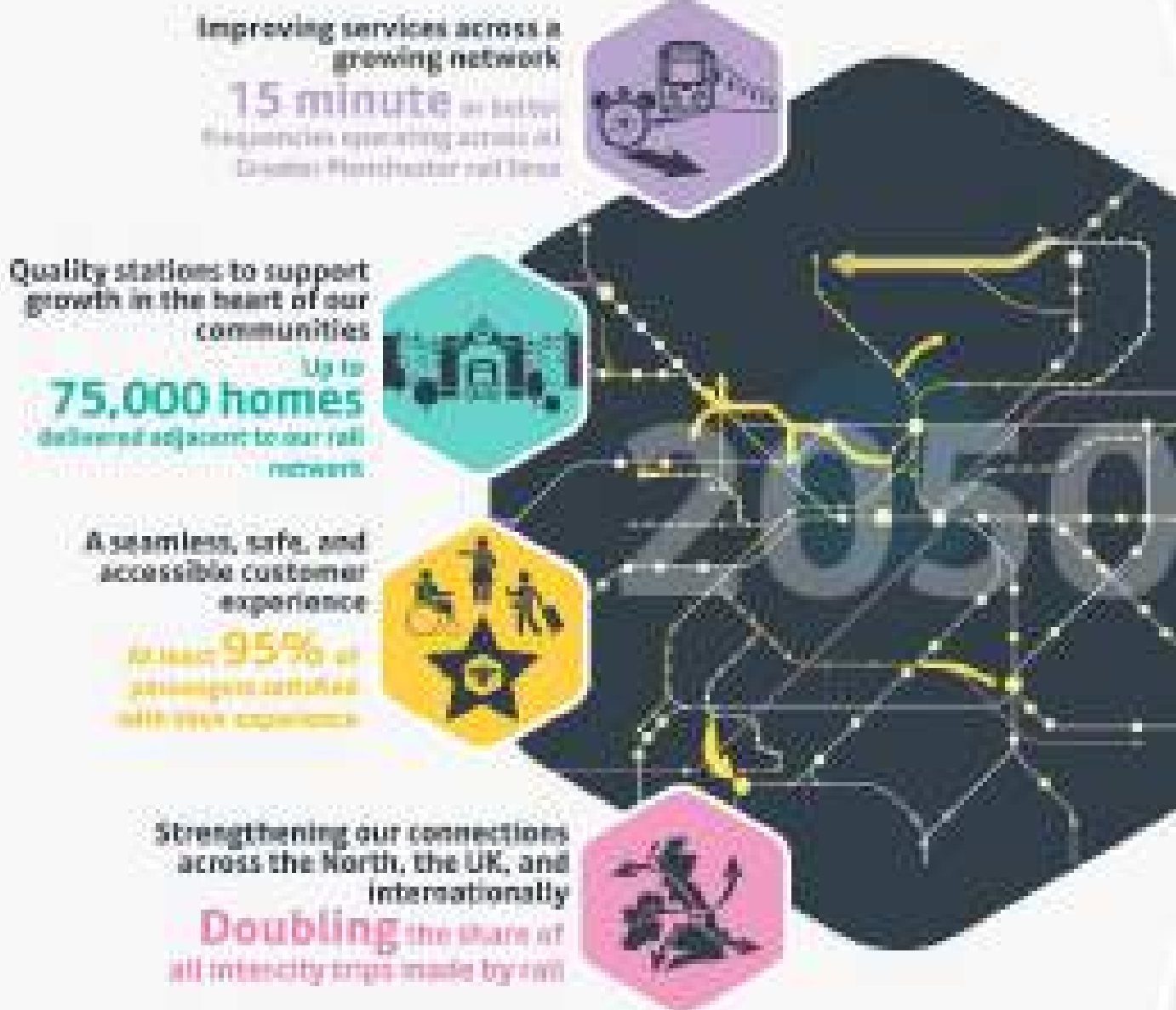
- 2. Developing a Local Commissioning Partnership with GBR to embed a local, place-based model.** The production of the Greater Manchester Rail Vision has been a shared endeavour across the industry and demonstrates the value that can be unlocked by following a local, place-based model. Going forward, this approach of aligning railway planning with local growth, transport, and business plans will be embedded as part of a Local Commissioning Partnership.
- 3. Working with Central Government to shape the future of major rail projects in our city region** including the Liverpool-Manchester Railway and broader Northern Powerhouse Rail delivery. As set out in chapter 3, the growth opportunity in Greater Manchester cannot be unlocked without investment in major rail programmes of national significance. The GMRB will work with our neighbouring authorities and Central Government to shape these schemes as they develop, avoid the mistakes of the past, embed local needs from the start, and maximise the benefits.

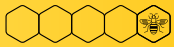
What delivering our Rail Vision achieves

Delivering our Rail Vision is about more than infrastructure—it's about impact. It's about building a transport system that unlocks opportunity, supports inclusive growth, and drives long-term prosperity across Greater Manchester and the wider North. By investing in rail, we're investing in people, places, and potential. Removing barriers, connecting communities, and enabling a future where everyone can thrive.

"This is a critical plan for putting rail right at the heart of growth for the city region. Over too many years, too many attempts to build and organise a network fit for Greater Manchester have come to nothing. This time though; it is different. It's locally led, responding to local needs, and will not only benefit local businesses and people, but have a positive impact at a national level too."

— Greater Manchester Chamber





"To unlock future business growth across the region and accelerate growth in Rochdale Town Centre, it is obvious a people- and place-based investment in rail is essential. As such, the Rochdale Town Centre business community welcomes and fully supports the delivery outcomes as set out in the 2050 vision for the future of rail in Greater Manchester."
– Rochdale Business Improvement District

"As a business that relies on extensive travel to reach clients that are geographically widespread, more reliable and frequent train services would benefit our business. Better services would alleviate some of the lost time spent on our city's congested road network and the interconnecting motorways between Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds."
– The HSQE Partnership, Atherton

Creating Opportunities

Expand access to opportunity by improving services in under-served regions and cities.

Reflect the public sense of pride of us bringing our pride back to a system that works for everyone, everywhere.

Support social mobility by connecting people to jobs, education, and services—giving everyone the freedom to choose where they live, work, and study.

Make rail a reliable, affordable, and empowering part of everyday life.

Provide career pathways through the Bee Network and GM Local Authorities, supporting apprenticeship and training across the transport supply chain.

Transforming Everyday Places

Make stations part of everyday life. Safe, welcoming, and rooted in local pride.

Design rail to reflect the character and needs of each place. Not just pass through, but serve.

Enable new homes and neighbourhoods to grow around stations, creating vibrant communities with better access to work, leisure, and rail use.

Help towns and suburbs thrive by improving local connections. Not just to big centres, but to each other.

Support the renewal of high streets and town centres by bringing footfall, confidence, and investment through reliable rail services.

Fuelling Long-Term Growth

Rail is more than transport. It's a foundation for resilience, innovation, and prosperity.

Support local businesses by improving access to talent, customers, and supply chains—making it easier to grow and invest.

Unlock us to offer new homes and regeneration, helping meet national housing targets and create vibrant, well-connected communities.

Deliver decarbonisation efforts and freight. Supporting industry, reducing congestion, and cutting carbon.

Provide the long-term certainty needed for public and private investment—giving confidence to plan, build, and deliver across the region.



Committing to the development of skills for our future

Our rail vision is about more than infrastructure, it's about creating a fairer, more inclusive city region where everyone has their share in the benefits and opportunities that rail unlocks.

As the network grows, so will the opportunities for people to connect to jobs, education, and essential services, enabling greater social mobility and improving quality of life.

Service enhancements and new stations that are welcoming, safe, and rooted in local pride will make rail a reliable part of everyday life. An increase in footfall will encourage greater investment to make city centre renewal ambitions more viable, while local connectivity improvements will enable our towns and suburbs to thrive. Cleaner air, quieter streets, and safer journeys will all be achieved through shifting more journeys from road to rail, while step-free access and inclusive station design will encourage better and more independent movement for people with mobility challenges.

Our vision for rail will also serve as a catalyst for education and skills. Programmes such as the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) and essential

partnerships with the rail industry will create new, high-value career pathways for young people. Right now, more than a third of new conductor and driver trainees come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with up to 30% lacking formal English or Maths qualifications. Nonetheless, many have progressed into roles that pay above the UK medium wage, highlighting the potential for rail to unlock better opportunities for all.

As the network expands, demand for skilled people will grow across the whole rail industry and project life cycle. Ensuring our labour supply maintains pace with growing demand will require long-term investment in training, clearer and more structured career pathways, and stronger collaboration between government, industry, and our educational institutions.

By setting out a clear programme for investment, our vision will give employers confidence to invest in delivering new training and apprenticeship opportunities. It will also give workers the assurance that rail offers a viable and rewarding future, one that creates opportunity, supports growth, and ensures the benefits of investment are felt across Greater Manchester and beyond.

The Greater Manchester Baccalaureate Pathway Programme

The Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) is a game-changing new vision for technical education and boosting productivity. It was set up with an aim of transforming technical education in the region to create an equally prestigious career pathway as an alternative to the university route.

The MBacc programme connects young people with employers through seven 'gateways' which help them understand the skills they need to pursue and reach opportunities in the region's fastest growing sectors. MBacc gateways for Engineering, Construction and the Green Economy, and the planned future gateway into Public Service, including jobs in the Bee Network are all relevant to rail.

Image source: Greater Manchester Combined Authority



Helping our supply chain harness rail as an engine of growth

A modern, integrated rail network is fundamental to Greater Manchester's economic success. By improving access to talent, customers, and supply chains, the vision will make it easier for businesses to grow and invest. Reliable, high-frequency services will reduce lost time spent in congestion, support just-in-time delivery, and help local firms compete nationally and internationally. Rail freight plays a vital role in keeping Greater Manchester moving. From the food on supermarket shelves to the materials used to build new homes, rail freight supports supply chains, removes thousands of lorry journeys from the roads, and helps keep costs down for businesses and consumers alike.

Investment in rail is an investment in Greater Manchester's future prosperity.

The vision is central to Greater Manchester's ambition to become a greener, more sustainable city region. By supporting a shift from road to rail, the plan will cut carbon emissions, improve air quality, and help the UK meet its decarbonisation targets. One additional freight train path can take up to 129 HGVs off the network, cutting emissions by 76%.³⁸

Cleaner, more efficient freight and passenger services will make everyday life better for everyone, while supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Rail also supports the circular economy, enabling the efficient movement of waste for recycling and energy recovery, and reducing the environmental impact of growth.

The interventions proposed in the vision are targeted at increasing the overall size and efficiency of the economy—unlocking land for new homes and regeneration, supporting high-value employment, and attracting private and public investment.

By 2050, the network will support up to 75,000 new homes adjacent to rail, double intercity rail mode share, and deliver at least 95% passenger satisfaction. Certainty and stability in funding are critical to sustaining progress and achieving long-term ambitions. The vision provides a clear, phased plan that gives government, businesses, and investors the confidence to plan, build, and deliver across the region.

Delivering the vision is about unlocking opportunity, supporting inclusive growth, and driving long-term prosperity across Greater Manchester and the wider North. By investing in rail, we are investing in people, places, and potential—removing barriers, connecting communities, and enabling a future where everyone can thrive.

The Tesco train: a case study in sustainable rail freight underpinning our economy



Launched in 2024, the 'Tesco train' moves 600,000 cases of groceries each week from its main distribution centre in Daventry, Northamptonshire to Trafford Park.

By delivering by rail to Trafford Park, six days per week, products are much closer to stores for the final step in the delivery process, with lorries collecting cases of goods off the train and delivering them direct to store.

Allowing for the continued growth of rail freight in Greater Manchester not only provides a reliable way to ensure our economy receives the goods and materials it needs from across the country, but it also removes thousands of congestion-causing lorries off our roads and dramatically reduces the carbon emissions associated with delivery.

Image source: Tesco

Ultimately, achieving our 2050 Rail Vision is about improving quality of life for residents and giving businesses the confidence to grow.

Greater Manchester stands at a pivotal moment. Our 2050 Rail Vision is more than a transport plan—it is a blueprint for inclusive growth, sustainability, and connectivity that will shape the future of our city region and the wider North.

Our approach tackles challenges head-on through short-, medium-, and long-term action. At its core, the vision is simple: when you arrive at a station, you can expect a safe, reliable, frequent service—operating seven days a week, early until late, getting you to work, school, or a meeting with friends, and home again on time.

For businesses, committing to, and progressively delivering this vision provides them confidence to invest in Greater Manchester and pursue new opportunities. A dependable rail system, integrated with wider investment in public transport, skills, and complementary infrastructure ensures access to talent and markets. Centre for Cities finds that integrating public transport in Greater Manchester can connect an additional 190,000 people to the city centre in under 30 minutes. Our plan to integrate rail with the Bee Network is critical to delivering exactly this—unlocking a larger labour pool, boosting productivity, and strengthening supply chains.³⁹

This transformation will not happen overnight—but the benefits are clear. Delivering our vision demands bold decisions, long-term commitment, collaboration, and investment led by strong partnerships across government, industry, and local communities. It means putting people and businesses at the heart of planning and delivery, and securing the certainty and stability in funding needed to turn ambition into action.

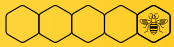
The next steps are clear:

- Pursue the committed Bee Network rail integration programme at pace. This will start to deliver integrated benefits for our people without waiting for industry reform through GBR.

- Leverage the Greater Manchester Rail Board's combined commitment to addressing the failings of the past to develop a common, clear Delivery Plan. This will clarify and streamline the pathway for rail development in a way that can be embedded in statutory transport plans and GBR's planning processes, as envisioned by GBR's Mayoral Partnership Framework.
- Establish greater transparency about funding and investment streams across the rail and wider transport portfolio to deliver a phased, efficient, and affordable pipeline of improvements.
- Use the Greater Manchester Rail Board and its work to demonstrate that Mayoral Partnerships can address the opportunities and challenges ahead together.
- Use Greater Manchester Rail Board to ensure from Day 1 that GBR is designed—structurally, accountably, and culturally—to deliver for places.

With a clear plan and shared commitment, by 2050 we will have a rail network that is the backbone of growth for thousands of businesses and a cornerstone of daily life for millions of people—supporting Greater Manchester, the North, and the UK.

We look forward to working together as a collective, by harnessing the capabilities the city region, Central Government, rail industry, and regional partners so we can build a fairer, greener, and more prosperous future for today's communities and generations to come.



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