

Press Release

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DERAILED!

No Money for Manchester Rail Improvement Plan in Government Spending Review, Warns Friends of the Earth

The Treasury's Comprehensive Spending Review to be announced this month will contain no money for a vital scheme to improve Manchester's rail services, Friends of the Earth warned today. Only already committed projects will be funded. The information comes from a reliable source within the Treasury. This is despite recent reports by both the CBI¹ and the House of Commons Transport Select Committee² both saying that more investment was essential.

Nationally, more than 5000 angry rail passengers recently supported Friends of the Earth's campaign for more rail investment, by sending E-mails and text messages to the Treasury. Many of these will be taking part in a further E-mail protest this week to put pressure on the chancellor to re-think his plans.

The Strategic Rail Authority has admitted that several crucial rail improvement schemes cannot be implemented before 2010 without additional Government funding.

These include:

- West Midlands Capacity Study³ – a programme of major improvements to prevent commuter gridlock around Birmingham
- **Manchester Strategic Rail Study⁴** - a package of major improvements to rail services which are currently poor and under used for a city of this size
- Multi Modal Studies⁵ – the consultants working on these integrated transport studies are already recommending rail improvement schemes that the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) says it does not have the resources to deliver until after 2010

Putting the necessary investment in place would not have to mean taking money from other spending priorities. Research recently commissioned by Friends of the Earth⁶ has shown that keeping motoring costs constant with small increases in fuel tax and cancelling a number of damaging road schemes would raise between £32.7 and £46.2bn over 10 years.

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Friends of the Earth Rail Campaigner Richard Dyer commented;

"Our information comes from a senior and reliable source. It is very bad news for passengers. If the Government is serious about improving our rail system then Gordon Brown needs to be digging deeper into his spending review pocket right now. Commuters in Birmingham, Manchester and elsewhere will be praying that the Chancellor's plans put improvements to their rail services back on track"

Manchester Friends of the Earth Transport Campaigner Graeme Sherrif added;

"A revitalised rail network is crucial to sorting out Manchester's traffic gridlock, the Government's decision, which will delay these improvements for at least 10 years, is a huge blow to the city"

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¹ CBI- 'From Plan to delivery: time to decide, 10 Year Plan Progress Report' July 2002, estimates that £10-£12 bn additional expenditure on rail is required if the Government's 10 year transport plan objectives are going to be met

² Transport Local Government & the Regions Committee – 'Passenger Rail Franchising and the Future of Rail Investment' 31/01/2002, 'Very large sums must be made available for the railways. The funding proposed in the 10 Year Plan is inadequate'

³ SRA- 'West Midlands Capacity Study' 2001, produced in partnership with Centro, The Government Office for the West Midlands and Railtrack, this study identified £4.5bn of improvements to double the peak hour passenger capacity of the West Midlands commuter network, Railtrack predict that the Birmingham rail network will already have reached capacity in October 2002.

⁴ SRA- 'Greater Manchester Strategic Rail Study' 2001, produced in partnership with Northwest Regional Assembly, GMPTA and Railtrack, this study identified that "rail usage in Greater Manchester is below average for major conurbations" and that this was due to a combination of "poor reliability, quality of trains and stations and lack of integration with other transport facilities" the study outlined a £1.5bn improvement strategy that could deliver the PTA's target of a 3 or 4 fold increase in rail patronage.

⁵ 'Multi Modal Studies' – these studies, introduced following the Government's review of the road building programme in 1999/8 examine a range of options including rail and other public transport measures in order to tackle traffic and transport problems in specific areas. 23 studies are taking place most will have reported by spring 2003. The SRA in its Strategic Plan lists rail schemes arising from the studies as "unlikely to be implemented before 2010"

⁶ Friends of the Earth- 'Paying for Rail' 2002, Government figures show that the total cost of motoring is due to fall over the next 10 years due to improved vehicle efficiency, a policy described as "incomprehensible" by the Commons Transport Select Committee in its recent report on the Government's 10 Year Transport Plan, Friends of the Earth's proposals would keep total motoring costs constant.

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