

Regular readers will know the [well-evidenced critique](#) (1) of the uk being centralised to a ridiculous degree and the adverse impact that has on uk plc's economy because of the lack of decent-sized cities outside london. By far the strongest contender to make good that deficit is a conurbation that runs from liverpool to leeds through manchester.

However, while the Liverpool to Manchester bit, despite local rivalry, sees pretty smooth and fluid economic continuity, Manchester to Leeds is a black hole of economic inactivity and non-connectivity, caused primarily by exceptionally poor connectivity. A better journey time of just 20 minutes between the two cities would [add almost seven billion pounds a year](#) (2) to the economy. The train journey west is poor, taking on average some Y minutes; Manchester to Leeds though can be up to X. Now imagine a high-speed line connecting the three centres. That would get you from Liverpool Lime Street to Piccadilly in around A minutes, and on to Leeds Central in another P. That would be transformational, also sorting out Liverpool's call for an HS2 spur and potentially adding well over £10 billion a year to the British economy, predominantly up here. Given it would take just 80 miles of track, the ball park cost would be around 12 billion – significantly less than London's Crossrail and Crossrail 2.

This is not a substitute for HS2, the argument for which is as strong as ever, despite the political sniping. HS2 is a sound investment with a fifty-year payback period from which the economic multipliers that would bring trade and people here will be immense if we use it right. The hesitation is typical of a national polity that decries a lack of long-term vision and critical infrastructure based on Victorian railways and then is shocked to find that there is a cost to actually building it. And the cost could be reduced and the economic benefits accelerated if we started building it from both ends instead of just London up. Whilst HS2 though is essentially about maintaining a solid growth trajectory, which would otherwise fall away because of constrained capacity, the Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds HS3 would be about creating a whole new economic axis that would be the first serious contender in a century that could seek to create a new mass of economic agglomeration that could really challenge London.

And if you think building another 420 miles of track in twenty years is beyond a modern nation, just consider that China has just built 8,500 miles in five years and is in the process of doubling that. A thriving East-West urban axis, linked to the South with HS2, would be a powerful lightning rod for economic growth that would be a good thing not just for the North but for UK plc as a whole. Time then to start fighting the battle of tomorrow and making the case for HS3.

- (1) <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/archives/35513>
- (2) [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/30806/1/Strengthening%20economic%20linkages%20between%20Leeds%20and%20Manchester_summary\(Isero\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/30806/1/Strengthening%20economic%20linkages%20between%20Leeds%20and%20Manchester_summary(Isero).pdf)

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