

The wrong type of investment

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George Osborne backed [the One North project yesterday](#). I wish he hadn't.

Please don't get me wrong though. I have argued long and hard for infrastructure investment in the UK, and [have suggested time and again how it might be funded](#). That though does not mean I think any old infrastructure spending will do: far from it. Keynes might have joked that digging holes and filling them in again was better than having people do nothing (and maybe it is) but when there are so many better options available then some sensible decision making has to take place and in my opinion the priorities of One North look to be wrong.

I say that as someone who is not a Northerner. I am aware of all that implies with regard to making suggestion. But I, like many northerners live in an area treated as economically peripheral. And I do spend time in the north, travelling there quite often. In that case what seems all too obviously apparent to me is that if £15 billion is to be spent on northern infrastructure to spend half of it on a new high speed rail link is a very poor choice of the way to spend money.

The first reason why it's a poor choice is that it will take years to happen. The north needs spending now, not at some distant time.

The second reason is that there is a very obvious problem with transport in the north but for the vast majority of people that has nothing to do with the absence of a high speed rail link that will always be used by a tiny minority of northern travellers, most of whom will be travelling occasionally for business. The real problem is apparent from just standing on any one of the major northern railways stations. It is that the infrastructure investment in the north's local railway system is dire. Second hand equipment that has often failed to meet need elsewhere always seems to be deemed appropriate for such services which as a result are too slow, unattractive and unreliable.

What the north needs is a reliable, modern, cheap (and yes, that's investment too) system of railways that can begin to be delivered very soon indeed and which

transforms the everyday lives of people across the region and not the few who need to go to sign a deal and want a high speed buffet on the way.

Please let's have infrastructure investment, but let's make it local, of widespread benefit, green, cost effective, and deliverable now because that is what is needed. By these criteria One North is another exercise in both fantasy and corporate aggrandisement. And that makes it a failure from the outset.