

# Perceptions of HS2 amongst Leeds residents

August 2023

The High Speed Rail Group commissioned Field Research to conduct four focus groups in the Leeds city region, to capture residents' perceptions of transport infrastructure and investment, including projects such as HS2.

The groups took place on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June. Each group consisted of six participants from parliamentary constituencies within Greater Leeds. To avoid gender bias, the groups were split between male and female.

The age of participants in the groups ranged between 21 and 55, with a mix of occupations and relationship status, as well as voting intentions reflective of the constituencies.



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There is consensus that transport infrastructure in Leeds falls behind that of comparable regions in both the North and the South. The South, in particular, is widely regarded as having superior transport options.

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Participants expressed cynicism toward major infrastructure projects and the government's ability to handle them, partly due to inadequate public services more generally.

3

Transport is brought up as a top priority for Government to resolve. However, when mentioning HS2 directly, there was cynicism that it would ever be delivered to Leeds.



# Perceptions of rail

- At the moment, most participants use trains on a "one-off basis," for long-distance trips.
- There exists a strong desire among participants to improve the rail connections between Leeds and the surrounding towns and cities in the north. This aspiration is rooted in the overall goal of enhancing connectivity within the north.
- Participants from all groups noted that rail services in other European countries surpass those in the UK, raising questions about the reasons behind this disparity.
- However, due to "regular over-promising and under-delivery" of major infrastructure projects from government (notably regarding levelling-up), participants were cynical that their area would benefit from any government scheme and therefore viewed projects like HS2 as unrealistic.

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*I was in France recently. It's baffling to see the stark difference between rail services in the UK and other European countries.*

Female, Leeds Central

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*We just want cheap, reliable, safe options to get places.*

Male, Leeds North West

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*This should be the number one priority for Government. Connecting up, addressing the North South divide.*

Male, Leeds West



# Perceptions of HS2

- Some individuals perceived the exclusion of Leeds from HS2 as indicative of a disregard for Leeds and the North as a whole. While some understood the economic advantages, others believed that the primary benefit for Leeds would be improved commuting to and from London rather than attracting investment and enhancing productivity within the Leeds city region itself.
- Few participants expressed surprise regarding the plans to limit the project's reach to Leeds. Moreover, the failed promises associated with the Leeds tram system are frequently mentioned alongside HS2, further influencing perceptions that promises on infrastructure projects are not to be trusted.
- Participants did not discuss the potential environmental benefits of HS2 extensively. Several participants acknowledge that HS2 will contribute to reducing lorry congestion on roads by improving freight transportation, garnering approval from the wider group.
- HS2 is generally seen as an expensive venture, and the government's perceived incompetence on various issues has fostered scepticism about its successful delivery within a reasonable budget. Given the stretched state of public services, some were reluctant to prioritise the project.

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*If they can't even keep the trains running smoothly, how can we trust them with something as massive as HS2?*

Male, Leeds North East

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*It wasn't surprising, but what a kick in the teeth for the North when they said HS2 wouldn't reach Leeds.*

Female, Wakefield

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*If HS2 gets completely scrapped then what was the point of it all? Where's all that money gone?*

Male, Leeds West



# General use of transport

- The majority of participants rely on driving as their primary mode of transportation, indicating car dependency. They expressed reluctance to switch to public transport due to concerns about its reliability and inadequate services.
- Convenience played a pivotal role in shaping participants' transport choices, leading to frustration at unreliable services.
- The lack of adequate public transport provisions in Leeds compared to other regions, notably the South, emerged as a significant concern. While some residents in the outskirts of Leeds who avoid the city centre displayed indifference towards this disparity, the majority viewed it as indicative of broader economic issues.
- A number of participants cited concerns about anti-social behaviour, particularly on buses, as a deterrent to using public transport.

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*I rely on driving because it's the most convenient and reliable option for me. Public transport just doesn't cut it in terms of reliability.*

Male, Wakefield

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*I live outside the city centre, so I'm not affected by the lack of public transport in Leeds. But it does make me question the overall economic situation around here.*

Female, Leeds West

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*Aren't we the largest city in Europe without a tram network?*

Male, Morley & Outwood



