

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State
DfT, Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

22 April 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you today, as organisations representing businesses across the UK, as well as passengers and communities, to urge you to begin a rolling programme of electrification following the publication of a new report: *“Why Rail Electrification?”*.

This report complements the interim programme business case of Network Rail’s Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy by explaining exactly why rail decarbonisation is only possible with large-scale railway electrification. It also demonstrates why this is a future-proof technology, with a strong business case, and why hydrogen and battery traction must have a role on the network, although they can never replace the need for a significant amount of electrification.

The attached two-page executive summary explains how these conclusions are derived from the categorical evidence in the report. We believe that they represent the view of engineers and businesses across the rail industry, as IMechE’s Railway Division Chair Felix Schmid states within the report. Thus, electrification provides the Government with both good investment and a means of reaching its target of removing all diesel trains off the network by 2040. It also has benefits for passengers; improves journey times and efficiency for freight operations; and improves air quality at stations.

Claims have been made in the past that electrification can be costly, but this argument focuses on a few past projects, neglecting more recent schemes delivered to time and to budget. As highlighted by the Railway Industry Association’s Electrification Cost Challenge report in March 2019¹, the industry has learnt clear lessons, including the need for a consistent pipeline of work, rather than the ‘boom and bust’ profiles seen in the past.

We are now at a critical juncture for decarbonising our railways. To meet the legally-binding 2050 Net-Zero target, there is less than 30 years to decarbonise the UK rail network – yet there is currently no significant construction of electrification schemes in England. Furthermore, with Midland Mainline electrification up to Corby completed last year, the industry is starting to lose the skills, expertise and capabilities that ensure it can deliver efficiently and effectively. Without further work soon, we risk repeating the mistakes of the past.

On behalf of the signatories to this letter, we urge the Government to authorise a “no-regret” electrification scheme on a busy diesel railway as a start of a rolling electrification programme to contribute to the UK’s green recovery. Doing so would not only support jobs, investment and economic growth, but would also show the UK’s commitment as a global leader in tackling climate change in the run up to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) later this year.

¹ See https://www.riagb.org.uk/RIA/Newsroom/Stories/Electrification_Cost_Challenge_Report.aspx

Yours sincerely,



Campaign for Better Transport



Campaign to Electrify Britain's Railway



Civil Engineering Contractors Association



Electrical Contractors Association



Institution of Mechanical Engineers



Logistics UK



National Skills Academy for Rail



Northern Rail Industry Leaders



Permanent Way Institution



Rail Alliance



Rail Forum Midlands



Rail Delivery Group



Rail Freight Group



Railfuture



Railway Industry Association



RSSB



Urban Transport Group