

Via email: scrutiny@parliament.uk

19 January 2026

Ref: AB/DJ

Dear Bill Committee Members,

Greater Manchester Combined Authority: Parliamentary Bill Committee Call for Evidence Railways Bill Response

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) welcomes the introduction of the Railways Bill. I am pleased to support the provision of written evidence to inform the committee's scrutiny of the Bill and I look forward to giving oral evidence to set out what I see as essential legislative changes needed to ensure Great British Railways (GBR) delivers for Greater Manchester and other Mayoral Authorities.

More broadly, the proposed changes align with ensuring that GBR is established in a way that provides meaningful benefits to Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs).

Our evidence focuses on making certain terminology more specific. Ultimately, this will enable a robust partnership under a reformed railway to flourish, with mutual accountability for GBR and MSAs that delivers for all, putting place-based decisions and customer needs at its core. With statutory roles for MSAs being an integral driver for rail reform and devolution being successful, it's important that the legislation underpins this and realises the partnership approach suggested to MSAs through early working with Shadow GBR. The Bill should be consistent with this partnership approach.

In December 2025, following collaboration with the Department for Transport and our local rail industry partners, GMCA launched On the Right Track for Growth: A 2050 vision for the future of rail in Greater Manchester.

Our vision recognises the potential – and increasingly the need – to place railways in service of economic and social growth, articulating public transport's critical role in driving prosperity. Heavy rail in Greater Manchester is a vital part of the Bee Network, as we integrate it with other modes, providing a world-class public transport network in the city region that enables people to access education, employment, and leisure opportunities right across Greater Manchester

Rail in Greater Manchester also has the potential to enable regeneration: we are piloting a new approach to transport-led regeneration in Ashton and Stalybridge by integrating rail services which serve those growing towns into the Bee Network by the end of 2026, with more lines to follow by 2028.

For too long, my region's railways have been marked by unreliable services, poor resilience, and creaking, outdated infrastructure that has led to low passenger confidence and satisfaction. Too many of our stations remain inaccessible to disabled and elderly passengers, an unacceptable situation. I therefore seek the government's commitment to



devolving Access for All funding, empowering local leaders to determine priorities and accelerate the delivery of much-needed station accessibility improvements.

We support the government's commitment to reverse this decline. The Railways Bill proposals for MSAs to set local rail strategies and reform of the rail system through the establishment of GBR as a single directing mind is welcomed.

However, to fully realise our ambitions for rail to be a driver of regional and national economic growth, we need to secure both a strong statutory role of MSAs, and the ability to hold GBR to account for delivering city-region commissioned services. These requirements are currently ambiguous and vague in the legislation, with some critical factors missing.

Mayors are responsible for driving forward economic growth and increasing opportunity for the people, communities, and businesses in our places. Devolution to date has provided us some of the tools needed to enable growth – but for rail to fully play its part we need to replace a consultative role with one which sees mayors making decisions on the specification and commissioning of outputs alongside the industry, enshrined in legislation.

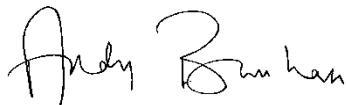
I am clear that to see long term improvements to the railway, there must be a widespread cultural change in the industry: we must restore a public service ethos to the railways.

In Greater Manchester, we are starting to witness a transformation of our bus network. Since we took over specifying bus services, standards and performance requirements in January 2025, we have seen significant rises in service punctuality, reliability, customer satisfaction, and patronage. I am in no doubt that local accountability secured through devolution has been key to this improvement.

To deliver a similar transformation on the railways there must be clear provisions on GBR that support unlocking growth, including alignment with local strategies and priorities. The needs of different places across the network must be embedded in long-term planning to ensure rail plays its role in driving forward our ambitions.

I look forward to working constructively with all parties as the Railways Bill progresses through Parliament, ensuring that the legislation meets the needs and expectations of the people we serve. Once the bill has become law, I know that Greater Manchester will work in lockstep with GBR and the new passenger watchdog to drive continuous improvement and create a better railway for everyone.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Andy Burnham'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Andy' and last name 'Burnham' clearly distinguishable.

Andy Burnham
Mayor of Greater Manchester