

# Roundtable on transport, infrastructure and growth with Lord Liddle, Former Shadow Transport Spokesperson & Chair of Progressive Britain

Online via zoom



Lord Liddle

## Introduction

The PLG's recent roundtable discussion focused on the critical challenges and opportunities surrounding infrastructure, transport, and economic policy within the current political landscape. Participants explored the Labour Government's approach to large-scale projects like HS2, the importance of integrated infrastructure planning, and the broader economic implications of inherited fiscal challenges. Key contributions emphasised the need for coordinated planning across government levels, the potential impact of planning reforms, and the role of public investment in driving sustainable development. Discussions also highlighted the importance of aligning transport infrastructure with housing development, the economic uncertainties post-Brexit and COVID-19, and the need for innovative approaches in technology and taxation to foster growth and equity. There is an urgency for long-term, vision-led planning to address the nation's infrastructure and economic needs effectively.

## Key Takeaways

- The meeting underscored the critical importance of a coordinated approach to infrastructure planning, emphasising that successful development requires integration across local, regional, and national levels. This coordination is essential to support housing development, economic growth, and the provision of utilities and energy. Labour's focus on major infrastructure projects, such as HS2, was highlighted as a vital component of this strategy. Participants agreed that without a unified planning effort, the potential benefits of these large-scale projects could be undermined, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for regional development.
- A significant portion of the discussion revolved around the financial constraints inherited from the former government, with Lord Liddle highlighting a projected £22 billion shortfall. The group discussed the impact of previous tax cuts and public spending plans, which have placed additional strain on the government's ability to fund necessary infrastructure projects. There was a consensus on the need for more realistic public spending plans that can adequately address the pressing infrastructure and transport needs of the country while managing these financial challenges effectively.
- Planning reforms were a central theme, with discussions focusing on their potential to accelerate infrastructure projects if implemented successfully. Participants expressed cautious optimism, noting that past efforts at planning reform have often fallen short due to a lack of strong leadership and poor interdepartmental coordination. The success of these new reforms will largely depend on the government's ability to foster collaboration across various departments and ensure that the reforms are guided by clear and decisive leadership.
- The integration of transport infrastructure with housing development emerged as a key concern, particularly in the context of large-scale projects like the East-West rail line between Oxford and Cambridge. Participants stressed that successful housing development is closely tied to effective transport infrastructure, and that developers should play a role in funding the infrastructure that benefits their projects. The discussion highlighted the example of HS2, where public investment has significantly boosted development in Birmingham, but raised questions about the sustainability of financing such projects solely through taxpayer funding.
- Additionally, there was a call for tax reforms that could stimulate investment and growth, with a focus on reducing the tax burden on investments and exploring new revenue sources that could support public infrastructure projects without stifling economic activity.

## Issues raised

- A recurring concern was the challenge of navigating the relationship between local and central governments, particularly in the context of large-scale infrastructure projects. Participants highlighted the difficulties in achieving coherent strategies and effective implementation when local and national priorities diverge, potentially leading to delays and inefficiencies in project delivery.
- The group raised concerns about the sustainability of long-term planning in government, particularly in light of short-term political pressures. Participants emphasised the need for consistent and strategic policies that can withstand changes in government and political priorities. They expressed worry that without a stable, long-term approach, critical infrastructure and housing projects could suffer from inconsistent execution and lack of continuity.
- There was concern about the challenges of modernising the UK's rail system, particularly in terms of cost and technological adoption. Participants discussed the high costs associated with electrification and the slow pace of implementing new technologies like driverless trains or improved signalling systems. The group worried that without a more aggressive push toward modernisation, the rail system might lag behind other countries, leading to inefficiencies and reduced competitiveness.

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