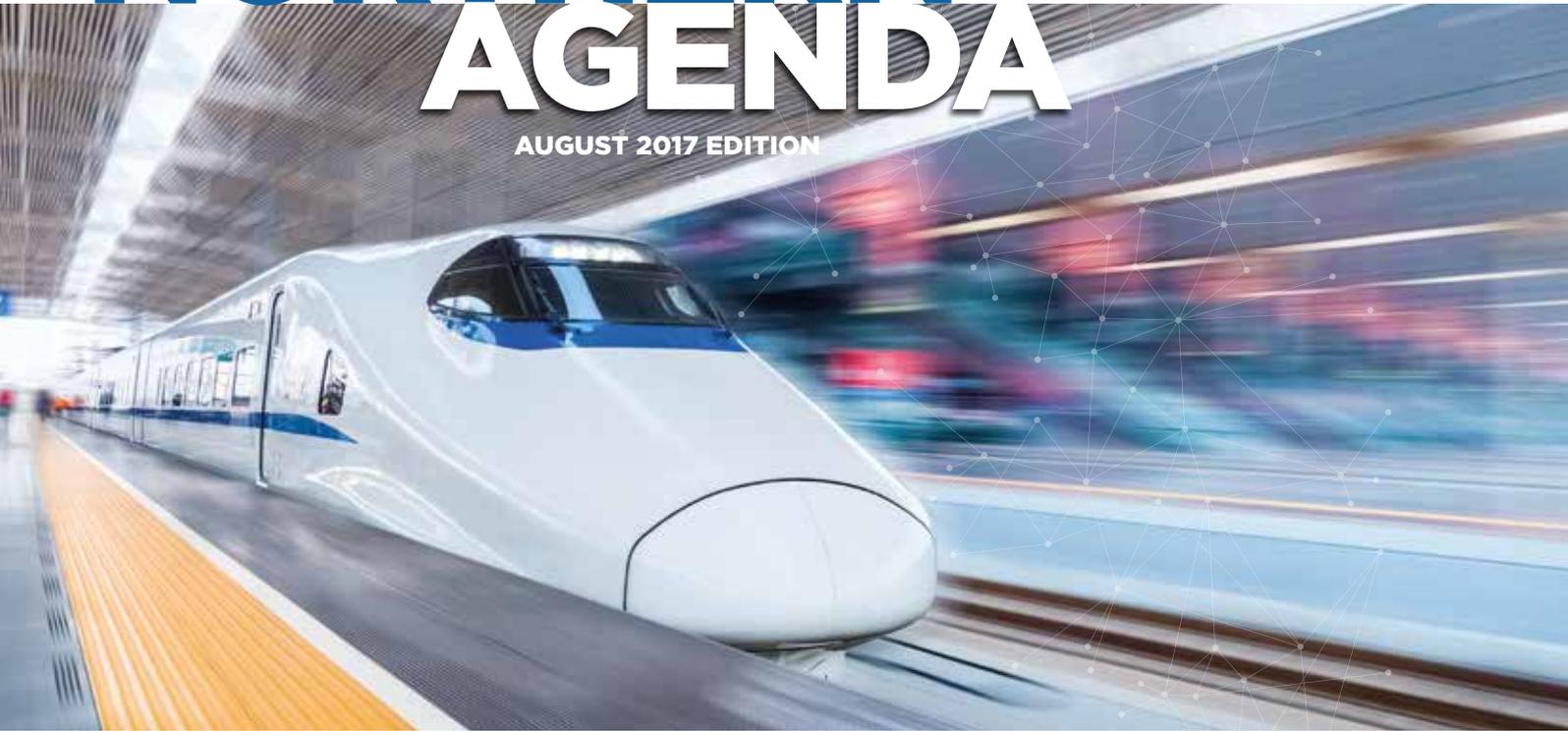




PROJECT ROME

NORTHERN AGENDA

AUGUST 2017 EDITION



Editorial

Following on from the effective collapse last month of the South Yorkshire devolution deal, 17 local authority leaders from across North, West and South Yorkshire, as well as the East Riding, signed a Yorkshire Day declaration expressing their support for a Yorkshire-wide devolution deal.

The self-styled 'coalition of the willing' will meet again before the end of August to agree the next steps on taking the agenda forward. A key player at the heart of the discussions told the Northern Agenda that an agreement

on a Yorkshire-wide devolution deal could be reached as early as September, and a formal bid could be lodged with government before the end of the year. Notable absences from the list of signatories of the declaration were the leaders of Sheffield, Rotherham and Wakefield councils. We understand that Wakefield will come on board once veteran leader Peter Box "stops playing hard to get", according to our source. Rotherham, too, are coming under pressure to sign up to a county-wide deal, which would leave Sheffield out in the cold.

This isn't just about the Steel City fearing a Yorkshire dominated by the financial powerhouse of Leeds (although that is a very real concern to many). For many years



Sheffield have believed that the needs of their manufacturing sector do not coincide with the needs of the economies of their Yorkshire neighbours in Leeds, North Yorkshire and Humberside. As one veteran commentator told Northern Agenda, “Sheffield has always looked South to its economic future. It sees itself as North Midlands rather than South Yorkshire.” Whilst Sheffield civic leaders refuse to rule out pursuing a devolution deal of their own it is unclear what the people of Sheffield would have to say about being excluded from such a powerful economic and political entity.

“ Sheffield has always looked South to its economic future. It sees itself as North Midlands rather than South Yorkshire.

- Veteran commentator

Meanwhile hundreds of business leaders from the Region signed an open letter calling on the Sheffield city region devolution deal to go ahead, claiming that failure to agree a deal would mean the region missing out on much needed investment and cause serious reputational damage. Whilst the sincerity of their commitment to the deal is not in doubt, most commentators believe that the political reality is that the deal is dead in the water.

Devolution supporters have also fine tuned their arguments for the governance of any Yorkshire-wide devolution settlement. Previously, government ministers had placed a stumbling block in their path by claiming that the law does not allow for a single Metro Mayor to work alongside several Combined Authorities. But advice has been sought and this does not appear to be as significant issue as opponents of the deal would hope for. “It’s a simple tweak of the law, not major primary legislation. We will have a single Mayor for Yorkshire” was the confident prediction of one campaigner.

If political leaders in Yorkshire can agree a devolution deal attention will turn to how the government would respond. They are known not to be keen on a Yorkshire-wide deal, but could they really refuse when it is supported by Conservative-led local authorities in North and East Yorkshire, as well as a number of Yorkshire’s Conservative MPs?

So confident of success are supporters of the All-Yorkshire solution that talk amongst key political activists has already turned to who might be likely candidates for an elected



RT Alan Johnson



Ed Miliband



Yvette Cooper MP



Hilary Benn MP

Mayor of Yorkshire, at least within Labour circles. Alan Johnson, the former Home Secretary who was previously sounded out by devolution campaigners, has left frontline politics to concentrate on his writing career; “He was the best Leader Labour never had and now he’s destined to be the best Mayor Yorkshire never had”, lamented one former ally of Johnson’s. The stature and scope of such a high-profile directly elected political position will inevitably attract the interest of some equally high-profile public figures. Only the Mayor of London will have a bigger personal political mandate than any future Yorkshire Mayor with the electorate, not to mention the economy, bigger than that of Scotland.

Current and former Yorkshire Members of Parliament inevitably head the list of possible runners and riders, with Yorkshire potentially offering a refuge for those members of the parliamentary party not part of Project Corbyn. In no particular order, some of the

names that have been mentioned include Ed Miliband, Yvette Cooper, Hilary Benn, Caroline Flint, Rachel Reeves and Ed Balls. “And what have they all got in common?” asked one Labour insider, “Not one of them is from Yorkshire!” If White Rose blood is a pre-requisite then Bradford born Chris Leslie could be tempted. He represented his home constituency from 1997 to 2005. Now exiled in Nottingham, he retains strong family links in Yorkshire and, as one of Jeremy Corbyn’s most outspoken critics the Momentum knives are out for his scalp.

His chances could be over before they begin, with pressure on the Labour party to make the selection an All Women Shortlist. All 6 Metro Mayors elected in May are men, as are 95% of their cabinets and it would be difficult to argue against having a woman candidate for this most high profile position.

As reported in last month’s Northern Agenda the key figure in the backroom negotiations



Caroline Flint MP



Rachel Reeves MP



Ed Balls



Chris Leslie MP



outside York Minster”, was the tongue-in-cheek verdict of our devo insider.

Meanwhile, the government’s decision to rule out the electrification of key rail networks in the North sparked a furious response across the North. Firstly electrification of the Hull to Selby line was cancelled, swiftly followed by the announcement that the Midland mainline from Sheffield to London was to be shelved. The final straw was leaked reports that the painfully slow Leeds to Manchester line was to go the same way.

has been Regional TUC Secretary, Bill Adams. “He’s been quietly shuttling between the different parties, negotiating, ironing out differences and, occasionally, cracking heads together. He’s played a blinder. If we do end up with Yorkshire-wide devolution they should erect a statue to Bill

An IPPR North petition calling for government investment in ‘Crossrail for the North’ has nearly 70,000 signatures at time of going to press. And this week George Osborne’s Northern Powerhouse Partnership officially launches its campaign for ‘Crossrail for the North’, with a letter going to No 10 and an article in The Times. Business leaders across the North are being lined up to support the campaign and it has the support of Transport for the North. The launch of the campaign is timed to coincide with the Northern Rail Summit, being held on 23 August.

As the summer recess comes to an end, and people have had a chance to recharge their batteries, the battle lines are being drawn up for some game-changing battles to come.

