

'Passing the buck without passing the bucks is not really an answer'

Graeme Whitfield

Business editor
graeme.whitfield@ncjmedia.co.uk
@Graemewhitfield

TRANSPORT Secretary Chris Grayling is "passing the buck without passing the bucks" by saying the North should sort out its own transport problems, a regional leader has said.

Newcastle City Council leader Nick Forbes was speaking as business and political leaders from around the North gathered to discuss downgrades to promised rail improvements in the region which were followed shortly by news of upgrades in London.

Coun Forbes joined counterparts from other big cities in the North in criticising Mr Grayling's comments that "the success of Northern transport depends on the North itself."

Those comments have added fuel to a campaign for fairer transport funding that has already seen more than 80,000 people sign a petition calling for a better deal in the North.

Yesterday a summit was held in Leeds to bring together business and



► Newcastle City Council leader Coun Nick Forbes

political voices across the North with the aim of putting pressure on the Government to reverse its decision.

Despite criticising Mr Grayling, Coun Forbes said: "There's a real danger that we focus all our anger on one particular Secretary of State for Transport. What's becoming clear is that the issues and challenges we

face are deeper than that.

"We need to challenge the perception that some people have in the central Government machinery that the North is somehow in decline.

"We need to be absolutely clear that we don't buy into that narrative, nor should be falling into the trap of saying simply that we need more money to help us.

"But if the Government is serious about addressing the economic imbalances in this country, the North is the most efficient place to do that. That's a more powerful message for the way Government works than simply saying: 'Look at us. Aren't we hard done by?'"

The summit was held after a series of rail links in the North, Wales and Midlands were downgraded last month at the same time the Government was announcing its backing for a new £30bn Crossrail 2 scheme in London.

Those announcements sparked anger across the North, and the situation was made worse by Mr Grayling writing an article for the Yorkshire Post in which he appeared to lay the blame with the region itself.



► Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham speaks at yesterday's summit

Mr Grayling said: "Congested roads and overcrowded trains are a daily reality for thousands of commuters. Without modern, efficient and reliable transport links, the vast economic potential of the North cannot be realised.

"So I am pleased that leaders from across the North are gathering for a conference in Leeds this week to debate this very issue.

"The message I want to send them is simply this: although one of my biggest priorities as Secretary of State is to build the transport links the North needs to thrive, they must be designed and managed by the North itself.

"It is central government's responsibility to provide funding and a delivery structure that ensures efficiency, value for money and account-

ability. But beyond this, I want the North to take control."

Greater Manchester and Liverpool mayors Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham, along with council leaders in Leeds and Sheffield, joined Coun Forbes in criticising those comments, before agreeing a statement calling on the Government to honour its commitments to deliver rail improvements in the North.

The statement also said ministers should prioritise a new east-west rail line in the North and come up with a fairer way of distributing transport funding so that projects in London did not always come first.

Sir Richard Leese, leader of Manchester City Council, said: "We have proved ourselves perfectly capable of planning the transport infrastructure that we need for the North

May takes a boat ride to launch regeneration plan



► Prime Minister Theresa May with Chief Operating Officer of PD Ports Jerry Hopkinson, centre, and the Mayor of Tees Valley Ben Houchen, right, during her visit to Teesside

THE Prime Minister took to the Tees as she launched a ground-breaking masterplan to transform the region.

Theresa May told Teessiders to "look to the future" before officially kickstarting a 25-year project to regenerate the former SSI steel site and thousands of acres south of the Tees.

The first of its kind outside of London, the South Tees Development Corporation hopes to create 20,000 jobs and become a "flagbearer" for major industrial growth.

Almost 30 years since her predecessor Margaret Thatcher's famous 'Walk in the Wilderness' in Thornaby, Mrs May opted to survey the once-booming banks of the River Tees from a boat at Teesport.

Laying out the dream of its regeneration, Mrs May said the 4,500-acre site has "significant potential" to stimulate the North East economy.

"It's a long-term plan, but it's about encouraging growth here in the Tees Valley and that will be from a variety of sectors. It's about providing and securing jobs for local people," she said.

"What's important is that we do look to the future and this site does have potential for the future.

"We can already see the potential for jobs, but what's important is that the South Tees Development Corporation will fit in with the

wider strategy the Government has - our modern Industrial Strategy."

Mrs May kicked off her four-hour visit to the region with a meeting of the Corporation's 16-member board at the former SSI steelworks.

Chaired by Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen, the Corporation is a key part of the Tees Valley's Devolution Deal.

He said today's deal is a "historic moment" for the Tees Valley: "Nowhere else outside of London has a Mayoral Development Corporation.

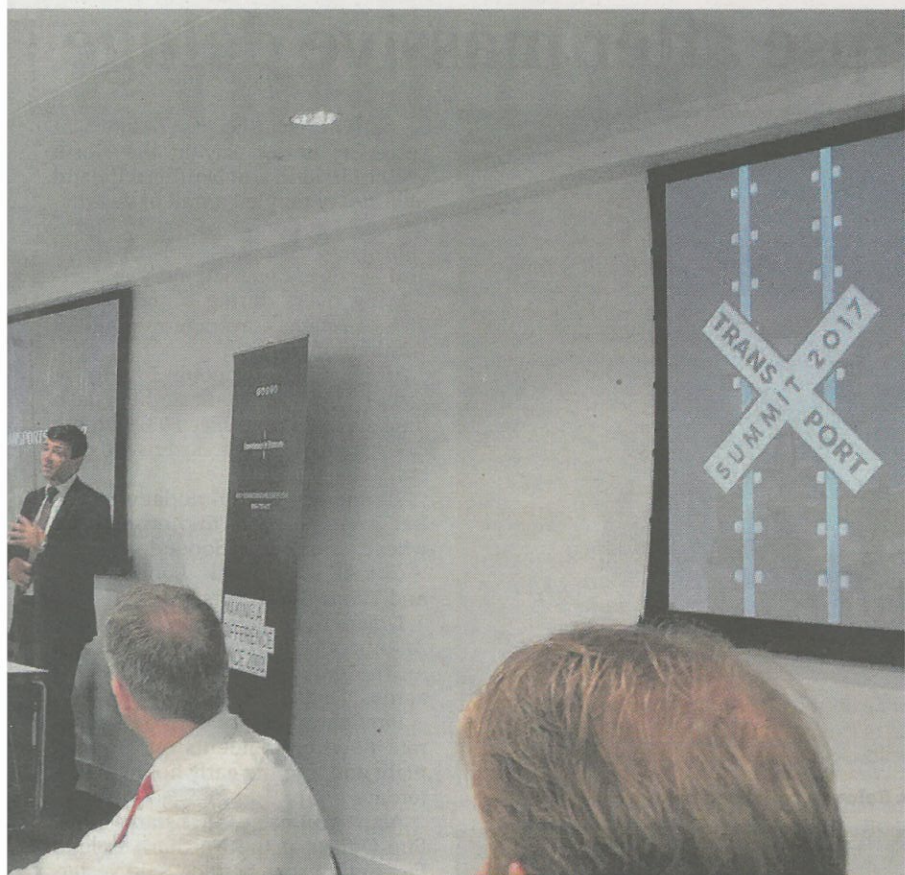
"It is a sign of the Government's commitment to our region and I am delighted the Prime Minister will see first-hand the opportunity we have to turn this local site into a national asset."

He added: "As we negotiate our exit from the EU, our plans offer an exciting opportunity for Teesside to access new international markets, bringing inward investment into the area.

"This has the potential to create more than 20,000 high quality jobs for local people over the lifetime of the project."

The Mayor used his powers to create the Corporation a month after he took office in May. A full masterplan detailing the corporation's aims, followed by a formal consultation, will be published in Autumn.

Scott Heppell



held in Leeds

Graeme Whitfield

of England both short term and long term.

"The problem is not our capacity to plan that. It is, without the support of Government, our capacity to fund the investment that is required."

Also speaking at the event was Adrian Waddell, director of operations at Newcastle Business Improvement District group NE1.

He said: "The North does not begrudge a single penny spent on infrastructure in London and South East, but transport cannot be a zero-sum game, in which some regions benefit from investment at the expense of others."

"To achieve this we need a commitment to action from the Government which includes significant support for transport for the North, matched with serious investment."



> Transport Secretary Chris Grayling

for 4,500-acre site



> Prime Minister Theresa May visiting the Harbourmaster's office in Teesport