

# Levelling up chief backs Burnham over controversial Manchester HS2 station plan

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If you're spending billions don't build an "eyesore", said Clive Betts MP



Manchester Piccadilly

- **What** Chair of levelling up committee has said Andy Burnham “know[s] better than central government” on plans to build a new ground-level station for HS2 in Manchester
- **Why** Burnham had asked for a station with underground platforms but government said it was too costly
- **What next** Manchester City Council told *React News* it hopes government “will listen carefully and come to the table”

The chair of the levelling up select committee has backed Andy Burnham and Manchester City Council on their opposition to the government’s proposed

ground level HS2 station next to Manchester Piccadilly, *React News* can reveal.

Clive Betts, MP for Sheffield South East, said of the government's plans: "If you're spending billions [on HS2], don't do it in a way where people say 'Isn't that an eyesore'."

Refusing to fund an underground station could require new viaducts to be built in the city centre in what Graham Stringer, MP for Blackley and Broughton, dubbed "putting HS2 on stilts through Manchester".

Betts also told *React News* that in this situation "the mayor and the council know better than central government", and viaducts in central Manchester will not encourage levelling up.

A ground level station would also potentially take away significant chunks of development land, with Manchester City Council having put forward a regeneration framework for the existing Piccadilly Station featuring several million square foot of development opportunities, including offices and residential.

Under a report put forward by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in 2018, the vision for Piccadilly was expected to provide 40,000 new jobs, 13,000 homes and nearly 10m sq ft of commercial development.

In November 2021 the government said it would build a new surface station in Manchester for HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, a partly new line to Leeds. It will sit next door to the existing Piccadilly station, which does not have platforms long enough to accommodate HS2's 400-metre trains.



Clive Betts said viaducts in central Manchester will not encourage levelling up

Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham had asked the government for a station with underground platforms. This was refused, with the government saying it would cost £4-£5bn more than a surface station and take seven years longer to build.

As well as allowing further development around the station, the underground option would also allow Piccadilly to serve as a “through” station rather than a terminus, allowing services to continue on to the likes of Leeds, Bradford, York, and other destinations in the North.

### **‘We hope government will come to the table’**

Councillor Bev Craig, leader of Manchester City Council, told *React News* that while the council welcomes bringing HS2 to Manchester, there is “a compelling case” for having a new underground station at Manchester Piccadilly to accommodate it rather than the overground option currently proposed.

“The underground option would deliver much greater economic benefits by preserving vital city centre land, capable of supporting thousands of jobs, rather than swallowing it up and causing less disruption through its construction and infrastructure,” said Craig. “It would also give us, at the heart of the North’s rail network, a futureproofed station capable of supporting growth rather than a

constrained overground station at full capacity from day one.

“We hope the government will listen carefully and come to the table on this. HS2 is a once in a lifetime investment which must help redress decades of underinvestment in transport in the North. We must capture the full benefits. An overground station might be cheaper in the short term – but it would cost the region much more in missed opportunities for many years to come.”