

Sheffield Green Party's response to the South Yorkshire Devolution Consultation.

The detailed model for the functioning of the Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority contains some positives. These, however, are outweighed by some very strong misgivings.

We feel the structure and decision making processes are lacking in democracy; there is little room for any person or organisation outside the MCA to have any influence in what decisions are made, decisions which nevertheless may influence their lives. The funding arrangements are dependant on Central Government, who have imposed a sole focus of business and economic growth, with vital factors such as inclusivity and the region's response to climate change as side issues. Given the climate crisis, we urge the MCA to try strenuously to persuade Central Government that the agreement between the two should be reframed to give greater priority to action to tackle the climate emergency and less priority to growth.

The focus on business and economic growth misses the point of the Paris Agreement entirely. The Government and all four local authorities within the SCR have declared a Climate Emergency; there is very little in this document to reassure us that it will receive the attention we all need it to receive. We believe it should be the focus of this devolution agreement, and indeed all devolution agreements; and that funding should be available and certain. If it were so, the amount of employment available in the region would skyrocket. Work on housing, to deliver near zero-carbon homes that are cheap to run; work on transport, perhaps making use of the Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation strand, to develop cheaper and more efficient electric buses and cars, as well as building the active transport infrastructure we so desperately need; work in renewable power generation, installing solar panels, on-shore windfarms and a wide range of other renewables, including developing wave and tidal generators; work in agriculture, to maximise food production within the region; work on flood defences; work in the education sector to provide the training for all this.

Where we can give some cautious approval is in the bus franchising. The region is crying out for an integrated network that offers people affordability, timeliness and reliability. We don't, however, believe that HS2 is in the interests of the people of Sheffield City Region, and neither is the existence of the Doncaster/Sheffield Airport.

We also have concerns about the integration of Adult Skills provision across the region, connected as it is with the DWP in delivering "future employment support". This sounds like Universal Credit, which has been thoroughly discredited.

Given the focus on business and economic growth, we cannot support the powers of the MCA in planning. If the proposed National Institute for Infrastructure in Doncaster were to be the National Institute for Climate Friendly Infrastructure, the proposal would be much more attractive.

To sum up, we find the proposed workings of the SCR/MCA to lack regional accountability and to be focused on aims incompatible with the Paris Agreement and the declared Climate Emergency. Whilst we welcome the bus franchising, it cannot by itself solve the considerable transport problems faced by the region. The focus very much needs to be on priority for local buses, with none of the spending being diverted to road-widening schemes to benefit private motoring. Spending on transport should be significant but only spent on sustainable modes of travel. Our objections would be lifted if funding was to be definite, not conditional; and if the focus was to be on the Climate Emergency, informing the planning function, the Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation function, and the National Institute for Infrastructure.