



Hi I'm Chris Leech, Lead Corporate Advisor to the Transport Sector for Business in the Community (BITC).

For the rail industry HS2 represents a journey which will create an engine for economic growth in the north. In the near future, we will be embarking on an infrastructure project on a scale we have not seen since Victorian times.

Many people are talking about the impact HS2 will have on journey times, the line speed and the improved connectivity, but these are 20 years in the future. Born and raised in Yorkshire, I believe the legacy is about the social and economic impacts it will bring to the region from the minute the first spade goes into the ground.

With more than 20,000 new jobs created in the development phases of the project, the impact these highly skilled individuals will have on stimulating local economies will be immense.



From the use of shops and cafés to hotels and accommodation - communities on the line of the route and surrounding areas will experience a renaissance of economic benefits not seen in decades.

However, if this is to happen, we need to address the immediate issue of the engineering skills gap. The youth unemployment rate remains more than three times that of any other group. It is becoming clear that the old link between economic growth and employment is in danger of breaking for young people. As a result we need to urge businesses collectively, within the region, to take action and inspire our young people.

Many are becoming increasingly polarised, due to their social background, into those who achieve success at school and beyond and those who do not. The wasted potential this represents increases the pressure on businesses, many of whom are struggling to recruit young people with the skills and characteristics needed.

Business can help develop and create economically viable, cohesive communities not only by supporting young people in schools, but also by creating pathways into work. This can be achieved through traineeships and apprenticeships as well as traditional graduate recruitment routes.

HS2 is now leading the way on behalf of the transport sector to address this issue. Recent research has warned that failure to meet the demand for engineering roles could cost the UK economy £27 billion.

Figures show that 1.82 million engineering jobs will need to be filled nationwide between 2012 and 2022. However, there is currently an annual shortfall of 55,000 skilled workers within the industry.

Today, Yorkshire and Humberside account for more than 7% of the demand for these engineering jobs. This means the City Region needs 13,000 people to enter the sector each year to keep pace with demand. The only way this can be achieved is for industry to

start heavily recruiting apprentices now. This is why HS2 is working with Business in the Community and other partners to address this issue.

Locating the National High Speed Rail College in Doncaster, one of the two centres of excellence for high speed rail engineering to support HS2, will provide training for the rail engineers of tomorrow. We need to work together to attract the brightest and best talent who will have the innovation, skills and technical expertise needed to deliver the HS2 project.

Looking forward, it is critical that the message about the importance of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) related subjects and the career opportunities that these bring are reinforced with our young people. Collectively we need to get out there and inspire them into the engineering sector.

As the Lead Corporate Advisor for the transport sector for Business in the Community (BITC) I advise and support transport businesses and broader industry to meet the challenges of creating thriving communities and a sustainable future.

BITC was created by Prince Charles 30 years ago to drive responsible business practices.

Now, 30 years on we have one of the largest and most influential networks of its kind, with 850 members in the UK and more than 10,700 global partners and are now part of "The Prince's Responsible Business Network".

One of our members in the Sheffield City Region is Linbrooke Services who provide signalling, power and electrical and telecommunications training for apprentices.

They are a classic example of how a business in the City Region is gearing up and getting poised to develop the training and skills required to deliver a 21st century rail network.