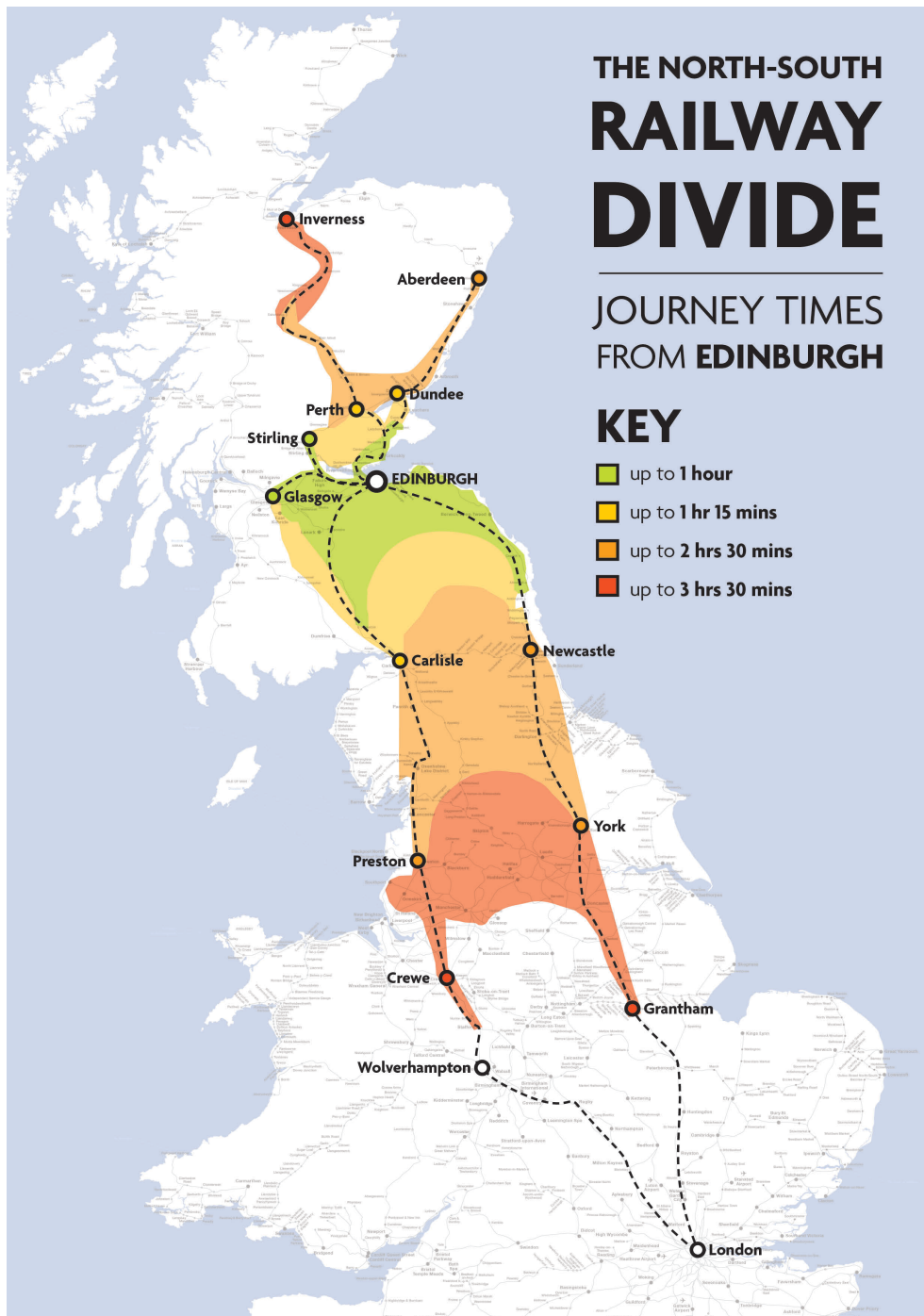


THE NORTH-SOUTH RAILWAY DIVIDE

JOURNEY TIMES FROM EDINBURGH

KEY

- up to 1 hour
- up to 1 hr 15 mins
- up to 2 hrs 30 mins
- up to 3 hrs 30 mins



Scotland's rail network in the Central Belt has seen major investments over the last few years with new lines, electrification and new trains. This has led to improved journey times by rail and the opportunity for many more people to choose the train over the car and therefore opt for a much safer form of transport. Much the same is true on routes south to England where passenger numbers on both the East and West Coast Main Lines continue to grow. Looking further ahead, the Scottish Government has been an enthusiastic advocate of high-speed rail from Scotland to the south in order to encourage modal shift to rail and further improve journey times.

The picture north of the Central Belt provides a stark contrast, as demonstrated by the map provided. Successive Scottish Governments have focused capital expenditure on roads, with £3bn being committed for dualling the A9 and a further £3bn for dualling the A96 in recent years. Due to a failure to provide adequate investment in rail infrastructure north of the Central Belt, rail in many cases is not time-competitive with travel by car, leading to people choosing to travel by road. Journey times by rail are demonstrated in the map provided.

Aberdeen is just 130 miles north from Edinburgh and yet the journey time is the same as that to York -- some 205 miles to the south. For Inverness, 175 miles north of Edinburgh, the contrast is even more striking: by opting to travel south, one could instead be in the West Midlands almost 300 miles south of Edinburgh in the same time that it takes to go north to Inverness.

Similarly, journey times between Edinburgh-Carlisle are faster than between Edinburgh-Perth, despite Carlisle being around double the distance from Edinburgh than Perth. Journey times between Edinburgh-Perth are around 75 minutes, compared to around 45 minutes by car. This is due to rail services to Perth having to travel round the Fife coast. For commuters, business travellers and tourists alike, travel by rail is clearly uncompetitive with rail. The reinstatement of the direct rail line between Edinburgh and Perth would reduce journey times by around 40%.

If the Scottish Government is to achieve its stated ambition of "making rail travel between the cities quicker than by car" then substantial improvements are urgently needed on the rail routes to the north. As others have said before, they are currently not fit for purpose and certainly do not represent an inter-city rail network fit for the 21st century. There needs to be a rebalancing of capital expenditure from road to rail in order to deliver a competitive and reliable rail network which works for commuters and tourists alike.