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Government to Transform Disused Railway Land into 40,000 New Homes

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In a move to tackle the UK's long-standing housing shortage, the government has unveiled a £1 billion initiative to build up to 40,000 homes on disused railway sites across the country. Over the next ten years, the long-term development strategy will target former railway yards, derelict stations, and other idle industrial land.

The first phase of the plan will focus on developments in Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, and Cambridge. These projects form part of a broader “brownfield first” policy, which prioritises the redevelopment of previously used land to help preserve greenfield

areas and boost urban regeneration. Ministers have said this approach will contribute to creating vibrant neighbourhoods close to existing transport links.

While the scheme offers a new route to increasing housing supply, the interim goal of 15,000 homes in five years remains just a small part of the government's larger promise to deliver 1.5 million new homes within the current parliament. That wider target is already under significant pressure due to existing construction delays and mounting regulatory burdens.

The Department for Transport plans to attract £350 million in private sector investment to support the rollout of these new housing developments. This funding will support residential builds and new community infrastructure, including shops, green spaces, and hotels, to form fully functional mixed-use communities.

A new body, Platform4, is being set up to drive the programme forward. It will merge the functions of London and Continental Railways and Network Rail's Property Development Team. According to the Department for Transport, this consolidation is intended to overcome inefficiencies caused by a previously fragmented approach to managing railway land.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said the initiative would boost jobs and local economies while delivering much-needed housing: "It's exciting to picture the thousands of families who will live in these future homes, the vibrant neighbourhoods springing up, and the new businesses that will launch thanks to these developments."

Bek Seeley, the current chair of London and Continental Railways, has been appointed to lead Platform4.

Despite the optimism, the homebuilding industry has warned that serious challenges remain. The National Federation of Builders (NFB), which represents firms across the sector, says red tape is already holding back developments at scale. According to the group, more than 40,000 homes are currently delayed due to regulatory holdups, including 700 projects awaiting clearance from the Building Safety Regulator (BSR), which was introduced following the Grenfell Tower disaster to oversee the safety of high-risk buildings.

Rico Wojtulewicz, Head of Policy and Market Insight at the NFB, acknowledged the merits of the railway land plan but highlighted wider cost issues across the sector: "Building houses

near to railway lines was a ‘winning blueprint’ because stations’ already connect up local and regional communities’,” he said. However, he also pointed out that government policy was driving up construction costs “on at least ten fronts.”

The BSR has admitted that many of the planning applications submitted have taken longer to review than expected, with around 70% being rejected for failing to meet legal safety standards. According to industry leaders, this backlog is prompting small firms to exit the construction sector altogether, causing further strain on training programmes and apprenticeships.