

STOP HS2

No business case.
No environmental case.
No money to pay for it.

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HS2- The Rich Mans Toy

“A new high speed network would bleed the rest of the railway of money and care. Is that what travellers really want?”

Simon Jenkins, The Guardian.

HS2- “The Rich Man’s Toy”

On 13th September 2011, Secretary of State for Transport Philip Hammond showed his complete lack of empathy with commuters struggling to cope with his eye-watering fare rises, telling the Transport Select Committee inquiry into HS2 that trains have become “A rich mans toy”.

Mr Hammond also concluded that whilst a factory worker in Manchester would most likely never use the £33 billion project in his lifetime, that wouldn’t matter because his boss would use it.

At the same Select Committee evidence session, after failing to answer MPs questions on the fare structure, Sir Brian Briscoe, Chair of HS2 Ltd, told the committee that “The business case for HS2 is independent of the fare structure”, but the business case clearly shows that the government expect the business people who will use HS2 to earn an average of £68,000 p.a. HS2 is most definitely a rich mans toy.

How did we get here?

In January 2009, Lord Adonis set up HS2 Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Department for Transport. Their brief was not to look at what Britain’s transport network needed strategically, but simply to build a case for high speed rail and design the first stage.

The warning signs have been there since 2006, when in his DfT commissioned transport study, Sir Rod Eddington stated;

“The challenge to be tackled was not fully understood before a solution was generated, due to intense political lobbying from advocates. The decision on this scheme was not informed by detailed appraisals of specific high-speed rail proposals, or against appraisals of other policy options for achieving the same objectives.”

"Too much is being spent on these big vanity projects, such as High Speed 2, and not enough on local schemes that will offer practical benefits in people's daily lives."

Andrew Lee, Former Director of the Sustainable Development Commission.



International Comparisons

One of the constantly repeated arguments from proponents of HS2 is that we need to 'catch up' with other countries. The reality is that when journey times in Britain from the capital to major cities are compared with France, Germany, Italy and Spain, Britain already wins.

Portugal have been told to suspend HSR construction as a bailout condition; Spain has already cut services; Dutch plans have been cut back; and in Taiwan the network has been bailed out by Government.

China's network has been plagued with problems, has caused \$304bn of debt and they can only just cover the interest on loans. In every country, the reason for these failures are the same: extortionately high costs and unrealistic passenger forecasts.

In France, fare rises caused SNCF president Guillaume Pépy to say;

"The whole basis of the high-speed rail revolution, that the TGV should be the "normal" means of travel, not just something affordable by the business elite, is under threat."

High Speed Rail was first proposed in John Major's 1997 manifesto following a 1996 EU directive for a European High Speed Rail Network, and whilst it was put on the drawing board under the last Labour Government, Philip Hammond has described HS2 as a "Conservative policy won in opposition."

There is still a complete lack of strategic thinking regarding the proposals for HS2, which started from a position of "High Speed Rail is the answer, now what is the question?" Since then the arguments to support HS2 have been retrofitted. This is why none of them fit the evidence or stand up to any scrutiny.



“The economic justification for HS2 is weak – very weak”

The Adam Smith Institute.



High Speed Rail- At what cost?

The headline cost for HS2 is stated to be £33bn for the ‘Y’ network to Leeds and Manchester. If this figure is accurate, it would represent an ongoing cost of around £2bn per year for 15 years. As the DfT infrastructure budget has remained unscathed in the cuts, Philip Hammond has stated that we will not notice this as it is what Crossrail (which is already due to complete two years late) is currently costing.

Besides being a Government construction project and liable to huge over-runs, the £33bn has been calculated without producing a route from Birmingham to Manchester and Leeds and HS2 Ltd are still unsure how many stations there will be.

There are glaring errors in the published plans between London & Birmingham, such as the fact there is not one single farm or foot bridge within the current proposal.

Nor will HS2 help to reduce the North-South divide – quite the reverse. The government’s own figures show that the great majority of the jobs created will be in and around London. The experience with HS1 in Kent questions whether projected local regeneration benefits will actually materialise.

Additionally the Environmental Impact Analysis, which will reveal the true cost of environmental mitigation, has not yet been produced. All of these issues will drive up the cost of HS2 well beyond £33bn. There are many other economically and socially beneficial infrastructure projects which offer far better value for money.

When looking at environmental concerns, despite HS2 Ltd saying the project is ‘broadly carbon neutral’, this is highly unlikely to be the case. Any reduction in internal flights as a result of transfer to rail will be more than cancelled out as vacated slots will go to international flights.

HS2 was the last issue Labour’s Sustainable Development Commission commented on before they were abolished by The Coalition. Besides stating that HS2 is completely unsustainable they said;

“HS2 will mean putting in a massive ongoing subsidy to something which only benefits the richest in society.”

At this time of austerity, is that really what Britain needs?