

## **High Speed Rail: Investing in Britain's Future – Response from Campaign for Better Transport to consultation from Department for Transport**

### **Summary**

This response mainly considers the general case for and against the proposed new High Speed Line. The response answers questions one, two and three of the consultation but does not comment on the specific questions on the line of route and how it was chosen.

It is difficult to assess the case for HS2 in the absence of a transport strategy that places it within wider strategy for roads, airports and aviation taxation, planning, local public transport, lorry charging and other areas. The business case must be much more rigorously tested against various scenarios than it has been hitherto.

It still needs to be demonstrated that the planned HS2 would ensure a real shift to rail travel from driving and flying and would cut carbon emissions as a result. This requires at least three things:

- Continued investment in the existing rail network
- Ensuring that sustainable and convenient access is provided to stations and that local transport services can cope
- Introducing complementary measures to make rail more attractive than car or air travel

### **1. Do you agree that there is a strong case for enhancing the capacity and performance of Britain's inter-city rail network to support economic growth over the coming decades?**

Campaign for Better Transport has been involved in the debates on the merits of the proposals for the HS2 route from London to Birmingham and beyond since they were initially developed by the last government. Campaign for Better Transport chief executive Stephen Joseph is a member of the HS2 challenge group and we have also worked with a range of other environmental organisations to coordinate responses to the proposals and to arrange meetings with officials and ministers.

There is a tendency for much of the debate on HS2 to be dominated by those backing the idea of high speed rail on the one hand (who can be less concerned with discussion of alternatives in the desire to see the scheme through) and those opposed at all costs to the proposals (often because they are directly affected but using wider arguments to try to oppose the plans). With other organisations, we have focussed on the details of what is being proposed and are backing the Right Lines Charter Group's work to ensure that if high speed rail proposals do go ahead, then they are done well.

Campaign for Better Transport's focus generally is more on people's everyday transport and, in the context of rail, that services are accessible, affordable and convenient. There is a danger that too much focus on the

new proposals for high speed rail will deflect attention away from the improvements we need on the existing “classic” railway.

That said, we agree that there is a need to enhance the capacity of the inter-city rail network (and many other rail lines). Decarbonising the current transport system will mean growing demand for rail travel, which will need increased capacity to accommodate this. But the high speed lines must be part of an overall improvement across the network with both continued electrification of lines and enhanced performance both in terms of number of services and their speeds. High speed rail therefore should be developed with a mind to the need to cut carbon, as well as support economic development.

HS2 should also support greater social inclusion, for instance as part of rebalancing our economy away from London and ensuring that the price of fares means that it is not a railway just for the rich. By enabling a shift from air and vehicle traffic, it can also have quality of life benefits.

However, as noted by Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), without wider complementary policies the net benefits could be limited or even lead to net costs. Space freed up on runways and roads could be filled by new flights and traffic, leading to overall increases in carbon emissions and reductions in tranquillity. Improved transport links to weaker regions could lead to stronger regions sucking economic vitality out of them, in what has been described as the ‘two-way road’ effect<sup>1</sup>. Because of the lack of a long term transport policy or clarity about sub-national planning following the abolition of the regional tier, there presently is a great deal of uncertainty about the policy context.

Campaign for Better Transport has called for a clearer national transport strategy for a number of years. Decisions about transport investments, particularly when the sums involved are of the scale of tens of billions of pounds over a number of decades, must be clearly part of a coherent national strategy rather than merely justified on the basis of a benefit cost ratio (BCR).

### **Right Lines Charter Group proposals**

Campaign for Better Transport is a member of the Right Lines Charter Group, which is a grouping of environmental NGOs seeking to ensure that if high speed rail proposals are to go ahead, they are done well. We have worked closely with the CPRE in the development of the Charter, including organising recent meetings with Secretary of State Philip Hammond and officials. The Charter<sup>2</sup> sets out four priorities for high speed rail:

- Principle 1. **National Strategy:** High Speed Rail proposals need to be set in the context of a long-term transport strategy stating clear objectives.
- Principle 2. **Testing the Options:** Major infrastructure proposals, such as High Speed Rail, need to be ‘future-proofed’ by comprehensive testing against different scenarios. This will help identify the best solutions for genuinely furthering sustainable development.
- Principle 3. **Public Participation:** Early public involvement in the development of major infrastructure proposals, including High Speed Rail, is essential. People need to be involved when all options are open for discussion and effective participation can take place.
- Principle 4. **Minimising Adverse Impacts:** High Speed Rail proposals need to be designed from the start to avoid significant adverse impacts on the natural environment, cultural heritage and local communities (including biodiversity, landscape, tranquillity and access) during construction and operation.

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<sup>1</sup> SACTRA, *Transport and the Economy*, DfT, 1996

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/transport/item/download/531> for details of the Charter

## **2. Do you agree that a national high speed rail network from London to Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester would provide the best value for money solution for enhancing rail capacity and performance?**

Both proponents and critics of HS2 have focused on the published business case and its assessment of time savings, demand forecasts and carbon savings. The reality of HS2 is that the numbers are inherently unreliable. They are based on business as usual forecasts extrapolating past trends, which for a long term business case will inevitably not prove accurate.

For example, higher oil prices will drive up rail demand beyond the level assumed in the business plan, while extra rail capacity, if used for railfreight or local passenger trains, will help reduce carbon beyond the HS2 forecasts, especially if allied with supportive planning policies and less rather than more roads and runways. The time savings values are also spurious and we have criticised reliance on them in transport appraisal more generally.

The real question for HS2 is how it fits with a wider package of policies in a coherent transport strategy. It is difficult to make assumptions about HS2 without clarity on what will happen to roads, airports, planning, local public transport, lorry charging, aviation taxes and other Government policies. The business case does address this to some extent with a short discussion on scenarios based on changes in relative pricing and this should be subject to wider discussion than it has been. However, the business case should have included more discussion of a range of plausible future scenarios for travel that take into account the Climate Change Act 2008 targets or the EU targets to shift longer distance travel to rail.

### **Remaining questions for high speed rail**

The plans for HS2 still need to do more to demonstrate that the line will result in a real shift to rail from driving and flying and, as a result, cut carbon emissions from transport. Transport produces a fifth of our domestic emissions and is still the sector where little fundamental progress on carbon has been made. The Department for Transport's model for the first phase of the high speed network suggests that there will be just a one per cent drop in motorway traffic as a result with most trips on the new line being from those who would otherwise have travelled on the old west coast mainline. Not surprisingly, the best that this scenario can do is to be "broadly carbon neutral".

But the scale of the climate change challenge requires us to do much more - particularly with HS2's price tag running into the tens of billions. To do this, the government has to do three things. Firstly, it should continue to invest in the existing (or "classic") rail network. Secondly, it needs to enable investment in local sustainable transport access to stations. And thirdly, it should introduce complementary measures to make rail more attractive than driving or flying.

The Secretary of State has recognised in public statements that spending on HS2 needs to be additional to continued investment in the classic network. Spending on rail has been maintained in this CP4 spending period (if at the expense of massive rises in most ticket prices). But the real challenge will be after 2015 when the main costs of HS2 will come in and when it will compete with other schemes that have been "moved to the right" in the next CP5 investment period. To cut carbon, the government must continue with further electrification of lines in this period and in growing the railways.

Continued investment in rail is also essential if the benefits of the "liberated capacity" on the West Coast Mainline are to be fully realised. Released capacity could deliver benefits for passengers<sup>3</sup>, for instance through new timetabling to enable more services and investment in improved links and lines like the proposed East West rail link, and could help deliver increased freight usage. This requires continued support

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<sup>3</sup> See *Capturing the benefits of HS2 on existing lines*, Greengauge, February 2011

for rail freight, for instance by ensuring that the final published National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for spatial planning supports the development of rail freight depots.

Using the planning system to foster growth and locate new development (such as warehousing and housing) to take advantage of these extra services would increase the benefits from HS2, which are not currently taken account of in DfT's business case.

New stations on the high speed route must be accessible by public transport if they are not to add to congestion and carbon. Local transport investment has been significantly scaled back to 2015 but new stations need to be linked to existing and improved local transport networks, as well as being easily accessible for those coming on foot or by bike. Providing investment for local transport improvements will be key and will help avoid overloading already stretched local transport services. The new stations for the second phase of HS2 should be located close to existing city centres rather than in stand-alone parkway stations.

Both high speed rail and classic rail must be attractive in terms of pricing relative to flying and driving. Since 1997 the cost of motoring has fallen by seven per cent in real terms and the cost of flights within the UK fell by a third. Rail fares rose by 17% over the same period, and will now rise even faster with the Government's decision for most fares to rise by three per cent above the RPI inflation rate.

The detailed business case published with the HS2 consultation shows that if rail fares continue to rise, its benefits will be much less - so much less that they will be outweighed by the costs of the project. Campaign for Better Transport's Fair Fares Now campaign shows the strength of feeling from those facing fare rises.

### **3. Do you agree with the Government's proposals for the phased roll-out of a national high speed rail network, and for links to Heathrow Airport and to the High Speed 1 line to the Channel Tunnel**

The phased development of the network makes sense if it is part of the overall strategic planning used for rail that enables the development of the network as a whole. The most significant wider economic benefits for high speed rail could be in developing the cities of the north of England and the Midlands into one economic space, helping rebalance the economy.

In terms of the link to Heathrow, Campaign for Better Transport agrees with Lord Mawhinney's conclusion in his report<sup>4</sup> for the Department for Transport that a Heathrow link is not necessary at this stage and that the existing rail network should be used to link Heathrow with high-speed rail connecting London with other British cities and the rest of Europe.

The question of HSR connections to Heathrow is also linked to whether there is a full link and through trains between HS2 and HS1. This will enlarge the market where rail can substitute for air to include journeys between the UK regions and near-Europe destinations. However, all the impacts of using the North London line as a link need to be fully explored.

## **Conclusion**

HS2 could deliver the step-change in travel that we need to cut carbon and support the future needs of the economy, but it must be part of an overall strategy to shift to rail for many journeys. A decision to go-ahead

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<sup>4</sup> High speed rail access to Heathrow: a report by Lord Mawhinney, Department for Transport, July 2010

with this level of spending needs wider support. Failure to demonstrate how HS2 fits into an overall strategy for transport will risk losing green groups as a key element of that wider support.

However, critics of the proposals need to address how the increase in demand for travel for the Birmingham-London route will be met. Even if there is little change in the split of modes for travel on the Birmingham-London route, demand for rail travel on this route will outstrip the capacity of the existing network. If there are policies to restrain demand for car and air travel (and even with policies to reduce the need to travel overall), there will still be a need to address the capacity issue and this would be likely to lead to an overall rise in the demand for rail travel.

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Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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