

*promoting quality public transport.....*

21<sup>st</sup> July 2011

## **Evidence from TravelWatch NorthWest to the Department of Transport's consultation on High Speed Rail**

TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent organisation representing all public transport users in NW England. We are pleased to give the following views on the questions raised in the consultation. A document setting out our Position Statement (Revised) on High Speed Rail is also attached.

### **Question 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?**

Yes and the majority of the TWNW Board is in favour of the principle of HSR in Britain. The main argument for HS2 is **primarily an increase in capacity to meet growth beyond the capacity of the existing system**. It will also bring economic benefits to the north. A high speed rail network provides fast and convenient city to city transport over distances of up to 500 miles. Deutsch Bahn have found HS rail a highly effective competitor to air on rail journeys of up to 4 hours and still competitive up to six hours due to the hassle factor of travel to and from the airport and potential problems at the airport.

A minority view from the TWNW Board is that ultra high speed lines of the type proposed have to be very straight and are therefore very unforgiving to the landscape and the communities they pass through in visual terms and in the noise they emit. They have to be serviced by trains which demand so much energy that their carbon footprint is at best neutral and at worst negative. And, in return for these downsides, the time saved would be marginal in a small county such as the UK, existing rail services would be seriously impaired and the benefits promised are questionable. It could well be the case that the only place which really benefit is London and having a slightly faster journey to there from Birmingham and Manchester merely encourages more people to live in those two cities but work in London.

Additional road building takes up more space than rail, is more intrusive to nearby residences, raises air quality issues in the surrounding area, generates more unsustainable travel and currently is less environmentally friendly. It is also equally expensive and leaves cities with major problems in dealing with incoming cars. It could be argued that whilst the overall direct impact of HSR on carbon emissions may be small, the overall impact including all spin-off benefits will be substantial as it will encourage rail travel in place of car or air.

Also the alternatives of further air and road travel growth are currently more likely to cause environmental and noise damage in excess of HSR. The latter also has options for varying power generation sources.

Forecasts that the development and increasing use of information technology would reduce the demand for travel have not been borne out by the evidence in passenger numbers throughout the British rail system. Increasing congestion of roads and motorways, coupled with rapidly increasing fuel costs and a growing environmental awareness, have done, and will continue, to drive more passengers – and freight – onto the railways.

Recent figures show that even in the middle of a major economic downturn, passenger usage is up by 6.6% during the 12 months to March 2011. This figure is likely to rise further when the economy returns to normal and fuel costs increase for private cars.

Pricing rail travel off the system to reduce demand (which is already happening on a significant scale) is bad for the economy, bad for global warming, bad for modal split and is likely to lead to more travel demand by road. Alternative modes are already at or near capacity.

There is little evidence that computer working has so far reduced the demand for travel in general. On the other hand, with increased free time, leisure travel is growing. It is noticeable that despite the depression passenger growth on many rural/tourist lines in the North West have shown continued growth. It is in Britain's economic interest to foster tourism from overseas which is also growing as other countries become more prosperous. Tourists tend to visit environmentally sensitive cities and rural areas and are thus best transported by rail. Many tourists prefer to use rail in view of the confusion caused by driving on the left.

It is noticeable that practically all UK line and station re-openings have exceeded the passenger numbers expected by government estimates.

Note should also be taken of the anticipated increase in population in the UK and the attendant increased travel demands that will bring.

**Question 2 Do you agree that a national high speed rail network from London to Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester (the Y network) would provide the best value for money solution (best balance of costs and benefits) for enhancing rail capacity and performance?**

As declared above we are in favour of a national high speed rail network. However, it is vitally important that concentration on the HS2 project does not deprive the existing route network of investment or continuing development. HS2 expenditure must be in addition to ongoing spending on rail. In addition the spin-off benefits of HS2 on other parts of the rail network must be fully exploited.

Investment in local rail based systems must continue and be expanded, including light rail in cities such as Leeds and Liverpool. HSR will not achieve its full potential if local connections are still slow, unreliable and infrequent.

The Y configuration is basically the right choice, serving Manchester and Liverpool on the west and Sheffield and Leeds on the east. It is important that HS trains should continue beyond Birmingham and beyond the limits of subsequent stages (as on the Continent) to serve the NW, Yorkshire, the NE and Glasgow/Edinburgh. HS stations should be located in the regional centres with good interchange with existing rail networks rather than at regional airports. This will mean tunnelling in most cases.

To serve the East Midlands and to allow HS travel between provincial cities consideration could be given to ultimately extending the Y into a diamond shape with the left hand proceeding Birmingham - Manchester - Leeds and the right Nottingham – Leeds.

Experience in the on-line upgrading of the West Coast route, the main works of which were extended at vast sum over a period of ten years up to 2007, is not one which users of the line would wish to see repeated with the extensive disruptions to services and unreliability they endured during that time. In any case most of the route is not suitable for further upgrading to HS engineering requirements.

It has cost approximately £10bn to increase the speed of the existing West Coast line to 125 mph. To increase its speed to 140 mph (the potential top speed of current stock) **and** increase the number of tracks to meet a necessary increase in capacity is likely to end up costing as much as HS2 without the High speed access to other UK and European cities which is the base case.

While the higher socio-economic groups may be expected to be the main beneficiaries, spin off benefits onto other rail routes will benefit a wide range of users and locations, some which are not anywhere near the actual HS route. The HSR provision should not be seen as the 'rich man's railway' by virtue of charging premium fares.

There will also be advantages for freight. By removing substantial passenger movements from the classic network it should be possible for some paths to be released for additional freight movements, with consequential environmental benefits. However this must be balanced with the provision of more frequent local train services using capacity released from removal of longer distance trains.

HS2 could also provide a suitable route for international freight movements. Tests are currently under way on HS1 with high speed freight trains. New locomotives and stock are not required for this as the existing container trains already run through to the continent via the tunnel and the class 92 locomotives can also work through to France.

**Question 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 the High Speed 1 line to the Channel Tunnel?**

We have always advocated that any HSR proposals are seen as logical parts of a much longer term strategy for the provision of a network of new lines to connect the various nations and regions of the UK with London and each other.

However the current proposals do not indicate how a high speed network would be extended to serve the further parts of northern England, Scotland or other regions of the UK. The lack of a longer-term and wider strategy could well lead to costly white elephants as has resulted with the concentration of HS1 services at St Pancras International leaving the expensive development of Waterloo station and its connections now abandoned after a life of little more than a decade. Questions needing to be answered now include that of whether Manchester should be served by a terminus station or a through station which would allow trains to proceed onwards to Scotland. From a North West standpoint the latter is far preferable to facilitate high speed links with Scotland further into the future.

Admittedly, building the network in stages starting from London is probably the only practicable option but it is crucial that the network is planned and approved as whole system and built as a rolling programme, not separately funded and approved sections

The link to HS1 as part of Phase 1 is an important one for through travel to and from the continent. However due regard should be paid to those passengers for whom through services from the regions to the continent are not convenient or frequent. They will require the best possible connections between HS2 & HS1.

We originally felt that the case for linking the NW and Heathrow was limited but we recognize the need for major improvement in the connectivity between Heathrow and the North of England. The route as planned now is some distance from the Airport. If the Governments argument for HS2+ involves reduction of internal flights thus lessening the need for a third runway it is important that high speed rail transport to the Midlands, North and Scotland is provided at Heathrow at some stage.

**Question 4 Do you agree with the principles and specification used by HS2 Ltd to underpin its proposals for new high speed rail lines and the route selection process HS2 Ltd undertook?**

It is vitally important that major stations along the HS2 route, e.g. London, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, are all built in close proximity to existing stations to avoid the inconvenience and time penalty of changing with the classic network. To build any station on the outskirts of a city and then expect

passengers to change onto a transport link will prove to be a disincentive to travel and will negate the attraction of an otherwise high speed journey.

For example, any terminus in Birmingham should ideally be co-joined to New Street station especially as connections at the new interchange station with Birmingham Airport International station will be less extensive than from New Street. Euston is problematical for those changing from HS2 to HS1 as intimated above. Ideally a terminus with in-station pedestrian connection to HS1 and Euston would be preferable, with allowance for trains from the North to stop and continue their journeys to the continent without changes.

If HS train length is an issue with station location and design consideration could be given to double-deck trains which would obviate the need for very long platforms and hence stations by almost providing a full train capacity in just over half the length. However if HS trains are to travel onwards on the existing classic network (as they should following completion of stage 1) this would mean two fleets, unless major gauge enhancement work was carried out on appropriate parts of that classic network. An alternative proposition would be for portion working as is currently the practice on Deutsch Bahn's high speed lines. This whole area is a complex one to which careful examination should be given.

Selective Park and Ride stations should be an integral part of HS2, whilst keeping the number of station stops as low as possible to avoid destroying the benefits of high speed (some 'skip stop' operation may be necessary). The criteria should be to minimise total journey time including access time and ensure maximum connectivity with other main line and local rail services

**Question 5 Do you agree that the Government's proposed route, including the approach proposed for mitigating its impacts, is the best option for a new high speed rail line between London and the West Midlands?**

We would have preferred a route paralleling existing transport corridors i.e. motorways. However we can see the need to pass close to Heathrow Airport.

It is inevitable that there will be substantial disruption during construction but the fact that most of the route will be on new alignment should reduce the impacts of existing rail services to those locations where the two systems are adjacent, e.g. Euston and Birmingham International.

The environmental problems which have been highlighted will mainly be short term during the building of the line, and will be offset by the obvious difference between an electrified high speed railway and six lane plus motorway which would be the only alternative. (ENDS)