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NORTHWEST

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***promoting quality public transport*.....**

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Evidence from TravelWatch NorthWest to the House of Commons Transport Committee's Inquiry into the strategic case for 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 by the Committee on High Speed Rail. A document setting out our Position Statement (Revised) on High Speed Rail is also attached.

1. What are the main arguments either for or against HSR.

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.

The main arguments against are its very high cost and the environmental impacts along the route. 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 it from Birmingham and Manchester merely encourages more people to live in those two cities but work in London

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2. How does HSR fit with the Government's transport policy objectives

2.1 HSR is designed to improve inter-urban connectivity. How does that objective compare in importance to other transport policy objectives and spending programmes, including those for the strategic road network?

Inter-urban connectivity is important but the need to reduce the north-south divide and the need to combat climate change is also important. There is little point in spending large sums on the highway network. 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.

2.2 Focusing on rail, what would be the implications of expenditure on HSR on funding for the 'classic' network, for example in relation to investment to increase track and rolling stock capacity in and around major cities?

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.

Recent announcements by the government for further major rail investment in the classic network, including route electrification in the north west, seems to belie concerns about diversion of investment into a high speed project.

2.3 What are the implications for domestic aviation?

Domestic aviation should be reduced or even eliminated because of its adverse environmental impacts and the need to reallocate airport capacity to longer haul flights, without the need to invest in new runways. HSR will assist that change.

3. Business case

3.1 How robust are the assumptions and methodology – for example, on passenger forecasts, modal shifts, fare levels, scheme costs, economic assumptions (e.g. about the value of time) and the impact of lost revenue on the 'classic' network?

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.

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.

3.2 What would be the pros and cons of resolving capacity issues in other ways, for example by upgrading the West Coast Main Line or building a new conventional line?

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.

3.3 What would be the pros and cons of alternative means of managing demand for rail travel, for example by price?

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.

3.4 What lessons should the Government learn from other major transport projects to ensure that any new high speed lines are built on time and to budget?

Projects that have been built on time and within budget should be compared with those that have not to define the features that are essential for success. We should learn from those who have done it, particularly the French, instead of trying to re-invent wheels.

4. The strategic route

4.1 The proposed route to the West Midlands has stations at Euston, Old Oak Common, Birmingham International and Birmingham Curzon Street. Are these the best possible locations? What criteria should be used to assess the case for more (or fewer) intermediate stations?

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 would need to be co-joined to New Street station. In London to terminate HS2 at a separate station from HS1 would make connections worse and discourage usage. 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. This is a complex area to which the Committee should give careful examination.

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

4.2 Which cities should be served by an eventual high speed network? Is the proposed Y configuration the right choice?

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 extending the Y into a diamond shape with the left hand proceeding Birmingham - Manchester - Leeds and the right Nottingham – Leeds.

4.3 Is the Government correct to build the network in stages, moving from London northwards?

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.

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

4.4 The Government proposes a link to HS1 as part of Phase 1 but a direct link to Heathrow only as part of Phase 2. Are those the right decisions?

The link to HS1 as part of Phase 1 is an important one for through travel to and from the continent. 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.

5. Economic rebalancing and equity

5.1 What evidence is there that HSR will promote economic regeneration and help bridge the north-south economic divide?

The only real evidence in the UK is the economic benefits of HS1 which are considered to be much greater than estimates. Similar evidence can probably be found from France and Spain and of course Japan.

Subsequent extension beyond Birmingham (which should be a through station) and construction of the diamond (above) would enable the introduction of a high speed rail service between these cities e.g. Birmingham - Manchester - Leeds - Newcastle which would do a lot to promote provincial growth

5.2 To what extent should the shape of the network be influenced by the desirability of supporting local and regional regeneration?

Local and regional regeneration should be taken into account but not at the expense of the key criteria.

5.3 Which locations and socio-economic groups will benefit from HSR?

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**.**

5.4 How should the Government ensure that all major beneficiaries of HSR (including local authorities and business interests) make an appropriate financial contribution and bear risks appropriately? Should the Government seek support from the EU’s TEN-T programme?

It will be extremely difficult to attract financial contributions from Local Authorities or businesses. Added land value taxes may be one avenue worth exploring but difficult to administer. Any possible EU funds including TEN-T should be fully investigated.

6. Impact

6.1 What will be the overall impact of HSR on UK carbon emissions? How much modal shift from aviation and roads would be needed for HSR to reduce carbon?

The overall direct impact of HSR on carbon emissions may be small but the overall impact including all spin-off benefits should be substantial as it will encourage rail travel in place of car or air. Actual figures can only be determined by relevant studies.

6.2 Are environmental costs and benefits (including in relation to noise) correctly accounted for in the business case?

Environmental costs including noise should be fully accounted for in the business case, either as quantified or unquantified costs. A separate audit of the business case may be needed to ensure this requirement is met. The alternatives of further air and road travel growth are currently more likely to cause environmental and noise damage in excess of HS2. The latter also has options for varying power generation sources.

6.3 What would be the impact on freight services on the 'classic' network?

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.

6.4 How much disruption will be there to services on the 'classic' network during construction, particularly during the rebuilding of Euston?

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, eg 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)