

## Correspondence with the Department for Transport about HS2

20 July 2016

Paul Maynard, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Transport

Dear Mr Maynard

Congratulations on your new appointment. We thought it appropriate to copy the attached message to Mr Grayling to you and hope that you will be interested in the two reports attached.

Jonathan Tyler

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP / Secretary of State for Transport

Dear Mr Grayling

We understand your initial endorsement of the HS2 project but hope that you will have the opportunity to reconsider its place in the transport policy of the new government. With that in mind we would therefore like to commend to you the two attached reports.

In brief, we argue

- \* that the southern end of the West Coast Main Line is not as liable to future congestion as HS2's proponents claim;
- \* that HS2 will not bring as much relief as expected (no operational timetable has been published to demonstrate the supposed benefits);
- \* that such relief as may be needed could be provided more quickly through a combination of more straightforward measures; and
- \* that committing over £50 billion to a huge project at a time of great uncertainty is a strange way of addressing a modest congestion problem.

It has also been claimed that HS2 will contribute to connectivity, economic regeneration and tackling climate change. We argue that it is unlikely to contribute effectively to any of these.

In terms of connectivity, the use of peripheral stations and the lack of through running will limit its contribution. In terms of economic impact, it is at least as likely to benefit London as the North, and impacts in the North are likely to focus on Leeds and Manchester rather than areas in economic decline. In terms of sustainability, we cannot agree that HS2's plans will be effective. For example, using HS2 Ltd's own data, we note that increasing speed from 300 to 360km/h increases energy use by 23% yet only saves 3.5 minutes between London and Birmingham, while the energy required for constructing the line means that even on optimistic forecasts HS2 will not become carbon neutral until at least 2080. These characteristics are incompatible with international obligations to urgently reduce carbon emissions.

We wish you well in your new appointment and look forward to your development of national transport policy. We would of course be happy to discuss our report with you, your ministerial colleagues or your officials (we are copying this message to Paul Maynard).

Yours sincerely

Tony May [Emeritus Professor of Transport Engineering, the University of Leeds]

Jonathan Tyler [Passenger Transport Networks, York]

The two reports referred to can be found at [www.passengertransportnetworks.co.uk](http://www.passengertransportnetworks.co.uk)

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Our Ref: 170680

DATE: 18/08/2016

Dear Mr Tyler,

Thank you for your email of 20 July 2016 to the Parliamentary Under- Secretary, Paul Maynard, about High Speed 2 (HS2). He asked me to reply on his behalf.

One thing we must learn from recent events is the need to provide investment that brings our country closer together. HS2 project remains absolutely on track, with strong cross-party support. HS2 will be the new backbone of our national rail network and help build an economy that works for all. Good transport helps people get around and get on and is crucial to driving economic growth. That is why the government is heavily investing in transport infrastructure such as HS2 across the country, spreading opportunity and growth and bringing our country closer together. HS2 will create space for passengers on our crowded railways and increase connectivity between our cities, supporting growth and regeneration, generating thousands of jobs and bringing our country closer together.

The Government is committed to delivering a successful economy that is balanced across the UK. The benefits of high-speed rail will not just be seen by those travelling between London, the Midlands and the North, but through the thousands of local jobs and apprenticeships being created because of HS2 and through the space it will create on our existing railways for new train services. We welcome the National Audit Office's (NAO) findings that the strategic case for HS2 has been made, the project is making good progress, and we are on course to gain the powers needed to start building the railway by the end of this year. In particular, the NAO praised the progress made in taking forward the HS2 hybrid bill. Additionally, they went on to say that the strategic context and the objectives of HS2 are clearer than when we last reported, and that the business case includes more detail about the scale of potential future capacity shortages – particularly on the West Coast Main Line. The NAO's report also found that we had a plan in place to ensure the regeneration benefits are delivered and praised the 'significant achievement' of making good progress with the Parliamentary process.

You raised a number of specific concerns which I will briefly address;

- West Coast Main Line. The West Coast Main Line was upgraded less than 10 years ago and a more frequent timetable introduced. Since then, most of the Pendolinos have been lengthened and extra units have been introduced on London Midland services. However, we still see 16% of passengers in the peak hour having to stand because there are no seats. The number of additional train paths available on the Slow Lines is very limited and there are none on the Fast Lines. Soon, we will find ourselves in the position where all we can do to provide more capacity as demand continues to grow is to lengthen the remaining 8-car London Midland services to 12-cars. Adding capacity to the rail network is a lengthy process, however, that is what HS2 will do in the most congested part of WCML.
- Timetable. The Department published the Strategic Case for HS2 in October 2013, which set out the key aims for future service patterns, including that all towns or cities which currently have a direct service to London will retain broadly comparable or better services once HS2 is completed. Train timetables for 2026/27 and the 2030s will not be written for many years.

Developing balanced service solutions will take time, and this will need to involve all the communities, passengers and businesses affected.

- Cost control. We are committed to delivering within the funding envelope agreed at the Spending Review in 2015 £55.7bn and are pleased that the NAO recognises the cost savings we have identified. HS2 will bring over £60 billion of benefits to transport users and £14 billion of wider benefits – delivering more than £2.20 of benefits for every £1 of investment.
- Connectivity. Improvements to transport connectivity between the northern cities will be a key driver of the North becoming a 'Northern Powerhouse' for the UK's economy. HS2 will link eight of Britain's ten largest cities, serve one in five of the UK population and bring two-thirds of northern England within two hours' of London's markets. Analysis by KPMG shows that HS2 will boost national productivity, and that while all regions will benefit, the city regions in the Midlands and the North will do particularly well. Seventy per cent of jobs created by HS2 are expected to be outside London.
- Speed. In the January 2012 economic case, HS2 Ltd considered a 186mph (300kph) line and found that the increased journey times – which result in lower time savings and lower demand for HS2 services – meant that the benefit to cost ratio would fall. The route is being designed for the future, it anticipates faster speeds to ensure the railway can take up future technological innovations without having to create further new railways or adaptations to the HS2 route that would cause further impacts. The route of HS2 has been and continues to be developed. To date the railway has been developed looking at and narrowing down a broad range of route options that has accounted for environmental, operational, engineering and economic considerations.
- Journey Times. HS2 will result in a significant time saving from London to Birmingham of the current time of 1hr 21m to 49m.
- Carbon emissions. We are committed to minimising the carbon footprint of HS2 as far as practicable and deliver low carbon long distance journeys that are supported by low carbon energy. Even though trains use more power as they travel faster, the high levels of passenger usage that high speed trains attract will mean that 'greenhouse gas' carbon emissions per passenger will remain comparatively low.
- Alternatives. Independent studies have looked at the alternatives options to HS2. None of these options can be shown to offer the same scale of benefits as HS2. Even if we spent £20 billion patching and mending the existing main lines, it would deliver less than half the benefits of HS2, requiring weekend closures on the West Coast, East Coast and Midland Mainline for up to 14 years. They fail to deliver the same level of capacity or journey time savings and would cause significant disruption on the existing rail network. A link to the HS2 alternatives report can be found here;  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/253456/hs2-strategic-alternatives.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253456/hs2-strategic-alternatives.pdf)

I trust this helps to answer your questions; if you do however require further information on HS2 this is available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/developing-a-new-high-speed-rail-network>

I would like to thank you again for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,

Caitriona Moore

*Reply to DfT, 22 August 2016*

Dear Caitriona Moore

Thank you for your reply on behalf of Paul Maynard to my submission of a paper calling for a review of HS2. It is not obvious that the paper has been read in any depth, and I am disturbed by the certitude with which government policy on HS2 is repeatedly restated, despite the critiques from many quarters. I will, if I may, take a few issues from your reply (there are many more in the controversy), and I would be grateful if you would share these with Mr Maynard.

1. You say that the Government is "committed to minimising the carbon footprint of HS2 as far as practicable". In the context of the climate emergency and the promises made at COP in Paris last December that is not remotely justifiable. We should be discouraging travel at the margin and not building a huge scheme that on HS2's own figures will not offset the carbon input to its construction until the end of the century.

2. You refer to HS2 as "the new backbone of our national rail network". Would that it were ! From the start the problem has been that the route has been planned as a largely separate railway with rather begrudging links with the classic system. So we have:

- \* a terminus in Birmingham with poor connections with the local network and an awkward interchange for travellers from, say, York to Bristol (probably meaning that most will not use HS2);
- \* a late change of plan in Sheffield which HS2 Ltd obdurately opposed and which appears to have abandoned the urgent requirement for a fast link between Leeds and Sheffield; and
- \* no clear plan to ensure that the areas of Greater Manchester most in need of regeneration will benefit from HS2.

3. Regarding capacity on WCML you say that 'most' Pendolinos have 11 cars: I do not think that 35 out of 56 sets counts as 'most'. Moreover, it is technically possible for a 12th car to be added (except for Liverpool services), and a further car could be converted from First to Standard class. There is therefore scope for increasing the number of seats by about a third at a very modest cost. And in any case, since the average load factor on Virgin services is only 40%, more could be done through pricing to reduce overcrowding: building HS2 to allow people to leave London for the weekend cannot conceivably be the nation's highest priority, while your reference to 16% of peak-hour passengers standing ignores the point that in PiXC terms Euston is one of the least stressed London terminals.

4. I am astonished by your remark that timetables for 2026 "will not be written for many years". The timetable is the central feature both of railway operation and of the service offered to potential customers. Not to have proposals now risks mistakes in infrastructure design and in demand forecasting: you may be interested that the Swiss Government, working closely with all the public transport operators, has a detailed timetable for 2040 and centres all its planning and funding around it. Your remark raises questions such as these:

- \* what happens if ORR decides that two applicants for track access should be allowed to compete for, say, the Birmingham or Manchester business, leaving fewer paths for other places that have been promised direct HS2 services ?
- \* since 18 trains/hour is a highly ambitious proposition that will only work if the trains from/to the classic network are optimally timed, their paths must be prioritised, which means rewriting the entire national timetable – has that been considered, along with all its implications for the difficulties that may arise ?
- \* if "all towns or cities which currently have a direct service to London will retain broadly

comparable or better services once HS2 is completed" where is the scope for new services on the classic network, including the paths promised for freight trains ?

\* how much of the posited journey-time savings will be lost through interchange penalties for trips that are not centre-city to centre-city or by the extra time required to negotiate mega-stations such as Euston and possibly to be subjected to Eurostar-style security checks ?

\* has the effect of rebuilding Euston on existing WCML services been factored into the BCR and compared with the alleged disruption inherent in alternative schemes (which incidentally seems to take no account of Network Rail's recent achievements of rebuilding Reading and creating the Norton Bridge Flyover with relatively modest disruption) ?

5. You claim that "two-thirds of northern England" will be brought "within two hours' of London's markets". However that same northern population will be within two hours of London's businesses, and that may be the dominant factor – transport 'improvements' where one economy is stronger than the other have repeatedly benefited the stronger.

6. I share the objective of substantially improving public transport, but there are many strategies (including a comprehensive overhaul of our mediocre timetable) and projects that could deliver that more quickly at a much lower cost than HS2. You explain that the NAO has noted greater clarity in "the strategic context and the objectives of HS2" : surely they should have been crystal clear from the outset, leading to a more wide-ranging process of option-generation than has actually taken place ? Hence, at this time of global and national uncertainty, to commit to a blockbuster project that cannot yield benefits for at least ten years would seem to me (and many others) most unwise.

I hope that Mr Maynard will consider these points, and I would of course be more than happy to discuss them with him or one of his staff.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Tyler

Passenger Transport Networks, York

Department for Transport Great Minster House  
Our Ref: TO 173492

20 September 2016

Dear Mr Tyler

Thank you for your further letter of 22 August in response to the reply to your earlier letter that was sent by my colleagues Caitriona Moore.

I am sorry that you feel the plans for the High Speed 2 (HS2) stations in Birmingham will discourage passengers from using HS2. The terminus station at Curzon Street in Birmingham will be one of the largest new stations built in Britain in 100 years. An estimated 25,000 passengers will use it each day in 2026. This will increase to 66,000 in 2041, six years after completion of both Phases of HS2. The station will not only offer significant journey time reductions to other stations on the high speed network, but provide onward connection to numerous other local and national services at the nearby Moor Street, New Street and Snow Hill Stations.

Curzon Street was selected as the location for the Birmingham terminus station in part due to its proximity to the other central Birmingham stations that will provide onward journeys to the wider rail network. The station will be connected to local bus networks and there is further potential opportunity for interchange with a future Metro tram service currently being explored by CENTRO and Birmingham City Council.

Birmingham Interchange station will be a new 'parkway' station serving a wide area of the West Midlands. It will provide for a travel market not otherwise served by HS2 including Solihull, Coventry, Kenilworth, the east side of Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield, Tamworth and Nuneaton. It will also provide access to the National Exhibition Centre (NEC), Birmingham International station and Birmingham Airport. From Birmingham Interchange London will be 38 minutes away and Heathrow less than an hour. For local access a high capacity people mover is planned to connect the Interchange to the NEC, Birmingham International station and the airport terminal. The journey from the Interchange station to the airport will take approximately six minutes. Not only are all three strategic destinations, but as a 'parkway' station this location is within ten miles of Solihull, the east side of Birmingham, Coventry and the towns east of the conurbation.

The new station is anticipated to be a catalyst for economic growth in the immediate area and the wider sub-region. The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Strategy estimates that there is potential for 16,500 new jobs and 1900 new homes around the station.

It is estimated that for Phase One of HS2, over 40% of London-West Midlands passengers would use Birmingham Interchange rather than Curzon Street.

We do not accept that there are no plans to ensure that Greater Manchester will not benefit from HS2. The former chancellor announced the provision of

£3.75 million to enable Manchester and Leeds LEPs to accelerate work on their HS2 Growth Strategies in March of this year. These strategies will help to align the opportunities HS2 and the Northern Transport Strategy offer to the Northern Powerhouse and they will help spread the benefits further, faster. The Government is also bringing forwards 50% (i.e. £625,000) of HS2 growth strategy funding to the beginning of FY 2016/17 for Manchester Piccadilly, Manchester Airport and Leeds.

HS2 Growth Strategy funding complements the £60m being invested to develop plans for HS3 between Leeds and Manchester as well as plans for improving rail journeys between the North's other major cities.

HS2 Growth Strategies set out the vision and plans local partners have to harness the transformational potential of HS2. By bringing this funding forward, we are supporting local partners to integrate these investment programmes and maximise the wider benefits like housing and jobs.

No decision has yet been taken about the recommendations in Sir David Higgins' report for South Yorkshire. I can assure you that this decision is not being taken lightly. Before the Secretary of State reaches a decision about HS2 in South Yorkshire, he will want to consider the recommendations in the report in detail. It is his intention to make an announcement on the entire HS2 Phase Two route, of which South Yorkshire is a part, later this Autumn.

With regard to the effect of rebuilding Euston on existing West coast Mainline services it is inevitable that there will be some disruption with a project of this scale. Significant work has been undertaken by DfT, HS2 Ltd and Network Rail (NR) with the train operating companies to keep the disruption to the network from HS2 works to a minimum. This will continue during the design development of the construction of the Euston HS2 Station over the next few years.

HS2 Ltd holds regular meetings with residents, community groups and local authorities up and down the line to inform and reassure people about the construction and operation of HS2. As we move closer to construction HS2 Ltd will continue to work closely with stakeholders to find a way forward that allows us to build and operate HS2 with as little disruption as possible. HS2 Phase One remains on track for spades in the ground next year.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Curson  
High Speed Rail Group

*Reply to DfT, 28 September 2016*

Christopher Curson  
High Speed Rail Group  
Department for Transport

Dear Mr Curson

Thank you for your reply to my letter of 22 August (your reference TO 173492). I note that it took four weeks to produce it, and I was reluctant to burden you again. However I regard the reply as so unsatisfactory that I must do so.

Taking your points first:

- \* Reference to the size and expected usage of Curzon Street proves nothing. New Steet and Snow Hill are not 'nearby', and interchange between them and Curzon Street can never be good, however much money the City Council pours into the area (a cost which should of course be included in the HS2 budget). I know, since I lived in Birmingham for 11 years: the extra time for interchanging will greatly offset the time that HS2 saves, whether for local access journeys or for longer-distance passengers who presently have through trains. And you do not mention that Curzon Street was also chosen because various players saw a profitable redevelopment opportunity. Can you please point me to a detailed analysis of the likely future behaviour of West Midlands travellers with respect to Curzon Street ?
- \* You present Birmingham Interchange as a focus for huge expansion. This is a considerable extension of the original plans and runs counter to the urgent need to protect and promote the economic and social vitality of our great cities. Moreover, it is clear from your presentation of the plans that they will generate great volumes of travel by car at just the time when we should be discouraging that if we are to save the planet from catastrophe. They will certainly remove any remaining pretension that HS2 will yield carbon benefits. Incidentally, I would appreciate an explanation of how you calculate that Heathrow will be "less than an hour" away: that does not sound plausible.
- \* I take what you say about funding for the northern cities. However I have not seen any serious analysis of how HS2 at Manchester Piccadilly will help the outer boroughs of Greater Manchester (connected by an excellent but slow tram or by local train services only some of which run from Piccadilly). And of course the late invention of HS3 illustrates the planning muddle we find ourselves in: it all should have been part of a single plan, and I and my colleagues would argue that this alone is reason for a pause in HS2. Otherwise is there not a serious risk of abortive expenditure or of poor decisions if HS2 plans cannot be altered ?
- \* We await the Phase Two announcement with interest. I will be surprised if it goes back on the idea of using Sheffield Midland instead of Meadowhall since Sheffield clearly believes that that battle has been won. I also note references to another station in the area: this may, I accept, be mere speculation, but it is interesting because HS2 Ltd has adamantly rejected many similar proposals and it would therefore be another example of inconsistent planning.

\* In regard to Euston, I am sure that everyone is working for the best of all possible worlds - but is there a scheme in the public domain to illustrate the effect of the works on existing services so that users can judge whether the benefits of HS2 will justify it ? After all, alternatives to HS2 were dismissed partly on the grounds of unacceptable disruption, and I fear that Euston may be no different.

\* I notice that you refer to meetings "to inform and reassure people". That strikes me as supremely arrogant - have they no right to be *consulted* ? - and just the sort of elitist government which is causing so much disquiet and threatening political stability.

As regards my points:

1. You have completely ignored the vital matter of carbon outputs.
2. You have answered my point about connectivity with bland repetitions and given me no reason to believe that there is a coherent plan for the role of HS2 within a national network.
3. You have completely ignored my propositions on capacity and alternative approaches to resolving such a problem as there is.
4. You have answered two of my points about timetable planning with 'boilerplate' responses and made no attempt to deal with the other three which raise fundamental issues in railway strategy (of which I have considerable professional knowledge). (I am fairly certain that if HS2 were to be put to a referendum it would be roundly rejected, whereas in Switzerland coherent national enhancement plans based on realistic train timetables - and fully costed - have been presented to voters several times and strongly supported.)
5. You have ignored the point about economic imbalances (which are potentially disastrous).
6. You have ignored fundamental points about priorities, the scale of the project, the risk and NAO's reservations.

And you give no indication that my letter has been put to Mr Maynard as requested.

I therefore remain deeply concerned, not only because I judge HS2 to be a profoundly flawed project, but because the responses I have had make me feel that it is being pushed through with all the contempt for ordinary people and professional sceptics that one associates with Soviet Russia or Communist China. That's not the country I thought I lived in - nor what I was taught as a historian about the high integrity of the British Civil Service.

I shall be copying this correspondence to my Member of Parliament.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Tyler

[BA (Cantab), MCILT, MTPS, formerly an Honorary Fellow in the Universities of Leeds and York]

Passenger Transport Networks, York

[www.passengertransportnetworks.com](http://www.passengertransportnetworks.com)