

**May 10**



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# **Briefing**

# **High Speed Rail**

## **Friends of the Earth's views**

### **Introduction**

In March 2010 the Labour Government published plans to build a High Speed Rail line (HS2) from London to Birmingham. This is envisaged to be the first part of a wider Y-shaped network that will link with Manchester and Leeds and possibly Scotland eventually.

All three main political parties support some kind of High Speed North-South rail link.

Construction is planned to commence in 2017, with the line to Birmingham open in 2026. New trains will be designed to run on both new and existing lines so some destinations north of Birmingham will benefit from slightly shorter overall journey times from 2026

High speed trains are considered more climate friendly than planes, but still have considerable environmental impacts. The new line(s) will also cost billions of pounds to build and construction itself will have huge environmental implications.

This briefing looks at the key issues and gives Friends of the Earth's views.

## **Q. Will the high speed line cut carbon emissions from transport?**

### **A. No, not by much, if at all, but it could help if other policies change**

The environmental impact assessment showed that HS2 will be broadly neutral in carbon terms<sup>1</sup>. This is because although it will take passengers away from more carbon intensive domestic flights it will generate new journeys and will take passengers away from existing (less carbon intensive) rail services. Crucially, the assessment did not factor in the carbon emissions from constructing the new line and also did not assume the introduction of any policies to encourage passengers to switch from cars and planes to the train - like higher taxes on motoring and domestic flights. Carbon savings could be increased if the route were later extended to Manchester / Leeds and possibly beyond to Scotland.

Friends of the Earth believes that at best, building a High Speed Line is a very expensive way of cutting carbon emissions from transport. Although it is a better way of spending money than building new roads or expanding airports, there are cheaper and quicker ways to cut carbon from transport. However, if the line is built a number of key companion policies must be put in place to maximise the environmental benefits by ensuring significant modal shift from air and road:

- The electricity grid must be decarbonised as soon as possible
- Fiscal measures must be introduced to make rail the cheapest mode compared to flying and driving, but at the same time discourage long distance commuting. Possible measures include road pricing, fuel tax on domestic flights and no season ticket discounts on the High Speed line
- The line must link with the Channel Tunnel rail link (HS1) so through-journeys are possible to continental Europe to provide a viable alternative to flying
- Capacity freed up on existing rail lines (like the West Coast Main Line) must be used to run more freight and passenger trains in order to maximise the modal shift to rail

## **Q. What about the impact on sensitive sites, e.g. Chilterns and Warwickshire?**

### **A. The line must not go through protected sites like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs – the UK's highest wildlife designation) and impacts on the landscape must be avoided where possible or else minimised**

The impact of the chosen route has been reduced by proposals for tunnels under some sensitive landscapes. However there will still be considerable visual and noise impacts. Friends of the Earth believes that alternatives to the chosen route should still be considered, including alongside motorways. It is likely that a Sustainability Appraisal and public

consultation will be published later in 2010.

There will also be implications for farming and biodiversity and these impacts will need to be part of the full consultation as will the severance that a project of this nature will impact upon farming practices and movement for wildlife.

**Q. What about the impact on communities?**

**A. The impact of the route on communities must be minimised, and adequate compensation must be provided**

Whatever route is chosen it is inevitable that some communities will be adversely affected, homes may have to be demolished etc. Where this happens adequate compensation must be provided. It should be noted that there is a consultation<sup>2</sup> (until May 20<sup>th</sup> 2010) associated with the publication of the current route and as many affected local communities as possible should respond to this consultation.

**Q. How much will a High Speed line cost to build?**

**A. About £16billion for a London – Birmingham route and £30billion in total for the whole Y-shaped network from London to Manchester and Leeds**

These are huge sums of money. £2billion would pay for a 10 year phased roll out of 'Smarter Travel Choices' schemes across the UK these schemes use marketing and promotion to cut car journeys by encouraging walking, cycling and public transport use. The Committee on Climate Change estimates that this would save 2.9MillionTonnes (Mt) of CO<sub>2</sub> per year<sup>3</sup> while the High Speed Line to Birmingham would save a maximum of 0.41Mt.

For more information on Smarter Travel Choices See Friends of the Earth's briefing [http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/smarter\\_travel\\_choices.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/smarter_travel_choices.pdf)

Friends of the Earth believes it is vital that the building of HS2 does not mean funding is taken away from other, more important, transport priorities. Funding to maintain and improve the existing rail network must continue alongside investment in buses, walking and cycling and other initiatives to cut carbon from transport.

We would also wish to see as much of the rolling stock and materials to be used in any construction programme to be sourced as locally as possible, utilizing the opportunities that this provides for the benefit of the UK economy.

**Q. What about links with other transport?**

**A. Stations must be located in city centres rather than 'out of town'. To maximise modal shift, high quality public transport and walking and cycling links to HS2 stations must be provided. Direct links to airports**

## **should not be a priority**

The Conservatives' proposal for HS2 includes a station at Heathrow Airport. Friends of the Earth believes Labour's plans will provide adequate connections to Heathrow via a connection with the planned Crossrail line.

More important in our view is a direct link with HS1 and the Channel Tunnel so that through rail services to continental Europe can provide an attractive alternative to air travel from other parts of the UK.

At Birmingham, it is vital that the proposed link to Birmingham City centre is not axed in any cost cutting exercises. This would undermine the regeneration of the City Centre and links with other public transport. It could also mean that the proposed Birmingham airport interchange station would become a new development catalyst to add to the pressures in that area which include not only the airport but The NEC, Birmingham Business Park and the M42 / M40 development corridor in general.

## **Q. Does HS2 mean the end to road building and airport expansion?**

**A. Not at the moment. All main political parties remain committed to a greater or lesser extent to catering for an increase in air traffic and to some road building<sup>4</sup>**

Labour says that HS2 is an alternative to motorway construction but it is committed to several expensive, damaging new road schemes and hard shoulder running that will all increase carbon emissions. It also supports new runways at Heathrow and Stansted. Through its Aviation White paper of 2003 it has also encouraged expansion at most regional airports within the UK such as proposed runway extensions at Birmingham and East Midlands Airports and terminal capacity increases at many more.

The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have ruled out new runways in the South East but neither have ruled out expansion of regional airports.

The Conservatives have proposed targeted road building, possibly funded by tolls. While the Liberal Democrats propose that funding for big new road schemes should be shifted to improving the existing rail network.

Friends of the Earth believes airport expansion must end and that road building must be the policy of last resort if we are serious about cutting carbon emissions from transport.

<sup>1</sup> DfT 'High Speed Rail – Command Paper' between -0.41 to +0.44 Mtonnes CO2 per year  
<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/pi/highspeedrail/commandpaper/pdf/cmdpaper.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/2010-18/>

<sup>3</sup> CCC ' Meeting Carbon Budgets' Oct.2009 page 227  
<http://hmccc.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/21667%20CCC%20Report%20Chapter%206%20to%20the%20end.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Links to the main political parties transport policy documents are listed below:-  
<http://www.libdems.org.uk/transport.aspx>  
[http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where\\_we\\_stand/Transport.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Transport.aspx)  
<http://www.labour.org.uk/policies/transport>