

Their main conclusions and the Stop HS2 response are as follows;

- “The rail network is close to being full. At the current time, we are hitting passenger projections that were predicted in a decades’ time.”

Some lines are full, especially in the South and SW . The Reading – Paddington line is 200% loaded at peak time. HS2 goes no-where near this. By contrast, studies have shown that the West Coast Mainline which HS2 is designed to relieve is only 56% loaded at peak time and the promised extra carriages provide even more capacity.

- “Growth has continued despite the recession. The railways are seeing substantial growth at over 5% even in the midst of a recession.”

The immediate reason for this is record petrol prices, and the figures are already coming down. As the Public Accounts Committee were adamantly attempted to get DfT officials to recently admit, the greatest growth is in regional traffic, as well as discounted fares. Skype, Webinars and web meetings will also take off if ever decide investment in encouraging more people not to travel is a priority and we catch up with our international competitors on Internet speeds.

- “Alternatives to HS2 will not meet demand. These alternatives, known as Rail Package 2 or 51m’s “Optimised Alternative”, are unable to meet peak demand, and would do little to help local services or freight.”

This is nonsense even on the DfT inflated demand figures. Investment in rail should be where it is most needed which is not the West Coast Mainline. The majority of train users are local passengers which will not benefit from HS2, while the planned Felixtowe-Nuneaton lines frees up freight demand in the southern section of the WCML

- “Risk of under-providing is greater than over-providing. The risks to under-providing capacity are severe, and are far more serious than the risks of overprovision.”

Evidence from nine out of ten rail project across the whole of Europe show that governments over forecast demand, by an average of 100%. These claims were made when HS1 was built, which is currently running at just one third of the original passenger forecasts.

Stop HS2 Campaign Coordinator Joe Rukin said;

“It is no real surprise that a group of out-of-touch MPs who would see their journey time to London cut, think mistakenly that there will be benefits to their areas, and are heavily influenced by the businessmen who directly benefit from the construction of HS2 think that building it is a good idea. This report is a sham, it was a foregone conclusion, it is shamelessly selfish and ignores the facts. Much like the Department for Transport, they had set out what they wanted to find before they even started. For anyone who doesn’t think this is spin, they should look at the fact that the groups official ‘secretary’ is listed as Lucy James from lobbying firm Westbourne Communications. All this report does is highlight the need for supporters of HS2 to spin away the reality of the situation.”

“The reality is that the expected economic benefits of HS2 have halved, the Treasury has been slow to release money for HS2, the Major Projects Authority have put HS2 on red-amber alert, the Transport Select Committee said there were a host of issues they wanted resolving which haven’t been and just this week said there is ‘no transport strategy’, the Public Accounts Committee used words like ‘Bonkers, Biased and Potty’, saying they were ‘Gobsmacked’ at the passenger forecasts, and the National Audit Office is just about to start a study after producing two which were heavily critical of HS1. There are also a multitude of serious economic organisations which have come out against this boondoggle.”

“The bottom line is with HS2, Should we build it because there are people who blindly want it no matter what the cost to the nation, or should we not build it because of the people who have actually looked at the cost, the benefits and the alternatives properly and said that the cost of HS2 is simply too great and not in the national interest?”

Penny Gaines, chair of Stop HS2 said;

"It's no surprise that the All Party Parliamentary Group for High Speed Rail concluded that high speed rail was the answer to the inquiry they set up. However, the writers of the report appear to have looked at the issue through the limited view a very narrow set filters, and compared a very limited number of alternatives. They - and the Department for Transport when developing HS2 - are completely oblivious to the growth in telepresence videoconferencing, which is leading to a fall in the total number of long distance journeys over all modes of transport."

NOTES:

1. For further enquiries call Joe Rukin on 07811 371880 or Penny Gaines 07765 780553.
2. Other recent Stop HS2 press releases can be found at <http://stophs2.org/category/press>
3. Transport Select Committee report-
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmtran/1560/156002.htm>
4. Highlights from the PAC on April 18 th -
<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL788EE5C4D923AF70&feature=plcp>