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Revealed: High speed rail link could be built in Scotland.. BEFORE link north from Manchester

Jan 26 2012 (http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics-news/2012/01/26/)

A HIGH-SPEED train line could be built in Scotland before the completion of the English leg of the railway, Infrastructure Secretary Alex Neil has said.

The minister highlighted findings in a report published today that looked into the potential routes connecting Glasgow and Edinburgh to the line south of the border.

The UK Government has already agreed to work on a line from London to Birmingham as a first phase, but concerns were raised that Scotland will have to wait up to 20 years for detailed consideration.

Neil revealed the findings of the report, drawn up by Scottish Partnership Group (SPG), at a conference in London.

He said: "The latest advice from the SPG suggests that construction in Scotland could begin in the shorter term. We would not be bound by the timings of the legislative processes of the UK Parliament, or by the constraints of proposed phasing of construction in England.

"However, it is essential that we work together in this regard, and that any new line is planned according to the criteria and assumptions directing development in England."

Mr Neil said Scotland should be considered from the start.

"It is not acceptable to consider Scotland's requirements after the hybrid bill stages for London-Birmingham or Birmingham-Manchester and Leeds - that could be an entire generation away," he added.

The report, which was given to ministers yesterday, states: "An opportunity exists for early build of elements of high-speed rail in Scotland.

"Construction of at least some high-speed lines in Scotland need not wait for construction of the high-speed rail network in England to be completed."

It also describes the opportunity for the early delivery of an Edinburgh-Glasgow high-speed connection.

The report authors said it is not clear whether a route north would start from Manchester or Leeds, so considered a range of options to link Scotland.

Three routes were considered, with one east of the Pennines from Newcastle to Edinburgh, one west of the hill range to Glasgow and Edinburgh, and a third described as a trans-Southern Upland route from Newcastle.

Criteria agreed by the group include the demand that trains must serve Glasgow and Edinburgh city centres and allow connections to the rest of the network.

Consideration was given to quick lines to the east and west of the Pennines in England, with the potential of a short new link between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Routes that were investigated but not taken forward included a line in parallel to the east coast main line, which was considered to be too "twisting". Routes along the A68 and M74 were dropped.

Westminster's transport secretary, Justine Greening, gave the go-ahead to the first phase of the network from London to Birmingham on January 10. The second phase aims to take the line north to Leeds and Manchester by 2033.

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Andy Edinburgh

R.I.P Alex Eadie MP

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