

HS2 'will still go ahead' despite Queen's Speech omission, insists DfT

by JONATHAN WALKER, BIRMINGHAM POST • MAY 9, 2012

A planned high speed rail network with Birmingham at its heart will go ahead as planned despite reports that the project has been delayed, the Department for Transport has insisted.

Officials dismissed newspaper claims that the lack of a high speed rail Bill in the Queen's Speech was a setback for the project.

In January this year, Transport Secretary Justine Greening set out proposals for the high speed network including a planned "hybrid bill" at the end of 2013 to give the Government the necessary powers to construct and operate the railway.

This would mean a Bill might be included in the next Queen's Speech, setting out the Government's legislative timetable, in the middle of 2013.

However, some reports have highlighted the failure to include a Bill in this year's Queen's Speech and suggested the project, known as High Speed Two or HS2, has been delayed.

A Department for Transport spokesman said: "These suggestions are nonsense as there was never any suggestion of including the Bill in this year's Queen's Speech. Birmingham will be one of the biggest beneficiaries of HS2 and it's going ahead as planned."

There's no doubt that the £32 billion line, which is expected to create 8,000 jobs in Birmingham, has sparked opposition among many Conservative MPs.

The Tory grassroots website Conservative Home published an "alternative Queen's Speech", compiled in consultation with Conservative backbenchers, which included plans to stop "throwing billions at a high-speed vanity project" and scrap the scheme.

And campaigners opposed to the scheme have highlighted questions raised by the Commons public accounts committee, which subjected senior Department for Transport officials to a grilling about the business case for HS2.

Committee chair Margaret Hodge told officials their arguments were "shocking" after they

revealed that the Department for Transport was assuming tickets for high speed rail services would cost the same as tickets on existing services, such as the West Coast Main Line services from London to Birmingham.

The committee was holding an inquiry to High Speed One, the high speed line opened in 2003 which runs from London to the Channel Tunnel, near Folkestone, Kent.

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