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MPs dismiss High Speed 2 rail alternatives

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A four month inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for High Speed Rail has concluded that construction of High Speed 2 is required to meet future demand for rail travel.

MPs from all three of the main political parties found that alternatives to HS2, such as incremental upgrades to the existing railway network including Rail Package 2 and the Optimised Alternative backed by the 51m group of councils, will not solve the capacity problem.

The inquiry took evidence from 60 people with interests both within and outside of the rail industry. There were two inquiry sessions where a panel of MPs took evidence from 11 witnesses.

Key conclusions of the APPG's report, published on Wednesday (23 May), are that Britain's rail network is close to being full and passenger projections for a decade away are already being met. It says growth has continued despite the recession with the railways currently seeing growth at over 5% a year.

Alternatives to HS2 will not meet demand, according to the report. While acknowledging that RP2 and the Optimised Alternative could provide additional capacity for inter-city trains the APPG finds that they would do little to help local services or freight. It concludes that the risk of under-providing rail capacity is greater - and far more serious - than any risks that would result from providing too much capacity.

Graham Stringer, co-chair of the APPG and MP for Blackley and Broughton, said: "The findings of our inquiry completely blow the arguments of the opponents of HS2 out of the water. Claims that we can create sufficient capacity on the railways by implementing piecemeal upgrades of the existing lines have been proved wrong."

Stuart Andrew, co-chair of the APPG and MP for Pudsey, added: "In the last few weeks there have been increased moves to muddy the waters around HS2. These are crude attempts to detract from the real benefits that HS2 will bring. The findings of our inquiry serve to reiterate that a major injection of capacity, so desperately needed on Britain's railways, is the driving force behind building the project."

Campaign group Stop HS2 described the conclusions of the report as "a simple case of lies, damned lies and statistics, whereby they have used general figures and problems across the entire rail network, which will not be solved by HS2 in an attempt to justify HS2".

Penny Gaines, chair of Stop HS2, said: "The writers of the report appear to have looked at the issue through 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."

HS2: MPs say cross-party report shows that major injection of rail capacity is required



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