

Transport and benefit projects stuck at red lights



HS2, the high-speed rail link between London and Birmingham, has provoked strong opposition Times photographer, Paul Rogers

Jill Sherman, Martin Barrow and Richard Ford
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Two main policies of the Government, the universal credit and the HS2 rail line, are among nearly 70 projects in serious trouble, according to a report published yesterday.

More than a third of the Government's 191 biggest projects, which are worth more than £353 billion, have either overspent or have been delayed.

The report ranks projects for the first time as red, amber and green. Amber-red denotes that successful delivery is in doubt, with big risks apparent, while red suggests successful delivery is "unachievable".

The document, published by the Cabinet Office and slipped out on Friday evening to gain minimum publicity, shows that eight projects are red, and 23 amber-red. The rankings will spark a ministerial intervention that may result in the project manager being replaced or management consultants being brought in. A further 58 projects are ranked amber.

The document gives project breakdowns by department. It reveals that the biggest problems are in the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Transport and the Department for Work and Pensions.

The universal credit system, which will combine six welfare payments into one, is rated amber-red. The rating dates back to last September but reflects teething problems in the computerised system to allocate payments to millions of claimants. The recent delays in two pilot projects to test the scheme also suggests the system, to be phased in later this year, is in trouble.

HS2, the high-speed rail link that should cut journey times between London and Birmingham to 49 minutes, is rated amber-red chiefly because of the level of risk involved in building such a large infrastructure project.

Concerns are also raised over a number of projects at the Department of Health and at the Home Office, where a £424 million programme to provide online applications for passport holders has also been rated red.

Despite the difficulties, there was an underspend of £834 million on the Government's 191 main projects in the past financial year. The figures, which show total spending of £17.2 billion against a budget of £18 billion, will provide ammunition for ministers arguing that there are further savings to be made. Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office, said big projects needed scrutiny and support. "I was staggered when I came into government and found a relaxed approach to managing projects worth hundreds of billions of pounds," he said. "Problems were swept under the carpet where they festered at the taxpayer's expense. In many places the Civil Service lacked project-management skills and had a lamentable record of project delivery."

He claimed that £1.7 billion — £100 per household — had been saved since the general election by making projects more efficient.

66 comments


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 **Michael Daventry**

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 **Mr J Mohan** 5 days ago

To deliver project the government need more finesse.

HS2 instead of burying it in expensive tunnels as a way of buying off protestors, make it 4 track in sections and add a super fast commuter service with local stations. House prices in the area will rocket & almost everyone will be happy. A few may choose to take the profit and move 15 miles away.

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 **Geoff Bowles** 5 days ago

@Mr J Mohan And destroy even more farmland and ancient woodland? Destroy the land and we'll starve. Population is growing world-wide, food is already becoming more expensive. We need to grow more.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

 **E Ward** 5 days ago

@Geoff Bowles @Mr J Mohan Considering we pay farmers to NOT grow food at the moment I don't think we are in any danger of imminent starvation. Add to that, that a railway line takes up very little room, far less than all the roads currently being built, and this really is a spurious argument.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

 **Geoff Bowles** 4 days ago

@E Ward @Geoff Bowles @Mr J Mohan It's not a matter of imminent starvation. Our population is growing, as is everyone else's. Good land and fresh water are in increasingly short supply. We are buying food on world markets that we could grow for ourselves, and the price is already going up. This will get worse - if the climate change prophets of doom are correct, much worse. Even without them, it is likely that wars will be fought this century over water rights. If we do not control our population, we shall be trying to compete on world markets for an increasing share of a diminishing supply - and basic foodstuffs will become unaffordable for many. Good farmland once destroyed cannot be replaced. This is an asset we will need undamaged before the end of this century, possibly much sooner. That the government not only wants to build a railway for which there is no economic case but is also driving roads through SSSIs and encouraging building on farmland rather than on already degraded land is no argument - it needs to stop doing any of it. If I had the choice of saving the life of a bee or that of the entirety of the Houses of Parliament, I would always choose the bee.

Bernadette Bowles

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Ken Broadbent 5 days ago

The only people who want HS2 are those who would build it.

3 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

E Ward 5 days ago

@Ken Broadbent Strange, I want it and have no part in building it whatsoever !

2 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

Ken Broadbent 4 days ago

@E Ward @Ken Broadbent

You pay for it then. And the string of nuclear power stations needed to run it.

1 Recommend [Reply](#)



David O'Gorman

5 days ago

Has the Government got a "project" aimed at stamping out Islamic extremism? If not, it damn well should. If so, when will it be implemented?

3 Recommend [Reply](#)



G K Collins

5 days ago

HS2 is the most spectacular waste of money in the recent history.

4 Recommend [Reply](#)



John Doy

4 days ago

@G K Collins

Why, and how do you come to that conclusion?

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



David

5 days ago

You would think that those who spend public money would have learned that many public sector projects are unrealistic in their short-term aims and overly complex in their execution. Identity Cards, NHS IT and the BBC's recently abandoned media projects are typical examples that follow the pattern where millions/billions are spent before anyone in charge asks whether the aims are achievable/affordable.

Didn't Einstein define insanity as *'doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome'*?

2 Recommend [Reply](#)



A HOARE

5 days ago

The Civil Service like most large organisations has become largely self serving. It has no competent managers or negotiators. Until a government has the courage to break this stranglehold there is little hope for the UK.

4 Recommend [Reply](#)



Mr Cornish

5 days ago

I would like to ask all the HS2 detractors what their solution is when the West Coast Mainline runs out of capacity in six and half years?

Do we really want another Heathrow situation?

2 Recommend [Reply](#)



Andrew Parford

5 days ago

@Mr Cornish Use skype.

6 Recommend [Reply](#)



Geoff Bowles

5 days ago

@Mr Cornish I do not regard the possibility of travel problems as an excuse for the death of a single tree, bluebell or bumble bee. Perhaps if it's harder to get into London, more people will work in the regions where they live rather than flocking into the capital like a flood of lemmings in reverse. HS2 will do nothing to regenerate areas of high unemployment, just increase the size of the London commuter belt.

Bernadette Bowles

7 Recommend [Reply](#)



David

5 days ago

@Mr Cornish You seem to be mixing two issues: rail capacity and high-speed rail. Yes there is a capacity problem but that won't be fixed by an overpriced new high speed network which will be of only limited benefit on our small island and unaffordable for many who use the existing service. Much better to spend the money on improving our existing network so that we get the benefits without blighting any more of our countryside than we really have to. HS2 is a political vanity project.

5 Recommend [Reply](#)



LBeagle

5 days ago

@David I'd love to know just *who* is *really* in favour of it within the government - and why. It seems to be an awful lot of money - £40 billion? but bound to be a great deal more - just to allow people to get away from Birmingham more quickly.

1 Recommend Reply



David

5 days ago

@LBeagle @David Perhaps those promoting it in government should commit to resign from whatever job they are doing if the if the projected budgets and timescales increase by more than 10%?

1 Recommend Reply



Michael Kelly

5 days ago

@Mr Cornish

The problem with HS2 is that it is being delivered backwards. The Midland and Northern cities need high speed rail connections to each other. That should be delivered first. Then a high speed connection to Europe, and as London happens to be in the way of that, a station in London would be sensible. The current proposals will simply benefit London.

2 Recommend Reply



Mr Cornish

5 days ago

@Andrew Parford Video conferencing or for that matter any electronic communication has not reduced the demand for travel over the last 50 years. While video conferencing can reduce the number of journey's it can also work as a catalyst, increasing business opportunities and the size of individuals and businesses networks which actuals necessitate greater demand for travel overall.

@Geoff Bowles Globalisation is a fact. People flock to work in cities because the concentration of people leads to greater economic output per person. Or to put it simply, there are far more job opportunities than in sparser populated areas. HS2 will certainly have an economic impact on the cities it connects, the key to exploiting this will be to ensure the local infrastructure is in place to exploit it.

Recommend Reply



Geoff Bowles

5 days ago

@Mr Cornish @Andrew Parford @Geoff Bowles But it isn't. Nor planned. London will become even more crowded, the regions even more deprived. The cities we need more people to work in are those where there are high unemployment rates; nothing planned will actually do this.

Bernadette Bowles

Recommend Reply



Mr Cornish

5 days ago

@DavidNo I am not. HS2 will provide relief to the southern part of the West Cost Mainline (WCML) which will reach capacity by the end of the decade. As for the alternatives network Rail undertook a study to look at adding an extra two lines to the current WCML between London and Birmingham to add extra capacity in the early 2000's. They concluded that the project was far to expensive because over half the route would have be in tunnel to avoid knocking down thousands of properties! Another alternative to HS2 is the so called "Rail Package 2" which involved lengthening platforms, upgrading signalling and introducing new trains on the WCML. While this would give a useful increase in capacity at £9 billion it represents worse value for money than HS2, never-mind the disruption it would cause to current services on the route.

High-speed rail networks offer greater capacity than conventional trains. Additionally as fast intercity traffic will move to HS2, the WCML will be able to operate trains with a more homogeneous stopping pattern, which will actually increase capacity! The likes of Milton Keynes, Northampton and Rugby will all benefit from a better service.

@Michael KellyThis simply isn't true. The majority of the routes between northern cities are not at capacity and those that are can be improved by upgrading the current routes without to much difficulty. This is no longer the case with the southern section of the WCML. Additionally northern cities will benefit even before HS2 reaches them as high-speed trains running on phase 1 (London to Birmingham stretch) of HS2 will continue north on the conventional network reducing journey times between London and the North.

2 Recommend Reply



Chris Miller

5 days ago

@Mr Cornish I can't tell if you are a PR agent for one of the various civil engineering firms looking to

benefit from this hugely expensive vanity project, or have simply swallowed their propaganda. But:

1. Who on earth was using video conferencing 50 years ago? 20 years ago when I was responsible for an early commercial setup, the quality was shockingly bad but it was already reducing our need for travel. Modern implementations are approaching virtual reality standards. By the time HS2 does anything useful (when it reaches Manchester/Leeds) technology will have rendered many of the anticipated journeys unnecessary. HS2 is a 19th century technology being applied to 21st century problems.
2. The WCML is not at full capacity - half the Pendolinos travel half empty. It's just that Virgin's extortionate pricing forces people off trains at useful times onto the first 'off-peak' service that results in dreadful overcrowding.
3. Rail Package 2 is only worse value for money than HS2 if you follow the mad DfT method of calculation (e.g. useful business activities on a train are impossible) which has to be completely rigged in order to make HS2 look half-way sensible. It's true that RP2 would involve further disruption to the WCML, but then the benefits it delivers are available to all WCML users. In contrast, HS2 will impose massive disruption on road systems (temporarily or permanently severed and clogged by construction traffic) and the environment while providing no benefit to those who will be affected by the disruption and almost no benefit to anyone else, unless they live or work in a flat or office overlooking the two termini and are so highly paid that they can afford the eye-watering fares that will be required to make use of it (cf HS1).

2  Recommend [Reply](#)



Mr Cornish

5 days ago

@Chris Miller Just because I disagree with you does not mean I have some undeclared interests or can't look at facts and reach a reasonable conclusion. But to address your specific points:

1) I was not referring to just video conferencing but all form electronic communication including telephones, mobiles, email etc. New communication technologies can reduce the need to travel (I have experienced this first hand). But they also act as a catalyst for more communication which inevitable leads to more people travelling. If you follow your argument people would be travelling less and less since the beginning of the last century - this is simply not the case.

2) Claims that trains leaving Euston in the evening peak are only half full are wrong. While this is true for Virgin Trains (52% seats occupied), Network Rail has pointed out that London Midland – which runs the commuter services – is at 94% capacity, and traffic levels are growing at 4% a year.

The 52% figure is misleading because:

1 - Peak period use of Virgin Trains is artificially depressed by off-peak travel restrictions; this may be the commuter 'peak', but the busiest trains for intercity journeys are before 4pm and after 7pm when cheaper tickets are valid.

2 - Even with 52% average loading, some Virgin trains are 80% full – and on Fridays they leave with standing passengers for long distance journeys.

The important point that anti-HS2 campaigners fail to acknowledge is that the best way to free up capacity for commuters in the fast growing Milton Keynes-Northampton corridor is to take the Virgin Trains services off the line and free it up for more commuter services and for more freight services.

3) The BCR of HS2 full Y network is 2.5. This is the latest calculation, which includes realistic assumptions about passenger utilisation of time during travel. Additionally the calculation were done by Atkins, not the DfT and were independently verified. The BCR also does not include the much wider possible economic benefits. Much of the current network would have never been built if it was subjected to a BCR analysis. As I stated in point 2 WCML users (mainly commuters) will benefit massively from HS2. A more homogenous calling pattern on the WCML will allow a transformed timetable, supporting growth, relieving serious overcrowding which is coming just a few years down the line and getting a lot of lorries off the road network.

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Dan C Ludlow

5 days ago

The best way to restore the economy is not to have government try to make anything happen.

If you really want to stimulate a recovery, lower tax, shrink government and have the "leaner, meaner" state work as a facilitator. If you don't you see an ever growing list of underachievement and great waste that saps funds from the needy and needed services.

Our government can't..... (you can add your particular major concern to this sentence). We have an inept and highly expensive Public Sector, leeching away the nation's wealth in return for far too little.

There is our recovery, Make it work, and make it work for less. Make the work in it both interesting and rewarding for those most able and put the dead on the fire.

5  Recommend Reply



David

5 days ago

@Dan C Ludlow Well said - government is the problem not the solution.

2  Recommend Reply



Dan C Ludlow

5 days ago

Ooops! That should've read "dead wood" on the fire. I'd like to blame my keyboard, but that wouldn't be fair to it!

1  Recommend Reply



John - John Lovejoy

5 days ago

@Dan C Ludlow "Don't just do something, stand there!"

2  Recommend Reply



Mr Ronald Payne

5 days ago

They are not really a government and they are not proper plans.

4  Recommend Reply



notoappeasement

5 days ago

HS2 is a misplaced and misconceived project thought of to benefit friends of the Government. Universal Credit project is a correct one to control the benefit dependency culture in the country. However DWP Secretary ought to have gone for simple solution. In my view benefit levels ought to be disincentive and not a lifestyle choice that have chosen by many. Begin to level to benefit to no more than minimum wage level less 10% and no more than recipients ability to earn. Also time limit all benefits not to let people get used to even at any level of benefits.

I know this is what DWP Secretary wanted but sabotage brigade came out with complicated schemes to scupper the whole project and they seem to be succeeding. Unfortunately all these schemes have been cooked and dream t about 'senior guys' sitting in in their plush offices without even asking the front line staff who have to implement them. Talk to front line DWP staff and Secretary of State will better feel of the situation.

3  Recommend Reply



Geoff Bowles

5 days ago

@notoappeasement The Universal Credit, like most of their ideas, sounds good, but the devil's in the detail. It's being implemented in a fiendishly complicated way - strange for an idea intended to simplify the benefit system - and the IT simply isn't up to it. The problems with benefits is that years ago they were divorced from contributions. This link needs to be restored. If you have paid in and have the misfortune to become sick or unemployed, you should be able to count on whatever help you need to get over it, when you need it. But certainly, the requirement for help should be a temporary one in most cases. In those sad cases where someone is too sick or disabled to work in future, they too should be properly supported. But we are so busy supporting those who never paid in, and supporting people for longer than necessary, we cannot afford to give the right help to those who truly need it.

Most single people and childless couples who are ill or unemployed would find minimum wage - 10% as you suggest a considerable improvement. Only those with families or living in the most expensive areas get anything like this. My daughter has MS and is not currently able to work, including HB she gets £179 per week because she's under 35 - despite having paid in for 10 years before getting ill. Your calculation would give her an extra £15 per week. If she were unemployed rather than accepted as seriously ill, she would be getting even less. On the other hand, if she had some illegitimate children she would be very much better off.

Bernadette Bowles

2  Recommend Reply



notoappeasement

5 days ago

@Geoff Bowles

I agree with you. However the Government have to start somewhere to stop the ballooning welfare bill. In the last 30 years living on benefits and housing benefit has become lot more lucrative than in work. Any government of any colour would have to bite the bullet. Whosoever does it would loose the following election and come back again after people will have seen the sanity over insanity. Government ought to be to govern and not to make themselves popular. This what successive governments have done, No wonder we are in a mess!

1 Recommend [Reply](#)



Geoff Bowles

5 days ago

@notoappeasement Restrict Child Benefit to one per adult. Insist all under-fives are seen twice yearly at a clinic in the UK. Older children should have a satisfactory attendance record at a British school and behave properly when there to qualify. If an older child receives a criminal conviction, his parents lose CB. This would solve several problems at a stroke.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



John Doy

4 days ago

@notoappeasement

All governments everywhere seek to make themselves popular.
Its called politics.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Gigo

5 days ago

On the other hand two thirds of the projects are within budget and are not delayed: not bad really!

5 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Alan Thorpe

5 days ago

@Gigo If it was a builder being discussed and your house was one of the one third you would not be very happy.

4 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Michael Curry

5 days ago

HS2 is an absurdity in a country as small as ours. Who wants it? It may prove as divisive as gay marriage.

11 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



PETER FARRANT

5 days ago

We should follow the American lead and bring in a "Fix it first" policy. Some of our infrastructure, particularly roads is in a dire condition. Is a rail project to save 49 minutes to Birmingham really worth spending upwards of £30 billion.....and no I don't live on or anywhere near the HS2 route.

18 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Geoff Bowles

5 days ago

@PETER FARRANT I do, though outside the immediate path - if anything, my house value could increase as the prettier villages are damaged. The people of Buckinghamshire will see no benefit from this if we wanted, it will not stop here; yet our roads are in a terrible state. Even some of the main roads are bad; little signs have appeared in places saying "Road Surface Failed" - it seems to mean extra big pothole - and along many residential roads you bounce rather than drive.

Bernadette Bowles

2 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Chris Miller

5 days ago

@Geoff Bowles @PETER FARRANT 49 minutes? I wish! I think that may be the potential saving if it ever reaches Manchester (unlikely to happen in the first half of the 21st century). The saving to B'ham is more like 19 minutes, and that's only if you ignore both the fact that HS2 could be upgraded to run at full (125mph) speed for less than 1/4 the cost of HS2 and that the B'ham HS2 terminus will be at least 10 minutes away from the main transport interchange at New Street.

It's just lucky that the country isn't flat broke and has loads of money in the Treasury to waste on this pointless vanity project.

1 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Nigel Toye

5 days ago

Why is it governments leap two footed into changes, projects, initiatives, "radical" policies? It is because they have to convince the electorate that they have the answers to all problems facing the nation and electing them has brought the new world order, "we are the Messiah!" Unfortunately they are "just a naughty boy".

They have 5 years to change everything and the result is an unholy mess. One or two things do work but most does not.

It is the nature of the beast I am afraid.

1 Recommend Reply



Geoff Bowles

@Nigel Toye I think we all know by now that the Emperor is naked.
Bernadette Bowles

5 days ago

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



W Baber

The title of the document and where I can find a link to it ?

5 days ago

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Stephen Williams

A three colour red,amber,green ranking!

.....and then seem to need additional levels...such as 'amber-red'?...planning?...hmm!

5 days ago

1 Recommend Reply



Mr J Mohan

@Stephen Williams from the highways code -- amber-red means stop

5 days ago

3 Recommend Reply



Ken Broadbent

@Mr J Mohan @Stephen Williams

It means about to go green.

A bad analogy I'd say.

5 days ago

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



putneytony

The traffic light system, though crude, is simple good practice giving easy visibility to management of the state of a project and so allowing management intervention. I would not believe a report that did not show some projects requiring management attention. In my experience as a Project Manager the proportion of projects in red or amber is fairly typical.

5 days ago

6 Recommend Reply



colin taylor

The private sector make project "screw ups" on a regular basis but are rarely reported.

Normally heads will role while wounds are licked.

The public sector get Knighthoods or early/medical retirement.

5 days ago

2 Recommend Reply



Geoff Bowles

@colin taylor The private sector has to pay for its own screw-ups, that is the difference.

Bernadette Bowles

5 days ago

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



John Doy

@Geoff Bowles @colin taylor

What? You mean like the banks?

4 days ago

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Geoff Bowles

@John Doy @Geoff Bowles @colin taylor Good point.

4 days ago

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

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