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Mail Online

Mandelson derails support for HS2 with stark warning super-fast train link will be 'expensive mistake' which hurts the north

- **Ex-Business Secretary says Labour was too quick to back £42bn project**
- **Line will link London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds**
- **Labour said it was at the heart of its plan for growth**
- **But Lord Mandelson now says it could be 'damaging' to the north**

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Labour's support for the controversial high-speed rail link between London and Birmingham began to crumble yesterday.

Former business secretary Lord Mandelson became the latest senior party figure to speak out against HS2, saying the decision to go ahead had been guided by politics and flawed estimates.

He said it could prove 'an expensive mistake' and 'damaging' to the northern regions it was intended to help.



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Halt: Labour's Lord Mandelson now says his party was wrong to offer fulsome backing to the high speed rail project linking London and the north

His intervention came just days after former chancellor Alistair Darling revealed he is now an 'HS2 sceptic'.

The party's leadership remains supportive of the high-speed link, but the comments by the two Labour grandees increased speculation that its backing might be withdrawn, which could make the controversial plan a huge electoral issue in constituencies along the route.

'More and more people are using the rail network - unlike Peter Mandelson we can't all hop on a private jet'

Transport minister Norman Baker

With the estimated cost of the line rising to £42.6 billion, Lord Mandelson said that those who previously backed the plan 'should not offer it an open cheque and should, instead, insist on keeping their options open.'

Labour's plans were based on an estimated cost of £30 billion and the central assumption that construction would spread growth across the country. This was 'neither quantified nor proved', said the peer.

'I once supported High Speed 2. There are no simple options when it comes to transport – but I now fear HS2 could be an expensive mistake,' he wrote in a national newspaper.



Thousands of home-owners blighted by the high-speed rail link are set to claim compensation for 'exceptional hardship'



Row: Lord Mandelson's comments are certain to be seized on by opponents of HS2 as proof that it should not go ahead

The peer admitted that Labour's decision to enthusiastically back the scheme before the 2010 General

Election did not give sufficient consideration to alternatives.



Slapdown: Lib Dem transport minister Norman Baker said that unlike Lord Mandelson 'we can't all hop on a private jet'

Other projects such as upgrading the east and west coast main lines, improving regional rail and providing mass transit systems in provincial cities 'were not actively considered' by the Labour administration when it gave the green light to HS2.

'In 2010, when the then Labour government decided to back HS2, we did so based on the best estimates of what it would involve,' said Lord Mandelson. 'But these were almost entirely speculative.'

'In addition to the projected cost, we gave insufficient attention to the massive disruption to many people's lives construction would bring. Why? Not because we were indifferent but because we believed the national interest required such bold commitment to modernisation.'

And he concluded: 'All the parties – especially Labour – should think twice before binding themselves irrevocably to HS2.'

Lib Dem transport minister Norman Baker responded: 'Thankfully, the country no longer has to do whatever Peter Mandelson says.'

'More and more people are using the rail network every year so we desperately need more north-south capacity.'

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