

Osborne 'set to campaign about HS2 rail line'



A concerted effort to sell the benefits of HS2 is being planned HS2/PA

George Osborne is helping to plot an autumn campaign to shore up support for the High Speed 2 rail line amid reports of internal opposition.

Treasury officials are said to be using a figure of £73 billion — not the official £42.6 billion price tag — in departmental discussions over the proposed new line linking London to the North.

The larger sum includes inflation and VAT over a 20-year period.

The Chancellor's aides insist he is unmoved by internal worries or the increasing number of business and political figures coming out in opposition following an admission that costs had soared to £8 billion.

However, they said that a concerted effort to sell the benefits of the project was being planned to coincide with the publication of an updated analysis of its costs and benefits due before the end of the year.

Support for the project in Northern cities is understated by a London-based media, complained a senior official in the Department for Transport.

He acknowledged, however, that the Government had to do more to present the case for the new line linking London with Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds.

“It can't just be about the time savings, it has to be about the specific benefits which will result.”

The new campaign will also seek to draw attention to the immediate benefits to the UK economy from its construction.

Mr Osborne's aides deny that the coalition is nervous that Labour may withdraw its support for HS2, a scheme initially introduced by Gordon Brown's administration. They point out that Lord Adonis, a former Transport Secretary and one of the line's most staunch supporters, was recently asked by Ed Miliband to carry out a review of policies to improve economic growth.

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Chris Miller

1 day ago

It's £80 billion and I don't think the government has (yet) coughed to the increased amount (though £73 billion, if confirmed, is getting close). Whatever, it's a pointless waste of money we haven't got, with only dubious benefits to show for it (unless you're a big civil engineering firm with highly paid lobbyists).

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