

Rail network 'heading for a capacity crunch' under HS2



Patrick McLoughlin says the main reason for building HS2 is to increase capacity Tirres photographer Jon Enoch

Philip Pank

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The planned High Speed 2 railway fails to link effectively with existing lines and will cause a “capacity crunch” on the network, a leading figure from the rail freight industry has warned.

Lord Berkeley, chairman of the Rail Freight Group, said that the £50 billion railway would further squeeze the overloaded West Coast Main Line as high-speed trains roll off new routes on to the conventional lines. The problem would be acute during HS2’s first seven years, when its high-speed lines will stretch only from London to Birmingham.

Even after branch lines are built to Manchester and Leeds, Lord Berkeley fears that freight may become harder to accommodate because of the increased number of passenger trains on the northern end of the West Coast Main Line between Wigan and Glasgow.

Lord Berkeley is a former Labour transport spokesman in the House of Lords as well as the head of the group representing rail-freight operators.

Patrick McLoughlin, the Transport Secretary, says the main reason for building HS2 is to increase capacity, given official forecasts that the busiest long-distance route linking Manchester and London will fill up during the next decade.

However, Lord Berkeley said: “There will be capacity gains in the South but there will be a capacity crunch in the Midlands and North, particularly in the first phase of the scheme.

“What amazes me is they’ve got to this stage without doing a timetable of trains to demonstrate that it’ll fit,” he told *The Sunday Telegraph*. “That is a big problem and HS2 don’t seem to have any solution.

“Ministers have got themselves into this position they do with every big project, where they say nothing’s going to change and we’re going to bulldoze everything through. The problem isn’t the middle of the line, it’s the ends. It doesn’t link up properly with the existing transport network.”

A DfT spokesman said: “Providing space for 18 trains an hour in both directions, HS2 will free up capacity across the train network. Doing nothing won’t give us the extra space needed for more intercity, commuter or freight trains on already overcrowded lines.”

Network Rail is to draft a timetable stating the proportion of freight, commuter and regional trains which will replace intercity services moving to the high-speed network.

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