

HS2 to keep food prices down, say rail chiefs



Rail freight companies say HS2 is good news for consumers Rui Vieira/FA

Philip Pank Transport Correspondent
Published at 12:01AM, September 28 2013

The high-speed railway linking London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds will ensure supermarkets can keep a lid on food prices, the bosses of the main rail freight companies claim.

The heads of five companies which between them transport 99 per cent of all goods carried by train in Britain say that the £50 billion railway will be vital to help to meet rising consumer demand.

“With fuel and road costs predicted to increase the costs of running lorries by 36 per cent by 2040, additional rail capacity will ensure that food and drink continues to reach our supermarket shelves at affordable prices,” they say in a letter to The Times. “Building HS2 will free up much-needed capacity on the West Coast Main Line, which is a vital freight artery. That is good news, not just for us as freight companies, but for consumers,” it adds.

The Government claims that building the railway will remove 500,000 lorries a year from the motorways. Although freight will not be carried on the high speed railway, it is intended to free up freight paths on the West Coast Main Line linking London and Glasgow. The proportion of freight carried by rail is forecast to double to 20 per cent by 2030 as fuel prices rise and congestion gets worse on the roads.

The letter follows comments from a leading figure from the rail freight industry who warned last week that the railway would cause a “capacity crunch” on parts of the existing network.

Lord Berkeley, chairman of the Rail Freight Group, said that the railway would squeeze further the overloaded West Coast Main Line as high speed trains roll off new lines on to the conventional railway.

The problem would be particularly acute during its first seven years of operations, when the high-speed lines will only stretch from London to Birmingham. However, even after branch lines are built to Manchester and Leeds, Lord Berkeley fears that freight paths may become harder to accommodate because of the increased number of passenger trains running on the northern end of the West Coast Main Line between Wigan and Glasgow.

“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,” he said.

“The problem isn’t the middle of the line, it’s the ends — it just doesn’t link up properly with the existing transport network.”

The letter is signed by John Smith, managing director of GB Railfreight; Russell Mears, chief executive of Freightliner Group; Neil McNicholas, managing director of Direct Rail Services; Stephen Haynes, managing director of Colas Rail; and Nigel Jones, head of planning at DB Schenker Rail.

Hostility to the Government’s flagship transport project has increased since Patrick McLoughlin, the Transport Secretary, announced in June that the cost was likely to be £10 billion higher than previously thought at £50 billion.

The new chairman of HS2 Ltd, Sir David Higgins, warned this week that the cost could be even higher.

Senior Labour figures have joined Conservative backbench MPs and people living along the proposed route to oppose the plans.

10 comments



 **Michael Daventry**

1 person listening

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 **Alan Thorpe** September 28, 2013 14:31
A miracle! A railway that doesn't require any electricity to run it. What do these clowns have to say about the price of electricity increasing and where it will actually come from if we don't build more power stations soon?

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 **Swiss Tony** September 30, 2013 20:52
Don't worry. Ed has capped the price!

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

 **James Ashwell** September 28, 2013 10:19
Reinforcing the tone and substance of your other contributors

Rail Freight is and will never be time sensitive Freight. There is no economic premium in trajectory time only only keeping the promise of arrival time for the efficient use of loading and unloading capacity.

Rail Freight suffers the economic impact of higher loading and unloading charges which render it uncompetitive over distances less than 600 miles. Import container traffics from ports to inland Container terminals (ICT) have survived on account of Government subsidies which offset the cost of the lift at the port and ICT.

Without doubt increased passenger traffic has reduced the number of paths available for freight on the West Coat Line but there are numerous other ways to increase capacity at much less expense than HS2. HS2 has all the hall marks of a Rail industry wet dream.

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Swiss Tony September 28, 2013 09:48
500,000 lorries a year equates to about 1 lorry per minute being removed from London to Manchester. Ie a drop in the ocean.

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ErnieC September 28, 2013 13:58
@Swiss Tony"The Government claims that building the railway will remove 500,000 lorries a year from the motorways." Do all motorways go to Manchester? There are other large centres of population; Birmingham, North and South Wales, Liverpool, Sheffield, Hull, Leeds, Newcastle, Glasgow etc

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Swiss Tony September 28, 2013 14:11
Thanks Ernie - I had clocked that there are other large centres of population in the UK. My example was to show in a simple way (too simple as it turned out) that even taking one just route the impact would be

negligible - taking all the other destinations you mention the impact would be further diluted.

2 Recommend Reply



PHIL PASCOE

Anyone ever thought of maintaining and using the existing network properly?

September 28, 2013 06:04

2 Recommend Reply



PHIL PASCOE

God, they are clutching at straws now!

September 28, 2013 05:57

1 Recommend Reply



Stephen Parker

Work must begin on HS2 as soon as possible. In Japan the first 'bullet train' service began way back in 1964. Engineers are still extending the network today and designing ever faster, more efficient trains -- much better than motorways and much more convenient than flying. I'm sure there were people who complained about the costs at the time, but Japan has benefitted for decades from this system, and will continue to do so for the next few hundred years. Come on Britain, catch up!

September 28, 2013 02:17

1 Recommend Reply



Mark Startin

I can understand the further attempts to bolster support for this line, and the business case that lies behind it. I have always suspected projects to be inherently flawed if the movers change their business case as initial justifications are subsequently undermined.

September 28, 2013 02:05

This latest attempt smacks of desperation..

8 Recommend Reply

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