

March 2012

Submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for High Speed Rail Capacity Inquiry

51m is the group of eighteen Local Authorities opposed to the High Speed 2 project.

The need for increased rail capacity

51m fully support further development of the role of rail as a key part of Britain's transport infrastructure, and notes the consistent, strong growth in the use of the rail network for both passenger and freight in recent years. We therefore support the need to increase capacity on the network, but believe this can be best achieved by concentrating investment to deliver early capacity increases at key bottlenecks across the country. This approach is consistent with the conclusions of the Eddington Transport Study (2006).

We do not believe that construction of High Speed 2 (HS2) is an appropriate way of increasing capacity, for the following reasons:

- The project takes far too long to deliver any benefits – the first stage will not be completed until 2026 at the earliest, and major capacity benefits will not be delivered before the second stage is completed in 2033 at best
- The project primarily relieves the West Coast Main Line, which is far from being the most overcrowded route in the country
- The large cost of the project will inevitably greatly reduce the investment available for other major schemes to enhance capacity across the network
- The project will provide benefits to a small number of major cities but result in worse services for many more towns and cities across the country – the attached map summarises the impacts.
- There is no robust international evidence to support the claimed regeneration benefits. For example, Spain has the both the largest high speed network and the highest unemployment in Europe
- HS2 is if anything likely to increase London's dominance. It will also benefit cities which are well served (for example Manchester) at the expense of those poorly served (for example Liverpool)
- The business case for HS2 is poor, and has progressively deteriorated, from a Benefit Cost ratio (BCR) for Phase 1 of 2.7 in March 2010 to 1.7 in January 2012

The 51m Alternative

51m has developed an Alternative to improve capacity and connectivity along the West Coast Main Line. This is set out in detail on the 51m website¹.

The 51m Alternative increases standard class capacity on the West Coast Main Line by 215%, through incremental, cost effective changes:

- Lengthening WCML InterCity trains to 12 cars (except to Liverpool, as the cost of reconstruction of Lime Street station for 12 car trains would be prohibitive)
- Reconfiguration of one first class car to standard (this would still leave three first class vehicles, as on East Coast Main Line trains)
- Infrastructure upgrades at a small number of specific locations, relieving bottlenecks for both passenger and freight traffic, and enabling operation of some additional InterCity services.

The Alternative also enables capacity to be increased in line with increased demand, potentially much more quickly than HS2. In contrast, HS2 is an “all or nothing” project, with no benefits until 2026 at best. The capital cost for the Alternative is c£2 billion, less than 10% of the cost of the full HS2 scheme – this releases investment funds to improve capacity on other parts of the network.

The Alternative has been reviewed by the Transport Select Committee’s rail Specialist Advisers, who endorsed the capacity calculations.

Network Rail carried out a review of alternatives for DfT, which was released in January 2012 as part of the documentation published at the time of the Secretary of State’s decision on HS2. The Network Rail work contained a number of errors and misconceptions about the 51m Alternative. Nevertheless, the review essentially endorsed the 51m proposals in relation to long distance flows. The Alternative was criticised for failing to meet Euston commuter demand; however, the work done previously for 51m had focussed on long distance travel, and subsequent work demonstrates that the Alternative can provide a major capacity increase for Euston commuters, contrary to the claims made by Network Rail.

Network Rail also claimed that the Alternative would result in major disruption to the West Coast Main Line. This is not the case; the limited works proposed at specific locations are equivalent to current upgrades in progress or planned for the route (for example, the flyover at Norton Bridge, north of Stafford). Yet

¹ <http://51m.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/App%201%20-%20Optimised%20Alternative%20to%20HS2.pdf>

Network Rail ignored the much greater disruption that will inevitably result from the total reconstruction of Euston over an eight year period for HS2.

Similarly, Network Rail claim that the Alternative would require services to be withdrawn or reduced at some stations on the route (Atherstone, Rugeley and Stone). This reflects a misunderstanding of the illustrative service pattern shown in the Alternative, which focussed on fast services from Euston and did not cover all services on the route. It is clear that the proposals in the Alternative would allow the current level of service at these stations to be maintained or enhanced.

DfT also commissioned Atkins to carry out an update appraisal of the alternatives². Their report showed³ that the 51m Alternative has a dramatically better Benefit Cost Ratio than HS2, as shown below:

Alternative	BCR (excluding wider impacts)	BCR (including wider impacts)
RP2	4.01	4.66
OA	5.17	6.06
HS2 (London – West Midlands) ⁴	1.4	1.7
HS2 (Full “Y” network) ⁵	1.6 – 1.9	1.8 – 2.5

Conclusions

1. There is a need to increase capacity on the rail network, but this should be achieved through targeted investment at key points across the country, focussed on delivering early benefits.
2. HS2 is an inappropriate project, concentrating available investment on one route, with no benefits for many years.

² “High Speed Rail Strategic Alternatives Study: Update Following Consultation”
<http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/hs2-strategic-alternatives-study-update/hs2-strategic-alternatives-study-update.pdf>

³ ibid page 28

⁴ “Economic Case for HS2: Updated appraisal of transport user benefits and wider economic benefits”, page 48
<http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/hs2-economic-case-appraisal-update/hs2-economic-case-appraisal-update.pdf>

⁵ ibid, page 10