



PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE HAS MISJUDGED HS1

Campaign group Railfuture has criticised the Public Accounts Committee over its assessment of HS1.

“We think they’ve failed to analyse in more detail why HS1 (the Channel Tunnel Rail Link) has not generated the traffic levels predicted before it was built, or why its high construction cost is seen as a “taxpayer saddled debt”, while new motorways costing similar sums never are – regardless of their full construction costs. Why the double standard?” said director Ian McDonald. “Furthermore the Government own the roads exclusively, while HS1 is owned by the Canadian Ontario teachers’ pension fund! Do they see it as a burden or a money generator? Why have the debts not been passed on to them? At least the best route was eventually selected, following existing transport corridors, after time and money was initially spent on planning some impractical alternative routes.

“The predictions for usage of HS1 were made before the really cheap airlines, none of whom pay a fuel tax, started to compete on the routes covered by Eurostar services. If the rail fares could match the air fares then Eurostar would attract 95% of the Paris/Brussels traffic rather than about 60%, and probably many of the passengers going beyond too. Kent rail commuters using the route also pay a premium fare to use the services some 20% higher than those on the classic routes and consequently many have not made the switch to the new services, although usage is slowly increasing.

“Road users have been spared several fuel tax increases, and in spite of popular protests, motoring costs in real terms are less than a decade ago, while rail fares have approximately doubled in the same period with another average 6% increase planned in 2013. The new high speed services should have attracted motorists in their thousands but low motoring cost comparisons have held this in check.

“Also while Railfuture has been critical of the HS2 project, for many reasons, the exceptionally high speed, the route selected, poor connectivity with other railways, station sites, etc, nevertheless we support the concept because of the additional rail capacity it will release on the classic routes. The increasing rail traffic cannot be carried by simply upgrading the existing busiest rail lines as many of the objectors claim, and we need to get more freight off the roads too. These transport modal switches are essential if we are serious about reducing our carbon footprint.

“We urge the Committee to look again at all the facts, and at other non-rail transport projects and correct their misleading report.”

Notes to editors:

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for both passengers and freight.

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