



INDEPENDENT TRANSPORT COMMISSION

Britain's independent research charity for transport and land use policy

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Independent Transport Commission

The Spatial Effects of High Speed Rail: Birmingham Workshop

The Event:

The Independent Transport Commission (ITC) has commissioned a major study investigating the spatial effects of High Speed Rail, and the opportunities that an extended network might bring to the UK's cities and regions. Public and media perceptions of the potential of High Speed Rail (HSR) have been strongly focussed on the speed of the journey, rather than the benefits it could generate in terms of improved connectivity, convenience, economic synergies and increased capacity across the system. In order to foster the exploration of these issues and improve collaboration at the wider city-region level, the ITC is holding series of workshops in major city-regions during Spring and Summer 2013.

The first of these workshops took place in Birmingham on the evening of 18th April: this was kindly organised by Peter Brett Associates and hosted by Glenn Howells Architects in their splendid meeting room with views over the city and the proposed site of the new HSR station. The workshop involved a number of leading stakeholders, including local government officials, Local Economic Partnership representatives, transport specialists, architects, and local experts who had responded to the ITC's Call for Evidence. The format of the evening involved short presentations on submissions to the Call for Evidence, followed by a structured discussion of the likely spatial effects of HSR chaired by ITC Commissioner John Worthington.

Key Issues raised in Discussion:

A number of key issues were raised by participants, including:

- If HSR is to be a good piece of infrastructure, we need a broad spatial plan for UK regions in order to capture its benefits. We need to better understand how the improved connectivity resulting from HSR can benefit our city-regions and take a broader view of the economic benefits it can bring, including social cohesion, employment, inward investment, and innovation. Several delegates argued that we should consider HSR not merely as a narrow transport engineering project but as a national project aimed at improving the UK's economy, social ties, and connectivity. HSR may well benefit the London region, but it can also stimulate growth in other UK regions with good planning and measures to improve local connectivity. But without good planning, there was concern that these benefits would not arise, and would remain bound in with the London economy.
- There were local concerns that the Black Country and Coventry might become excluded from the benefits HSR can bring to the region. The importance of regional co-operation and good governance was a recurring theme: this was seen as essential if the spatial benefits of HSR were to be fully captured for Birmingham and the towns and cities around it. A number of participants argued for the development of a strong vision (references to Highbury) for the long term future of the City Region, with stronger regional leadership and a greater clarity of purpose to deliver it
- Work is continuing to explore how HSR can create greater connectivity across the region by releasing capacity on the existing rail network. In the period before HSR Phase 1 is completed around a third of the existing rail network will have been replaced through planned maintenance. We should therefore take the opportunity to use this investment to create new connections and maximize the ability of HSR to contribute towards greater rail accessibility across the UK.
- Airports are an important aspect of capturing the spatial effects of HSR. In Birmingham there is an excellent opportunity to create a travel hub at Birmingham Airport and make better use of its spare

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capacity. Good connections between HSR, local rail, local public transport and the airport must all be part of this plan.

- We must understand the spatial effects of HSR in terms of improved connectivity which is more than merely journey time savings. A number of delegates noted that current forms of evaluation and cost: benefit appraisal are inadequate since these focus strongly on the value of time savings, (which a number of participants argued was flawed because time on trains is now being used much more effectively), rather than the full value of economic and social benefits.
- To capture the spatial benefits of HSR additional investment is required in small-scale local connections which are often vital. In Birmingham, the spatial challenges of the HSR station in relation to the city centre will require consideration to ensure that interchanges between rail, other modes and city centre development are convenient and effective.
- This should be seen in the context of reform of our planning systems, by giving greater autonomy to city regions in decision making. In addition, better communication is necessary so that the infrastructure provider has a clear line of communication with those responsible for planning the future of the city and wider city region, as well as ensuring that the local business community understands the spatial benefits that such infrastructure could bring.

Next Steps:

From the discussion, the following have been identified as key initiatives to develop:

- The need to identify small projects that can begin soon will improve the chances of success once HSR is built. For example, Birmingham could seek to improve connections around the proposed terminal as a matter of urban design. In addition, Network Rail replaces half its infrastructure every 20 years through maintenance: by the time HSR is built there is a great opportunity to ensure that the local rail network is well-positioned to capture the connectivity advantages of the High Speed line.
- We need to stimulate innovative thinking at both a national and a regional level. In order to bypass entrenched viewpoints it will be important to generate strong local co-operation and the development of a regional vision for all the places HSR will serve. Such networks and political/social engagement will be vital if areas such as the Black Country and Coventry are going to join Birmingham in capturing the spatial benefits of HSR.
- The need to consider reform of our approach to planning, so that we counteract the deep-seated attachment to centralized control of such decisions, and take into account local and regional aspirations.

The ITC will draw together the issues raised at the national workshop series with a concluding event in London on the evening of 23rd July 2013. All participants in the workshops will be invited. An interim report containing summaries of the workshop discussions will be published later in the summer. This will lead to a major symposium 'Learning from Europe', be held in Lille during the autumn to review conclusions, draw insights from European experience and frame recommendations for the project's final report.

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