



## *INDEPENDENT TRANSPORT COMMISSION*

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

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### **The Spatial Effects of High Speed Rail: Regional Workshop in Manchester**

#### **The Event:**

The Independent Transport Commission (ITC) is running a major work stream investigating the spatial effects of High Speed Rail (HSR), 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 have been strongly focused on the speed of the journey, rather than on the benefits it could generate in terms of improved connectivity, increased capacity across the system, convenience, and economic synergies. Following a Call for Evidence in late 2012, which drew a strong response and raised wide-ranging connectivity and impact issues, the next stage of the project is fostering the exploration of these issues and improving collaboration at the city-region level through a series of workshops in key regions during the Spring and Summer of 2013.

The third workshop in the series on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May in Manchester for the North-West region, kindly hosted by Bruntwood in City Tower with superb views across the region and the site of the proposed HSR city centre station. The workshop involved a number of leading stakeholders, including representatives from the combined authority and local government, academics, business leaders, transport specialists, and 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 and project chairman John Worthington.

#### **Key Issues raised in Discussion:**

A number of important issues were raised by participants:

- Many delegates argued that the benefits of HSR were far broader than merely the time savings arising from faster journeys. Additional important benefits to the North-West region could arise from improved rail capacity on the national network, better local and international connectivity, additional inward investment as a result of that connectivity, and the catalytic effects of HSR on local and regional regeneration. Of these factors capacity release on the national network was thought to be especially important for both freight and passenger services, helping to provide more frequent and a broader range of services, as well as reducing chronic overcrowding. Some delegates, however, questioned whether the assumptions behind the case for HS2 were sound, and warned of the need to avoid displacement effects and regional segregation.
- High Speed Rail stations have the potential to become gateways into the region, both nationally and internationally (when connected to Airports). This makes it particularly important that HSR stations are well designed and well connected to local transport services. Several delegates noted that it would be critical to provide good connections to second-tier cities such as Oldham and Bolton if they also were to benefit from the HSR hubs at Manchester Airport and Manchester city. It was added that the Northern Hub is a pathway for this, putting in place the local connectivity in advance of HSR. Others pointed out that station design would be important at a local level in order that the stations could encourage regeneration and do not become a barrier to pedestrians. At Manchester Airport delegates warned that the station should not 'sit in a field' but be plugged into local redevelopment.
- The special governance structure in Greater Manchester, whereby the city, surrounding districts, and transport executive worked together as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

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was thought to be an advantage in terms of preparing for the opportunities that HSR would bring. The Authority and the LEP also shared the same boundaries and this was expected to help in the formation of a common agenda to prepare for HSR.

- Business leaders highlighted the benefits of HSR for local enterprise and employment. These benefits included a greater catchment area for employment, the ability to attract a wider pool of talented people, and the improved links that HSR would provide to mainland Europe. A participant from the creative sector stressed the potential impact HSR could have on Manchester's identity as a leading European centre of creativity and innovation.
- The mood of the workshop was of a city region confident and optimistic about its aspirations and expectations for the future.

### Next Steps:

From the discussion the following were identified as key initiatives to develop:

- Better communication is needed in order to make the case for HSR. A recurring theme was the importance of explaining that the benefits of HSR were not merely about journey time savings, but include a host of other connectivity, city identity and economic and social advantages. It was noted that the cost of HS2 was only 10% more than building a new conventional rail line on the same route. Such messages had to be made relevant to the experiences of ordinary citizens. Current initiatives by local transport user groups to map and make more legible the connectivity between various modes of transport should be supported.
- A regional partnership should be developed in order to promote a connected and positive vision of the benefits of HSR for the region. It was agreed that Manchester and the North-West had a strong brand which had international appeal. The Government and HS2 Ltd were encouraged to invest in such a partnership in order to bolster regional support for the project.
- Enhanced investment in local and national transport would be critical. The 'Northern Hub' rail upgrade and associated schemes were deemed a prerequisite for making the most of the benefits of HSR. Others argued that the prospect of HSR should be used as a catalyst to stimulate this transport investment, much of which should take place regardless of the HS2 scheme. Awareness of the way HSR would change the geography of the North would also be important, recognising the combined strength of the Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield City Regions

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

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