



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 London

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 fourth workshop in the series on the 25th June was held in London for the Greater London and South-East region, kindly hosted by Grosvenor in their auditorium in Mayfair. The workshop involved a number of leading stakeholders, including representatives from Transport for London, 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:

- HSR must be part of an integrated transport system, including road transport, the national rail network and airports. In the London region this will require careful thought, especially around the proposed interchange stations and the link with High Speed 1. Old Oak Common could become a transport super-hub if properly connected with Heathrow, and the site is more accessible than Euston within the Greater London area. Crossrail 2 will, nonetheless, be an essential step towards improving Euston's accessibility. The legacy of poor station access can be extremely costly, so a strong vision for urban and transport integration at each site will be critical.
- There are major economic benefits arising from major transport infrastructure projects, and HSR plans should be used to capture this opportunity. In London, good examples exist of the potential of major transport projects to unlock local growth, and lessons can be learned from experience with Crossrail and the Jubilee Line Extension. The transport capacity benefits for the London region arising from HSR and Crossrail could be significant, and have the potential to boost economic and population growth.
- Good governance is an essential aspect of creating good transport infrastructure. Unfortunately, in the UK delivery of major infrastructure takes far longer than in many comparable nations. Tensions exist currently between central government and the localities over HSR, and more effort is required to find consensus across these groups, in order that the project is not hampered by a sense of benefiting London at the expense of the regions. Delegates heard that planning reform could also help, and it was suggested that speedier planning decisions and the agreement on shared goals would make such projects more attractive to private capital.
- Transport must be seen as an integral part of the 'city machine'. When planning our HSR network

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we ought to be aware of the significance of London as one of the world's most vibrant city-regions. Cities are changing in their nature, and delegates heard that HSR could help to extend the knowledge economy of the London 'city-region' northwards and westwards thereby creating a 'South Britain mega-city-region'.

Next Steps:

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

- In order to capture the benefits of HSR a grand plan is needed for integrating it into the nation's infrastructure. We should think of the HSR proposals as akin to building the motorway network and use it to create a more interconnected Britain. Some delegates added that a National Networks Policy Statement was urgently required in order to set the framework for such a vision. A special delivery vehicle might also be necessary to provide confidence for private sector businesses and developers.
- HSR has the potential to spread the wealth of London and the South-East to the regions. Plans for HSR must build in good connectivity if the project is to rebalance the UK economy. A major challenge will be how our cities can act collaboratively in order to realize gains. Emphasis should also be given to the international connectivity of the HSR network with airports, and its potential to improve regional cohesion.
- When planning HSR we should learn from the experience of High Speed 1 in building a broad base of support. Delegates heard examples of how communities in Kent had been won over by the convenience of HSR services to and from Europe and London. Careful thought should be devoted to engaging those who are negative or unwilling to participate in the project, and inter-regional HSR stations similar to Ashford should be reconsidered.
- Transitional projects can be set in motion even where certainty does not exist about the final timescale and shape of the HSR network. Establishing a UK High Speed Rail network is a generational project with many associated projects required to maximize its value. The commitment to HSR could stimulate such projects to happen. Crossrail at St Giles Circus was a catalyst to bring the different planning authorities together and stimulate fresh solutions to movement and land use.
- At Kings Cross/St Pancras during the twenty years of negotiation, interim uses of the site and in the surrounding areas established a vibrancy and changed perceptions of the area. We were reminded by the developer that development is unpredictable: 'you need to believe and act, with the ability to adapt to changing circumstances'.

The ITC will now draw together the issues raised during the 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 a summary of 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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