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## High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill - second reading

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**Transport secretary Patrick McLoughlin introduced the second reading of the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill on Monday, with the Bill ultimately passing with a majority of 452 for to 41 opposed.**

McLoughlin commented that the need for a new North-South route now needed to be addressed, adding: "The West Coast Main Line can take no more; it is increasingly full."

He added that London and the South-East was also "increasingly full" with rising house prices and transport congestion. The Bill was about breaking a cycle and connecting to "great cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Liverpool", he said.

McLoughlin explained High Speed Rail Bill dealt with the route from London to the West Midlands. The route to Manchester and Leeds was still out to consultation. He added, Sir David Higgins did a report, 'HS2 Plus', was welcomed and he accepted the recommendation to remove the HS1-HS2 link.

He argued that to say the scheme was only about speed was to misrepresent what the last government intended and also what this government intended.

On capacity issues, he commented that over the past 20 years, passenger numbers on the train network had risen from 750 million to 1.5 billion passenger journeys a year.

"Smartphones and broadband are not an alternative to things such as HS2; they are part of the same growing links between people and businesses, and that pressure is felt acutely on our North-South rail corridors."

Though phase 1 was the focus of the debate, when complete HS2 would be a wider network, which should include serving cities on the eastern leg through the east midlands, Sheffield and Leeds as well as the north-west; "we will set out more details later this year" he said.

McLoughlin also said there were plans for the first new further education college in 20 years, backed by HS2 and that HS2 was a huge opportunity to the next generation, with 2,000 apprenticeships.

He noted that as Parliament considered the Bill for phase 1, "we will prepare our proposals for phase 2, responding to the Higgins challenge to accelerate and improve it so that the most can be made of this investment".

The transport secretary clarified that Parliament was being asked to grant planning permission and the other powers needed for the first phase in this Bill, and the vote would be on the principle of the Bill: that there should be a high-speed railway between Euston and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Handsacre.

He went on to say the government carried out the largest environmental impact assessment of a major project ever undertaken in the UK and added that those directly affected by the scheme wouldl have the opportunity to be heard by the select committee.

He noted there were "creative things that can be done along the route, such as planting tree screens to cut noise, which also makes ecological sense by creating green corridors."

Responding to Cheryl Gillan (Con, Chesham and Amersham), McLoughlin argued that of the 20.8 km of the route that passed through the Chilterns, only 3.3 km would be on the surface-at the moment the rest would be below ground level.

He also confirmed to Kevan Jones (Lab, North Durham) that the government would consult on elements of deregulation in the Bill that removed protections for monuments and gravestones.

The secretary of state repeated that he had announced an enhanced property compensation package and said he wanted to consult quickly on the further proposals.

The government would also introduce a need-to-sell scheme: "It is more than just a re-labelling of the previous exceptional hardship scheme. It will be more generous, too, but it does not stop there".

Concluding, he argued the legislation had the "power to change our nation profoundly and for the better. Yes, HS2 is ambitious; yes, it will take a great deal of investment; yes, it will take time to complete-but so did the canals, the railways and motorways that previous generations left as their legacy".

Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, Mary Creagh confirmed Labour would support the Bill, argued there would be significant benefits to the North-East and added that the Higgins review had shown where costs could be brought down.

"The key risk to the project costs is political delay" she said, adding Labour had "also looked at the strategic alternatives, as we did in government, and we believe that HS2 is the best way to move to the low-carbon transport infrastructure that our country needs".

Turning to capacity, she felt HS2 would deal with some of these constraints on the country's railways.

She added that "if we are to achieve the modal shift by getting HGVs off our roads and freight on to trains.we have to make sure that freight is able to go on the West Coast Main Line".

Creagh went on to reiterate that she wanted Higgins to look carefully at how High Speed 2 integrated with the national strategic road network to minimise travel disruption during construction and operations.

It was "right that there is proper scrutiny and ample opportunity for the select committee to examine every complaint and comment thoroughly, but there must be no more government delays", she argued.

She welcomed the removal of the HS1-HS2 link from the Bill, and also welcomed proposals for a "coherent transport plan for the North".

Turning to environmental factors, she felt "this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a green spine that links our great cities and to open up wildlife corridors". It was important to learn from the biodiversity work that had been done by Crossrail, she noted.

Concluding, she argued "HS2 follows in Brunel's great tradition of railway innovation, and we should learn from that ambition for our railways".

Gillan moved her reasoned amendment to halt the project as she argued there had been insufficient time for MPs and those affected to consider the report of the assessor.

She argued "assessments of the relative costs and benefits of works envisaged by the Bill have been repeatedly unconvincing" and also called on the government to publish the Major Projects Authority report.

Reiterating her well voiced criticism of the project, she did not believe it was "the answer to the UK's transport issues" and questioned whether it would result in the economic transformation of the North.

She reminded MPs that the environmental audit committee report had suggested the "overnment had "significant work to do" to prove that they were prioritising environmental protection.

Chairwoman of the transport committee, Louise Ellman (Lab/Co-op, Liverpool, Riverside) welcomed the Bill saying it must be as a "major addition to the national network, linked with investment in the existing classic line so that essential increased capacity and connectivity, together with the potential for regeneration, are realised".

Noting her committee's recommendations, she went on to say the "potential benefits of High Speed 2 are immense".

She appreciated some MPs had "justifiable local concerns which should be addressed, but these do not outweigh the strategic case for HS2."

Without the line, she felt "commuters will suffer from overcrowding and there will be fewer passenger services on the line than the public require and the market could sustain".

Simon Burns (Con, Chelmsford) also felt it was "crucial that there are major infrastructure projects in this country to make sure that we keep ahead of our competitors".

He felt the overwhelming need was for capacity adding that "our competitors are racing ahead with high-speed railways and that we cannot afford to stand still".

Holborn and St Pancras MP, Frank Dobson (Lab) felt there was now a "ridiculous situation whereby the hybrid Bill before the House proposes major works in my constituency, none of which the government now intend to carry out".

Whilst the option eight design of the station at Euston was shortly to be abandoned, he said "the design, cost and construction timetable for the alternative to it have not yet been worked out, so there's nowt to vote on".

The HS2 project as now proposed would "wreak havoc on those neighbourhoods", he argued.

He felt local people felt HS2 should not go ahead or at least terminate at Old Oak Common to test its capacity and permit the assessment of any "capacity needed at Euston to be based on experience rather than the guesswork used so far."

Conservative MP Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) was also in agreement with Gillan's amendment, adding that there was not enough capacity at present for those disembarking at Euston to travel across London. He also felt the implementation of HS2 was "deeply flawed".

Graham Stringer (Lab, Blackley and Broughton) said that "if we pay more and earlier in compensation, we save in the long term and the projects happen more quickly. A lot of the resistance comes from people who think they are being treated unfairly".

Jack Straw (Lab, Blackburn) focused on the unfair distribution of investment for rail projects between the South and North of the country and hoped the construction of HS2 would go some way to correct that imbalance.

Stephen O'Brien (Con, Eddisbury) claimed that there were still far too many unanswered questions about the plans, including the extensive plans to build on salt marshes which were notoriously unstable.

"No serious assessment has been made by the government in respect of increasing capacity on the West Coast Main Line and making the comparison with other countries' solutions to these problems", he added.

Karen Lumley (Con, Redditch) focused on the economic benefits for the Midlands, which she estimated to be between £214m and £375m annually.

"I am worried that once we start the project and the costs start to go up, more and more money will be taken away, and not just from other parts of the transport network", Kate Hoey (Lab, Vauxhaul) said.

Caroline Spelman (Con, Meriden) hoped the government would rethink plans not to offer any compensation to those affected by prolonged construction work and pointed out how her constituency would most likely experience more than five years of construction projects.

John Randall (Con, Uxbridge and South Ruislip) said with regards the Heathrow spur that "we can pretty well agree that the Heathrow spur is dead and should be scrapped now" and called for the Hillingdon tunnel to be extended as a consequence.

Randall concluded that the plan was "currently unsuitable for our country, because it will ruin too much of it."

Conservative MP Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) outlined his intention to support the Bill on second reading due to its impact on his local economy. He stated that the relief on local roads, by taking 1.6 million lorry journeys off them, would enable the North West to get world-class products to market.

Chairwoman of the environmental audit committee, Joan Walley (Lab, Stoke-on-Trent North) began by criticising the lack of time available to debate the environmental aspects of the Bill.

"My head tells me spending £50bn without a strategic environmental assessment will not necessarily ensure integrated transport policies for all parts of the UK, its cities and localities. Indeed, it might actually undermine many of the gains from increased rail travel that we have built up."

She said it was important to note that, despite the government's business case and the aim of making HS2 support their objective of reducing carbon emissions by shifting passengers from air and road travel to rail, that was not integral to the Bill's planning stages.

The greatest concern for Walley was the way the government went about the environmental appraisal for sustainability for phase 1.

Walley argued that the Supreme Court had effectively ruled that the strategic environmental assessment directive did not apply because Parliament was now, through the hybrid Bill process, the decision-making body.

"The government might claim that their version of strategic environmental assessment addresses those issues at the strategic level, but in reality Parliament, the decision-making authority, has had no role", she added.

"Parliament is in a very confused situation, which is made worse by having to vote tonight on second reading without knowledge of what instructions will be voted on tomorrow to guide its select committee in its work."

She concluded that passing second reading did not justify "the iniquity" of taking forward infrastructure investment of this magnitude without a strategic environmental assessment.

Chairwoman of the backbench business select committee, Natascha Engel (Lab, North East Derbyshire) began by questioning the "suppression" of the publication of the Major Projects Authority report.

"I think part of the reason the report is not being published is that there is no very strong financial and economic case."

Engel focused on what she described as "the pitifully poor consultation" which was "so complicated and narrowly drawn that most of my constituents who are affected will certainly not be able to petition Parliament and have their voices heard."

"I am really concerned that the whole project has been run along those lines. It has excluded the voices of those people most severely affected by it. It excludes those whose homes and communities will be destroyed, and it does not give a real opportunity for their concerns to be heard", Engel added.

She concluded that the "true reason those people are not being consulted" was because the financial and economic case "is so weak".

Brian Binley (Con, Northampton South)  commented that the issue was more significant that "just a set of railway lines; it is about what we feel about competing in the world to come and what we are willing to leave both our children and our grandchildren."

Mike Kane (Lab, Wythenshawe and Sale East) added his support for the project, saying that it would facilitate Manchester and the northern economy to fulfil its potential.

Joining the member across the chamber, Eric Ollerenshaw (Con, Lancaster and Fleetwood) said the government had appreciated the support of Labour members such as Kane from key northern cities.

He agreed with other members that the biggest reason for HS2 was addressing the widening North-South divide.

Barry Sheerman (Lab/Co-op, Huddersfield) detailed his move from one of support for HS2 to his position now, in opposition of the project. He said initially he had been supportive as he believed it would address the North-South divide; however research he had considered showed it would not deliver on this promise.

Andrew Bridgen (Con, North West Leicestershire) also spoke against HS2, and criticised the lack of answers to questions raised by members since the paving Bill for HS2 in June 2013. He queried the impact of cost, capacity, light and compensation for those households directly affected, as did Andrew Turner (Con, Isle of Wight).

John McDonnell (Lab, Hayes and Harlington) criticised the consultation process, and the lack of clarity for constituents on what the political parties' views will be about their options in respect of airport expansion, and as a result, HS2.

"My constituents do not know the route, do not know what land is threatened and do not know what compensation they will be offered" he said, which he believed was unacceptable.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Con, The Cotswolds) emphasised the benefits that linking HS1 and HS2 would bring, particularly for passengers coming into the country from Europe that would want a fully interconnected railway. He thought it crazy that the world's busiest airport hub would not be linked with the most expensive infrastructure project ever seen in the country.

Stuart Andrew (Con, Pudsey) spoke about how crucial HS2 would be for Leeds and the wider city region in terms of boosting local economic growth, saying it would "help us to reshape the economic geography, be a catalyst for regeneration across the city, and provide a real boost for jobs and skills".

Angie Bray (Con, Ealing Central and Acton) thought that the balance of compensation for the construction of HS2 for those living in urban and rural areas was unfairly skewed towards those in rural areas as people who had chosen to live in a city were not immune from noise and pollution.

Dr Phillip Lee (Con, Bracknell) argued that government strategy should be about reducing people's need to make rail journey: "The widespread installation of fibre-optic cabling, the increased use of satellite broadband technology to serve more rural areas and more extensive 4G would allow people to spend longer at home".

Mark Reckless (Con, Rochester and Strood) argued that shortening the journey time from Manchester to London would be a huge economic boost to Manchester.

Shadow transport minister Lilian Greenwood said that across the network, freight, commuter, and fast inter-city services all competed for a diminishing number of paths. Those limitations caused innumerable conflicts and compromises in timetables.

She welcomed the new focus on the benefits that phase 2 of the project could bring through new connections between the cities of the Midlands and the North.

"The West Midlands and the nation as a whole need this project to meet rail capacity challenges, but it can also deliver huge economic benefits and address the transport inequalities that continue to hold our regions back", she added.

Transport minister, Robert Goodwill explained that later in 2014 an enhanced need-to-sell scheme would be launched to help owner-occupiers who wanted to sell their property but cannot because of HS2.

The government would also consult on offering a new choice of a cash alternative, and would consult on new home owner payments for owner-occupiers in rural areas between 120 and 300 metres from the line.

In closing, he insisted: "HS2 will help drive this country forward. It will create new capacity and enable better use of existing transport corridors. It will join up our great cities and strengthen our economy. As a result, it will help open up opportunities currently held back by lack of investment".

Question put, that the amendment be made.
The House divided: Ayes 50, Noes 451
Question put that the Bill now be read a second time: Ayes 452, Noes 41.
High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill (money)
Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.-(Harriett Baldwin.)

Question agreed to.

High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill (ways and means)
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the making of provision about income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax, stamp duty land tax and stamp duty reserve tax.-(Harriett Baldwin)

Question agreed to.

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