

28 July 2011



## High Speed Rail: Investing in Britain's Future

### A response from Sustaine

Sustaine is an independent organisation, based in northern England, working across geographical boundaries, inspiring and supporting action on sustainability in all sectors. We provide a voice on sustainability for northern England.

Sustaine is a cross-sector voluntary group of highly experienced individuals who have come together to work towards the realisation of a shared vision of a sustainable future for northern England and its people. Sustaine brings together a depth and diversity of individual experience and expertise resulting in a unique and broad knowledge base, enabling us to provide a range of information and support across the three dimensions of sustainability – economic, social and environmental.

In this response to the consultation Sustaine offers its support for the Government's strategy for a high speed rail network for Britain, and welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

Sustaine has the following comments to make in response to the questions posed in the consultation.

#### **i. Strategy and wider context**

*Do you agree that there is a strong case for enhancing the capacity and performance of Britain's inner-city rail network to support economic growth over the coming decades?*

Sustaine supports the case for enhancing the capacity and performance of Britain's inter-city rail network. The introduction of High Speed Rail is a valid option, where other modes - air and road - cannot deliver the additional capacity required without detrimental impact on the environment and significantly increased carbon emissions.

High speed rail will make a strategic contribution to the improvement of Britain's economic, environmental and social well-being in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will bring greater capacity, performance and affordability of the nation's inter-city connectivity.

High speed rail will make a major contribution both directly by improving connectivity between main towns and indirectly by releasing capacity on the classic rail network which could be made available for freight and local train services (Northern Route Utilisation Strategy (Northern RUS)). As already

demonstrated in Europe and elsewhere in the world, high speed rail will have an effect on physical connectivity comparable to that achieved by broadband networks in the digital communications field.

As a fully developed network, high speed rail will significantly reduce national intercity journey times and also link the major British cities directly into the European network, transforming international competitiveness and contributing significantly to the rebalancing of the national economic geography. To ensure that this potential is realised, high speed rail must be presented as a transformational, integrated national network, even though its delivery must of necessity be implemented in phases.

High speed rail will also be a key component of a sustainable, low carbon, low pollution transport system, with a low dependence on the availability of fuel oil. High speed rail has the potential through mode transfer from air and road travel to reduce significantly the carbon emissions of the transport sector.

The reduction in pollution and major reduction in death and injury compared with car travel will not only benefit everyone directly but will reduce the drain on economic and health service resources that improved air quality and safer travel will deliver.

Sustaine would urge that to maximise its value, high speed rail must be set in the context of a national transport strategy reflecting the long term challenges outlined by the Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond (September 2010): *“For long-distance, inter-urban journeys, our challenge is to make the train the mode of choice. For short-distance urban travel, our challenge is to make public transport or low-impact modes such as walking and cycling the most attractive options”*, where public transport includes electrically powered local rail, metro, tram and bus.

## **ii. The case for high speed rail**

*Do you agree that a national high speed rail network from London to Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester (the Y network) would provide the best value for money solution (best balance of costs and benefits) for enhancing rail capacity and performance?*

Sustaine supports the Y route as a useful starting point. We strongly recommend that the Government’s vision *‘of a truly national high speed network for the whole of the Britain’*, including northeast England and Scotland, should be presented from the outset, to ensure that the opportunities are maximised for the benefit for all. There is a strong case for high speed rail lines to serve other parts of Britain, linking core and strategic hubs in England, and Scotland and Wales.

In the earlier stages of development of the Y route, it will be essential to ensure that effective links into the classic rail network are developed progressively to maximise the benefit from the investment. For northeast

England, this would initially require effective, enhanced access to Leeds and beyond via the East Coast Main Line (ECML) to Newcastle and Edinburgh. Early improvements to the infrastructure of the ECML as already recognised in the Northern RUS will be required with subsequent, sequential development of the infrastructure necessary for high speed rail operations.

A high speed rail link from Birmingham through the Midlands towns to the Tees Valley, Tyneside and Edinburgh would provide a 'centre' of population that would deliver the economic agglomeration benefits currently enjoyed by London and the South East, thus making a major contribution to the rebalancing of economic opportunities between North and South

At the same time it will be necessary to enhance the west coast route to Glasgow; the need then for a link between Manchester and Leeds will be clear, the engineering challenge being small in comparison with those already addressed or being addressed elsewhere in Europe.

To ensure that the indirect benefits of high speed rail are realised, it will be essential to continue to invest in the classic rail network with its local services and connections in a timely manner, to improve performance, develop efficiency gains, enhance the station environment, replace the often life-expired rolling stock and promote the transfer to electric operation that are essential to accommodate the forecast growth in passenger and freight movements in areas remote from the high speed network.

A national high speed rail network would provide the best value for money solution for enhancing rail capacity and performance however Sustaine believes that it should be presented as a transformational project seeking to deliver an *integrated national* high speed rail network from the outset. Such a project would provide the best value for money solution for enhancing rail capacity and performance and be truly beneficial to the whole of the Britain.

### **iii. The Government's proposed network**

*Do you agree with the Government's proposals for the phased roll out of a national high speed rail network, and for links to Heathrow Airport and the High Speed 1 line to the Channel Tunnel?*

Sustaine agrees that a phased roll out of the high speed rail network is necessary with the London to Birmingham link being an appropriate place to start which crowding expecting to be severe within the next 15 years on the West Coast Main Line.

The current plan for high speed rail to reach Leeds by 2033 appears unacceptably slow. As currently proposed, Newcastle cannot expect a high speed rail service until after 2036 which is unacceptable given the current economic difficulties. The Government needs to be more ambitious and seek to deliver an integrated national high speed network sooner and before 2032.

Connectivity across the north of England must also be addressed as a priority, with careful consideration being given to phasing later stages to start in both the north and south as a means of delivering the network sooner and avoiding geographical disparities. Planning, design and construction rates should follow a timescale that reflects the best European practice.

Sustaine supports the linking of the national network to the High Speed 1 line (HS1), improving connectivity with Western Europe, supporting economic growth and international competitiveness. We note that HS1 already takes over 80% of ticketed journeys between London and Paris/Brussels.

The proposal to provide high speed rail services to international airports such as Heathrow limits the route options available in the early stages of the development of the network. A good express service to and from central London already exists and in 2010 HS2 Ltd found insufficient demand to justify direct high speed rail services. Hence, Sustaine sees no advantage in linking high speed rail to Heathrow before the network has been developed effectively across northeast England and Scotland.

#### **iv. The specification for the line**

*Do you agree with the principles and specification used by HS2 Ltd to underpin its proposals for new high speed rail lines and the route selection process HS2 Ltd undertook?*

Sustaine supports the principles and specification used by HS2 Ltd for the development of high speed rail lines. We would expect to see these parameters form the basis of the high speed rail network across Britain, albeit perhaps modified sympathetically in the light of experience gained from the design and construction of the London to the West Midlands link.

Specifically, the application of the principles of sustainable development and of integration with the classic network; integration with other transport networks; and the 'high speed trains only' concept will help to ensure that the capacity and use of the network is optimised to deliver the greatest possible economic, environmental and social benefit.

Sustaine is pleased to see the application of the principles of sustainable development, and we provide further commentary on the Appraisal of Sustainability in Question 7.

We agree that the high speed rail network should be designed to a maximum line speed of 250mph; not only is this in line with European good practice but it also helps to ensure that the design will remain appropriate in the later stages of the development of the national network.

However, Sustaine strongly supports the sensitivity with which the actual design speeds are to be implemented to reflect the differing environmental considerations across the range of rural and urban areas through which the

routes will pass. This approach will minimise the environmental impact and maximise the benefit of the new railway.

The route selection process undertaken appears to have been well considered and thorough.

#### **v. The route between London and the West Midlands**

*Do you agree that the Government's route, including the approach proposed for mitigating its impacts, is the best option for a new high speed rail line between London and the West Midlands?*

Sustaine has no specific comments to make on the proposed route between London and the West Midlands but would like to make the following general comments.

We welcome the sensitive way in which feedback from the consultation with local communities living next to or close by the proposed route has been used in developing the current plan. The intention at Euston to *'work closely with local authorities, residents and businesses to develop detailed construction plans which minimise the impact to surrounding areas'* is welcomed as an approach that we expect would be adopted for the whole construction programme.

We accept that the route will pass through highly sensitive areas such as the Chilterns, and we support the stated guiding principle of *'where possible avoiding or minimising, and then mitigating, impacts on people and the environment.'* We suggest that this principle would best be reflected by the optimum design of the route, rather than necessarily following existing transport corridors, in particular main roads and motorways.

Whilst a link to Heathrow airport may be desirable at a later stage of the network development, provision for the link should not distort the optimum route for the primary task of linking London and Birmingham.

Sustaine wishes to see the route focused on hubs in London and Birmingham as the two major cities to be linked by the first phase of the development. This approach would then simplify the links to existing public transport networks and help ensure efficient, overall journey completion. Whilst there may be a catchment area role for Parkway stations, they would require extended connections with other modes for journey completion, thus reducing the overall journey-time benefit.

#### **vi: Appraisal of Sustainability**

*Do you wish to comment on the Appraisal of Sustainability of the Government's proposed route between London and the West Midlands that has been published to inform this consultation?*

Sustaine notes that the Appraisal of Sustainability has been carried out to assess the economic, environmental and social impacts of HS2 at the early stages of the development of the scheme, and is a useful analysis to inform stakeholders.

It is not appropriate for Sustaine to provide detailed comments on the results from the Appraisal of Sustainability for the proposed route between London and the West Midlands and instead offers some general comments on the approach undertaken.

The Appraisal of Sustainability process has adapted the four sustainable development priorities from the *UK Sustainable Development Strategy: Securing the Future*, which have formed the overarching structure for considering sustainability impacts. Sustaine commends the thorough and detailed way in which this appraisal framework has been used to guide the work to date.

Sustaine expects that similar processes will be followed for the remainder of the Y network, as well as on any further extension of the high speed rail network.

We welcome the gating process used in reducing the original long list of options and the way in which the sifting was informed '*at each stage by highlighting their relative performance against the stated sustainability objectives*' to derive the finally recommended route.

We are concerned to ensure that the route selection process is not dominated by economic performance considerations and that the wider principles of sustainable development involving a balance between social, economic and environmental parameters are equally valued.

Sustaine notes the work undertaken on environmental impacts, such as noise during construction and operation, which has already been completed. This work establishes a firm base for the formal, overall and detailed Environmental Impact Assessment that is to follow in 2012/13. We have noted the proposed mitigation measures to address the environmental impacts of the scheme but we consider that further work remains to be done in this area. It will be particularly important that the findings of this formal assessment of the impact of HS2 on the environment, people and communities, continues to inform the detailed design of the route, and its features as they evolve, if the Appraisal of Sustainability is to achieve its full objective.

In addition Sustaine notes and commends the further extensive work undertaken and shared in the appendices attached to the main reports.

## **vii. Blight and compensation**

*Do you agree with the options set out to assist those whose properties lose a significant amount of value as a result of any new high speed line?*

Sustaine supports the guiding principle of '*where possible avoiding or minimising, and then mitigating, impacts on people and the environment*' (as noted at Question 5); this would, of course, include the natural and built environment, cultural heritage and local communities and would apply during construction and operation. This principle requires a respect for environmental limits and communities, and requires a strategic approach to reducing impacts with compensation being the option of last resort.

We note that in some Brownfield areas in particular, mitigation measures may result in an overall improvement to the environment and circumstances for people and communities.

The opportunities to minimise impact and maximise benefit must therefore be shaped by the local circumstances along the proposed high speed rail route, through a flexible approach to design speed and technical specifications.

Whilst the proposals for property blight and compensation appear fair, should a case for compensation be reached, we would expect fair and just treatment, with prompt payment to ensure no extended uncertainty.

We note the proposals for close working with the major community groups in London and Birmingham and trust that the intent to 'contractually bind the companies building the route to reduce impacts to a practicable minimum and protect the environment and the amenity of people along the proposed route' would be equally applied to communities large or small.

We welcome the opportunities provided for those who may be affected by HS2 to comment in the proposals at an early stage.

For further information or if you require clarity on any of the issues made in this response, please contact:

Shruti Jain  
Policy Advocate  
Sustaine  
The Guildhall  
Quayside  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 3AF

Direct Line: 0191 261 3933  
Email: [shruti.jain@northeastcouncils.gov.uk](mailto:shruti.jain@northeastcouncils.gov.uk).