

High-speed network

By Graham Nalty

graham@grahamnalty.co.uk

High-speed rail is now definitely on the political agenda. The case has been demonstrated quite convincingly in the Atkins report, indicating that there is a strong business case and a strong transport case for building a high-speed line from London to the North – and most probably on to Scotland.

The transport case for building a line can easily be verified by the excessive overcrowding of peak-hour long-distance trains and capacity-linked delays at key junctions.

The capacity limitations of our present network has been most poignantly exemplified by the ongoing row about capacity on the East Coast main line following the Rail Regulator's ruling to allow through London-Sunderland trains in favour of increasing the number of London-Leeds trains.

To illustrate further the urgency of expanding rail capacity, the limitations of the East Coast main line are not as close to breaking point as on the West Coast main line, according to the studies conducted in producing the Atkins report.

To put it bluntly, unless a high-speed line is built, the WCML will, within 10 years, reach such a level of overcrowding on its peak hour trains and delays on its peak hour services that it will be a serious embarrassment to the government of the day.

The best forecasts show that the high rate of increase in rail travel is not likely to diminish and rail travel will rise faster than road travel over the next decade.

Studies carried out for the Atkins report demonstrated that a high-speed line would be far more effective in meeting the future rail travel demand than would expanding the current network, or building more roads to encourage potential rail users to use their cars, or expanding the domestic air services.

Indeed one of the main generators of increased rail travel has been the increase in congestion on the roads. This will continue while inter-city road journey times are increasing about 3-4% per year, and rail journey times are decreasing.

The business case for building a high-speed line is strong. Cost to benefit analysis indicates a benefit ratio of greater than two to one.

The campaign for building a north-south line, and indeed a network of high-speed routes has been taken up with great advocacy by the Railway Forum.

In conjunction with supportive partners in different areas (Scottish Passenger Transport Association, Derby and Derbyshire Rail Forum and GNER) the Railway Forum has promoted a series of seminars



One of Britain's most successful trains was introduced 30 years ago.

The InterCity 125, also known as the HST or high-speed train, became a favourite for passengers.

Now the search is on for a replacement. Railfuture's AGM was told that First Group and the Department for Transport are working on an "HST2".

Secrecy surrounds the project but many Railfuture members believe it should be possible to design a train suitable for

electric or diesel propulsion. Railfuture member Andrew Long points out that in Germany electro-diesel tram-trains are being introduced in Kassel, Zwickau and Nordhausen.

If a 25kv ac version of the standard gauge "electro-diesel" LRTs could be built, disused lines such as Luton-Dunstable and Cambridge-St Ives could be reconnected at much lower cost to the national network. Similarly a hybrid diesel-third-rail

version could revitalise the South Hants LRT scheme, Portsmouth-Gosport-Fareham, where only the tunnel under Portsmouth harbour would need be electrified.

An electro-diesel version of HST2 would obviate the need for diesels working under electric wires as they do on the East and West Coast lines.

The rolling stock companies make big profits. Perhaps they should invest in these two steps towards integrated transport.

to explain the benefits of the high-speed line. To further the campaign for high speed rail in the UK, Jim Steer (formerly of the Strategic Rail Authority) has set up Greengauge 21 "a new not for profit organisation which aims to research and develop the concept of a UK high speed rail network and promote its implementation as a national economic priority".

What is truly exceptional about Greengauge 21 is that at last railway industry leaders are getting together in a way never before contemplated to drive forward the concept of developing a high speed rail network within the UK.

Greengauge 21 has produced a manifesto for the development of a high-speed rail network that is extremely well researched and extremely positive.

To give an example of the common sense, Greengauge 21 says "... for HSL to be successful, it must serve city centres. Network designs that only reached the periphery (say the M25 in the case of London) would fail to attract sufficient market share to be worthwhile".

Most Railfuture members would know that by instinct without the need for an SRA study to prove it.

Greengauge 21 is a valuable asset. It will provide opportunity for study and debate to determine the most beneficial way to build a high-speed rail network that will interface with existing rail services and with other forms of transport.

Greengauge 21 welcomes contributions to the debate on high-speed

rail. As many Railfuture members have specialist knowledge and imaginative ideas for the development of the rail network, we can play our part by joining that debate through Greengauge 21.

The development of an HSL network is a catalyst for imaginative ways to expand the rail network. It will affect the way we campaign for new routes and better services.

I should emphasise that supporters of HSL do not consider that the money for building an HSL should be taken from funds allocated towards improving the present rail network. Do motorway supporters suggest that other roads should be neglected because a motorway is to be built?

The arrival of HSL will be a stimulus for increased rail expansion around the HSL stations. Evening outer suburban services could benefit from increased frequencies by virtue of more long distance rail services arriving between 08.00 and 10.00 in the evening (including passengers from continental Europe). The economic case for line reopenings is strengthened by the extra passengers using the proposed ser-

vice to access the HSL. We are not talking about a marginal expansion, we are talking about doubling the number of people using the railways for long distance travel, and more. We are also talking about reducing the demand for airport expansion.

We need to promote the discussion and state the benefits of high-speed rail so that it gains the massive public support now enjoyed by low cost airlines. It is important that the building of an HSL network gets into the national planning system.

When the opportunity comes along to comment on local transport plans, include references to a national high-speed rail network in your response.

It may be a long way off, but a national high-speed rail network would probably include most population centres of 500,000 people.

The eight English core cities (Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, Bristol, Sheffield and Nottingham), three capital cities (Cardiff, London and Edinburgh) plus Glasgow, might be assumed to be linked by a high-speed network within 50 years.

The task is to get HSL included in each relevant local plan alongside all the proposals for motorway expansion. High-Speed Rail can be our future.

Let us each make our own contribution to make it reality.

More information: <http://www.greengauge21.net/index.htm>

High-speed rail frees up existing network.

Air travel uses 17 times more energy per passenger than rail.

A two-track high-speed line has the capacity of seven motorway lanes.