

HS2 – THE SLOW TRAIN TO OLD OAK COMMON

FROM PARISH COUNCILS IN SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

The all consuming Brexit babble is drowning out major concerns that the Government is failing to address. All over the country the concern that excites the most vociferous condemnation is the HS2 infrastructure project. Mr. Thurston, HS2's Chief Executive, claims that there is a groundswell of support nationwide for this railway – we do not believe him.

When launched nine years ago, HS2 was heralded as the train that would carry 1,100 passengers every four minutes from London to Birmingham at speeds well in excess of 200mph. A straight line was drawn across England, obliterating anything in its path, in order to accommodate this “high speed” wonder. After nine years of planning and numerous changes of management at senior level, the Government needs to reassess the criteria on which the viability of this project should be judged.

Everyone knows that the budget is ballooning and out of control. In order to try and regain control we hear that the trains may now go slower – to save cost. The trains may be greatly reduced in number – to save cost. The line may never be built beyond Birmingham – because the cost will be too great. The latest ex-Chairman suggests that the development at Euston should be delayed and the trains should stop at Old Oak Common – to save cost. Local observation of the preliminary enabling work that has been done already shows a total disregard for cost control, and a complete lack of common sense.

There are claims that this whole project is already obsolete. It earned the nickname “White Elephant” almost at its inception, and it still carries that description today. “White Elephant” projects make people nervous. Improving our existing railways nationwide is so obviously the better option and would be a far more popular plan.

Andrea Leadsom, our Member of Parliament, has put all these points about HS2 to Mr. Thurston and challenged him to review the business case and the value for taxpayers money. He trots out an all too familiar assurance that the project will be “on time and on budget” – a commitment also made by Mr. Grayling. Another major infrastructure project, currently under construction, that boasted to be “on time and on budget” is Crossrail. Now the Government admits that Crossrail will be late and over budget. By the time HS2 is up and running the IT phenomenon will see more and more people working from home – they do already. The whole world can already make instant contact, with eye contact, on screen. The cry for more and more capacity (a necessity strongly advocated by Teresa May) will fade away. Who will need to travel, on an expensive ticket, from Old Oak common to Birmingham, with no stops en route and no saving on time?

Mr. Grayling still labours under the illusion that Phase One of HS2 will cost £27.18bn. We all know that the cost is over £50bn and rising. He also says that HS2 will become the backbone of our national rail network. A backbone is no use to anyone if it only connects a third of the body. If this railway never goes beyond Birmingham, the improvement to connectivity between London, the Midlands, northern England and central Scotland will be greatly diminished.

Every week recently there have been more and more revelations which demonstrate the inadequacy of those in charge of delivering HS2. The source for the considerable amount of electricity needed to power the HS2 trains has long been questioned. The possible, unbelievable answer to this problem at this late stage is wind turbines and solar panels along the route. More land acquisition

and much, much more cost, both financial and environmental. There was no mention in the EA of wind turbines powering the trains. Therefore when Parliament gave the go ahead for HS2, there was no knowledge of this huge environmental impact to wildlife and the countryside.

We, the undersigned, urge all those with power and influence to stop this bloated mammoth now, before any more money is wasted, and thus release billions of pounds for far more important, necessary and worthwhile projects.