

# One thing we have learnt this week – High speed rail is controversial

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High speed rail is controversial. Yes we're back to rail again, this time as fast as possible. At the moment in the UK HS2 is in the news - a lot. The costs have escalated throughout the project and are now put at over £100 billion up from £33 billion. The government is reviewing the whole project, since its coughing up the cash. Like Hinkley C this is a project many would say as bigger white elephant that this site keeps coming back to... Coming from the West Midlands I know a number of people who say they are affected by the route (phase 2). However when I've asked how near they are to it, the answers a few miles away. This to my mind is not the same as having your house knocked down or having it at the bottom of your garden, but anyway... **Reasons for first.** 1) We undoubtedly need new rail capacity. Numbers travelling by train have almost reached the 1913 record, although they've dropped a bit in the last few years. With the climate emergency more people are going to travel by train. the numbers will certainly increase. 2) This country is big enough to justify high speed rail. Its crazy that it takes me 4 hours to get to London from Edinburgh. Forward thinking suggests that trans European high speed rail will be needed to get around and why should this all start in the UK from London? 3) In building it we are building a new piece of infrastructure that will last hundreds of years. This to me makes the cost overruns while disturbing - seem less important. The last major line to be built in the UK before HS1 was Great Central, we are using Victorian infrastructure and we certainly need to do something. 4) The alternatives (see below) may not be cheaper and certainly won't be easier. 5) Billions of pounds have already been spent. 6) There are claims it will regenerate the north. 7) Euston station needs a major revamp. 8) Radio 4 "Costing the Earth" did a programme on the effects of HS1 on the locals. They had all seem to have learnt to live with it and preferred it to the M20. **Against.** 1) There is undoubtedly been a loss of biodiversity. A number of ancient woodlands are going. One reason the cost has risen is a lot of tunnelling to mitigate some of this. I feel very sorry for anyone's house that is being demolished. Some of these are of historical significance. 2) The costs have risen dramatically. There's a surprise. 3) A lot of the planning of all this is quite frankly knaff. The construction period is far too long. I've heard experts say this adds to costs. But some of the route decisions are crazy. There is no connection to HS1 and the route is coming to Scotland at some unspecified point in the future. Look at the route near Cannock. The line splits in two. One bit seems to be new, the other joins up with the West Coast mainline Birmingham bypass. They run parallel to one another even cross one another and then join at Crewe. Sorry can't get my head around this bit of the route, there might be a good reason... Between Birmingham and London there is nothing other than the Birmingham interchange. HS1 stuck some stations in between. This probably helped mitigate opposition to a certain extent to this project. To tell people to go north to Birmingham, which I have heard people involved do on the Radio news is insulting. 4) There are always have been alternatives to this and still are. One alternative is to re-open Great Central (see posts passim). The other is to upgrade the East and West Coast main lines to true high speed running. 5) There are claims that it will not only not regenerate the north - but is a southern plot to allow people to buy cheap property in the north and commute to work in London. If you speak to two economists... What's going to happen? No idea, although I strongly suspect that either the whole project will be cut or only the truncated Birmingham section will open. There are possibilities to cut costs but none of them really add up. One is terminate at Old Oak Common rather than Euston. This then means a Cross rail trip into central London which will take longer hence reducing the advantages of the high speed trip. The other is to run the trains slower but what's the point in that? The whole thing is a huge mess. It was arguably a huge Tory vanity project to appeal to potential voters in the North. They cannot win, whatever they do they will now upset one lot of supporters -either their new ones in the north or the old ones in the Tory Shires. I would not be unhappy to see the whole thing dropped, but doing nothing is not an option... If you want to look the route this is the [best map of the route](#) I've found. By doubling clicking you can zoom in. If you zoom in far enough there is colour coding of the route. Hold the mouse over the line and it tells you what it is i.e. tunnel. There are one heck of a lot of these... Neil

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