

# THE Sun SAYS

## Hunt's punt

**IT is certainly a welcome change to hear the Chancellor bullishly talking up Britain's prospects. Few are currently brave enough to do that.**

Jeremy Hunt even said yesterday that those despairing of our future, or even our present, are plain wrong. Our growth, he insists, is no worse than Germany's and better than in France.

This was a far chirpier Hunt than the funeral individual parachuted into the Treasury last year to calm the markets.

Back then he delivered grim sermons about the impact of Covid, war and, yes, the mini-Budget under Liz Truss.

But he and Rishi Sunak **HAVE** steadied the ship – even if we are still borrowing vast sums to stay afloat. And it was refreshing to hear his optimism about a new UK "Silicon Valley" of tech startups and entrepreneurship.

Our Brexit freedoms, he said, are key to turbo-charging flagging productivity and growth... quite the admission from a former Remain campaigner.

His ambition for "the most competitive tax regime of any major country" was music to our ears too.

But, Mr Hunt, when will that happen?

We agree that slashing inflation must trump immediate tax cuts. But what we see is the tax burden at a 70-year high – and the Chancellor himself hiking corporation tax six per cent in April. How is that attractive to the firms he wants?

Factor in our inability to build enough affordable homes for workers and Mr Hunt's Silicon Valley looks way off.

Likewise his drive to lure comfortable early-retirees back to work will remain a pipe dream without some concrete incentive such as pension tax breaks.

And, frankly, all talk of a golden future rings hollow with prices still soaring, pay lagging and the NHS in chaos. Voters want immediate action on those, plus major tax cuts in due course and real growth to make us all better off.

**The Tories may have little time to achieve any of it.**

## Train shame

**WE don't agree with Mr Hunt that it's a "national embarrassment" Japan opened its first high-speed rail line some 70 years before we ever will.**

What **IS** is that HS2 was always a dubious idea, may never now do what it set out to and may have tripled in cost.

What will be an embarrassment is if it proves as pointless, archaic and underused as we suspect.

**And the nation regrets the mind-blowing price tag wasn't spent more wisely.**

## Had our fill

**AS diesel fell 32p a litre on the wholesale market, the pump price dropped only 20p.**

Clinching proof that drivers are routinely ripped off.

**That Pumpwatch monitor cannot come soon enough.**

# EXPERT'S VERDICT ON A SHAMBLE

**GARETH MORGAN is just the sort of businessman they need in the North.**

The company he founded near Sheffield employs 100 skilled workers who manufacture high-tech parts for the aerospace industry, which they sell abroad to countries including the USA.

But when his customers from America fly into Manchester, they are forced to take a 40-mile taxi ride to Sheffield because the rail service – just like in much of the North – is very slow and totally unreliable.

Dr Morgan, the boss of Advanced Manufacturing (Sheffield), can travel easily to London but to see suppliers and customers in nearby towns in the North he has to use his car.

He agrees "1,000 per cent" that the planned 250mph high-speed train from London to Manchester should be scrapped now.

It would take just half of the £160billion that HS2 will cost to give the North and Midlands a frequent, reliable, comfortable, electrified rail network that is as good as the service enjoyed by commuters in the South East.

I have spent my life in civil engineering and was heavily involved in the building of the Channel Tunnel.

Sadly, I have come to the conclusion that HS2 is a **£161BILLION** vanity project that is bleeding the rest of the rail network to death.

As The Sun revealed yesterday the project is not fit for purpose, especially when we can't seem to design a station at London's Euston that will accept the trains, which does seem to be rather stupid. HS2 must be abandoned before we throw more good money after bad.

### Out of control

Governments have long talked about bringing prosperity to the North but HS2 is the biggest failure of the levelling-up agenda.

All it will do is bring more people and money into the South East and not help the North nor the Midlands.

Getting to and from London may be a priority for politicians and business leaders but the existing services are generally good.

Why do you need to get to London 30 minutes quicker when you have wifi and your laptop on the train?

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said yesterday that it is a "national embarrassment" that Britain does not have a high-speed train like Japan.

But HS2 Ltd, the company behind the project, has designed the scheme for trains to travel at 224-250mph which is higher than any other high-speed line in Europe or Japan.

Why do we need the greatest and fastest and best in the world for a little country like ours?

England is much smaller geographically than France, Germany or Italy. We don't need trains that can do 250mph an hour.

The extra cost of the earth works and track to carry such fast trains is enormous – and all for vanity.

The cost of HS2 Phase 1 was originally meant to be £10billion to £12billion. By 2016 it had risen to £35.1billion and by 2019 the cost had gone up to £54.5billion, an increase of 361 per cent.

With construction inflation running at 15 to 20 per cent, the cost is now £161billion – and who knows how much the final bill will come to.

As well as costing billions more than planned, HS2 will bring in much less money than

expected. Calculations for income were based on 18 trains an hour, with higher fares for those using the line.

Even the HS2 company admits that no other high-speed line anywhere in the world is able to run more than 12 to 14 services an hour.

It is time to bring the whole project to an end before it gets out of control.

Cancelling Part 1 of HS2, from Birmingham to London, would lose around £10billion because much of the land could be sold or repurposed.

HS2 Part 2, to Crewe and Manchester, could easily be cancelled at minimum cost.

I talked to Rishi Sunak about it

when he was Chancellor and he was very interested in my figures.

He wouldn't say he was going to scrap it but I think there is a good chance that HS2 will either get truncated or dropped altogether.

Spending about £30billion of the money saved would dramatically improve local and regional rail services in the North and Midlands, where very few people used the railways even before the rail strikes.

Like Dr Morgan in Sheffield, those people want a reliable, east-to-west rail service so they can travel for education, jobs or shopping by rail rather than car.

It doesn't have to be high-speed but it should have proper links, electrified hope-



By **TONY BERKELEY**  
Civil engineer & Labour peer

fully, joining cities such as Hull and Leeds, Doncaster and Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool. It would really help places like Bradford, which has a terrible service for such a big city. Leeds station, in particular, is a mess.

There is an enormous amount that could be done but, rather than wait 25 years for the "benefit" of HS2, it is much less financially risky to do smaller projects and, if one part goes wrong, you learn for the next one.

I urge ministers to give the regions a modern network of rail services they deserve, as good or better than that around London, and to put the suffering residents along the HS2 route out of their long misery.

The other £80billion that would be saved could be spent on the NHS, education and the quality of life the people in the North and Midlands so desperately need.

● Lord Berkeley is a civil engineer and was deputy head of a government review into HS2.



BOW OUT... HS2 worker