



From Lord Berkeley
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Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Treasury, London SW1

7 February 2023

Dear Jeremy
The Future of HS2

I was surprised to read your reaction to the reports about HS2 in the Sun: 'I don't see any conceivable circumstances in which that would not end up at Euston (FT 28 January 2023).

May I suggest that there are several reasons for HS2 not going to Euston – one is the very high cost of the last section from Old Oak Common and the station itself; another is that, 13 years after HS2 was proposed by Andrew Adonis when he was S of S for Transport, there is still no safe design for the approaches which does not put at risk the existing tracks into Euston and the adjacent walls and buildings. But for passengers, terminating at Old Oak Common and continuing by the Elizabeth line will get them more quickly to the centre of London. It will take just three stops to Tottenham Court Road Underground on the Elizabeth Line compared to three stops on the Northern Line from Euston.

Most people seem to think that the Government is short of money and should not therefore spend on HS2 whilst it starves the rest of the railway in the regions of funds and does very little for the levelling up agenda.

I suggest that part of the money saved from HS2 can be spent on improving the rail network in the North and Midlands, particularly the local and regional services and including Bradford – which has one of the worse rail services for such a large city. East West is the priority Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds with a through underground station at Manchester – as proposed by many local authorities in the area. Similar comments apply to the West Midlands, where the rail routes from Wolverhampton to Birmingham, Coventry, Derby and Nottingham are so bad that most people use their cars.

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 Wi-Fi and your laptop on the train? Compare this with the need for better local rail services for the daily commute for education, jobs, shopping or whatever – by rail rather than car?

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So may I suggest that ministers should look at options for radically cutting the costs of what is left of HS2, by repurposing the parts that are already under construction and allocate some of the funding saved to improving the regional rail network before the whole project balloons totally out of control.

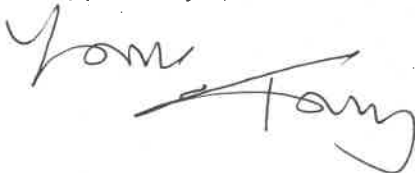
Here are a few options to consider.

- Turn those parts of HS2 where construction work has already started into a good quality commuter line Birmingham to Old Oak Common with connections to the Elizabeth Line and a great potential for over-site and adjacent development there. Ten trains an hour would be possible, effectively adding two more tracks to parallel the West Coast Main Line and Chiltern Line.
- Reduce the HS2 specification and speed to say 125mph and integrate the infrastructure and trains with Network Rail stations and standards, which affects IT, signalling, track and structure design.
- Set The Midlands and Northern regional interests to come up with East West and other improvements including stations, electrification etc to increase capacity and demand for daily services and give them the funding to deliver.
- There is a shortage of rail workers at the moment, and so shutting down much of HS2 would free up several thousand highly skilled staff to work on the many shovel-ready rail projects where the need is greatest in these regions, alongside letting the contracts in much smaller pieces where the financial risks are much less.

Do you not share my vision of the rail network in the North and Midlands as good as that of the south east around London – mostly electrified, reliable, comfortable and fast?

To conclude; the rest of the rail network is being starved of funds for even minor enhancements whilst this vanity project that is HS2 bleeds other parts of the railway to death! The most important issue for these regions is for them to get a much better rail network and services urgently, rather than getting to London a little quicker in 20 years' time!

I urge you as our new Chancellor to take a fresh look at this project; I'd be more than happy to support any such move.



Tony Berkeley

Copy Rt Hon Mark Harper MP, S of S for Transport.