

PRESS RELEASE



GREENGAUGE 21

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“Are High Speed Railways Good for the Environment?”

Greengauge 21 today counters claims that a north-south high-speed rail link may not be the right way to tackle growing carbon emissions from domestic airlines. It is responding to a report by the outgoing chairman of Transform Scotland.

As Greengauge 21 Director Jim Steer says: “David Spaven’s report ultimately comes to a balanced opinion, but only after a tortuous journey that invites us to believe that there is a much easier way to achieve the same beneficial outcome. This is a chimera”.

Greengauge 21 welcomes the report as a contribution to the debate it is seeking to foster into the case for High speed rail in Britain. It is delighted that having posed the question, the author, David Spaven concludes:

“The fairest answer to the question: are high-speed railways good for the environment is probably yes, in the right circumstances, compared to short haul air transport”.

“We agree, says Jim Steer, and we also agree with the author’s warning that an environmental advantage has to be earned and demonstrated and cannot simply be taken for granted”.

The author calls for more research, finding existing studies lacking. Jim Steer says: “public and political concern over environmental impacts and greenhouse gases has increased dramatically over the course of the last year and, yes, of course it is undeniable that more research is needed. But the pursuit of the most sustainable future is not served by a partial and misleading analysis in the interim, which is unfortunately, what David Spaven has offered in his report.”

His analysis, Geengauge 21 believes is wrong because:

- In assessing the environmental effects of high-speed rail (HSR), he only considers the potential switch from air and overlooks the benefit of HSR for increased railfreight flows on the existing network and the advantages of creating more capacity for rail access to our major cities in place of car commuting
- He ignores the potential for high speed rail travel between any major cities in England from a north-south link

- He assumes conveniently that existing railways can be upgraded to achieve unachievable journey times instead
- He makes the mistake of assuming that reducing travel is itself an aim, whereas what we actually want is to reduce the adverse consequences of travel
- He ignores the evidence of the advantages that HSR can offer, suggesting that they are somehow uniquely available to mainland Europe
- He assumes that to achieve a competitive journey time for HSR between central Scotland and London it is necessary to build a new railway throughout: it isn't!

Ultimately, David Spaven proposes, as an alternative to HSR, a set of investments which would cost a similar amount to the HSR to which he objects. He wants to build a new high-speed north-south rail freight route instead, *and* to have extensive upgrading of both the existing east and west coast main rail lines between London and central Scotland.

Not only would this prove to be as expensive as HSR, but it is a solution that would be immensely disruptive to achieve, highly risky (because it relies on the attractiveness of new (and uncosted) rail freight terminals along the spine of the country – to which lengthy road feeder trips would be necessary – rather than expanding the use of existing rail freight terminals located close to customers), and much less attractive to passengers. Mr Spaven fails to report that such ideas were indeed examined in the most substantive piece of work to date (by Atkins) and rejected as being uneconomic.

In short, his alternative, while offering no conceivable advantage, would fail to attract the airline passengers which Mr Spaven agrees are crucial to achieving a more sustainable transport future.

Notes to Editor

1. Greengauge 21 is a company limited by guarantee established to promote the case for high-speed rail and foster debate. It has an Advisory Board comprising: Chris Green (Chair), Richard Bowker CBE, Lord Faulkner, Sir Peter Hall, Sir Digby Jones and Nicholas Owen.
2. Greengauge 21 Directors are Jim Steer and Julie Mills.
3. Greengauge 21 full response to the Transform Report is available on the Greengauge website: <http://www.greengauge21.net/index.htm>