



PRESS RELEASE

GREENGAUGE 21

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Ministers urged to accelerate thinking on high-speed rail network development

Greengauge 21 today welcomed the publication of the rail strategy White Paper by the Secretary of State for Transport but called for greater urgency in the development of a UK high-speed rail network.

“It is helpful that the White Paper has narrowed down the ‘area of search’ for solutions to the longer term capacity problem. It has confirmed the view of earlier studies that new alignments for passenger rail are a better approach than new technology solutions (MAGLEV), upgrade of existing lines, or, indeed, a new dedicated rail freight line” said Greengauge 21 Director Jim Steer. “The White Paper also says that the priority for a new route – as set out in Greengauge 21’s report **High Speed Two** – should be between London, Birmingham and the Northwest, set within a wider network strategy for the whole country. But the White Paper has become hyper-cautious when it has looked at the merits of high-speed (300km/h+) versus existing speed (200 km/h)”, he added.

“It is perhaps understandable that a newly appointed Transport Secretary of State would wish to have more time to consider the evidence on high-speed rail, but not the five years of thinking that the White Paper signals”, said Greengauge 21 Director Jim Steer. “We would remind Ministers that the Stern Report insisted that there was a price to pay for delaying action on carbon emissions on which high-speed rail can do so much by displacing domestic aviation. And Sir Rod Eddington, who advised government on transport and its link to economic productivity told the Transport Select Committee as recently as April that we should start planning now for high-speed rail in Britain”.

The Eddington Transport Report identified a reduced carbon benefit of between £2bn and £4bn from high-speed rail. Today’s White Paper, Greengauge 21 suggests, has a distorted comparison of the carbon impacts of air and high-speed rail travel, with an assumption that high-speed rail – for some unexplained reason – would achieve only half the load factor of aviation. In fact Eurostar already achieves the kind of load factor that the White Paper has assumed for aviation.

“The White Paper invites us to rely on the long term future becoming clearer by the time of the next High Level Output Statement, in five years time. In this sense, it fails to deliver a 30-year view on which the industry can start to plan. While Ministers may console themselves that this defers the time when decisions need to be taken on funding, it almost certainly means some expenditures will be made in the interim that will turn out to be of little value and therefore wasted”, said Jim Steer.

“We will seek a meeting with Ministers to explore what further analysis should be carried out, noting the expressed wish in the White Paper to look across the transport modes, and to discuss how thinking on long term transport capacity and the wider case for high-speed rail can be progressed without becoming bogged down in the difficulties that surfaced with the ‘Multi-modal Studies’ of just a few years ago”.

Notes to Editors

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 Panel comprising: Chris Green (Chair), Richard Bowker CBE, Lord Faulkner, Sir Peter Hall and Sir Digby Jones.
2. Greengauge 21 Directors are Jim Steer and Julie Mills.
3. In June 2007, Greengauge 21 published a report setting out a proposition for “High Speed Two”, a new high-speed railway linking London, Heathrow and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link to the Midlands and the North. This report is available on the Greengauge website: <http://www.greengauge21.net/index.htm>