

Candidate 2 evidence

The High-Speed Rail Project – Should HS2 go ahead?

Conclusions

The debate around HS2 is not centred around whether or not there are problems on Britain's rail network, but how best to address them. Advocates of the scheme point to the success of such efforts across Europe, as well as in China and Japan. While the TGV network in France has accumulated significant debts, this has due to an overextension of the network, including the continual operation of unprofitable lines. The UK government would have to be careful to avoid similar mistakes if they wish to prevent this.

There is no doubt that regional inequality is a major issue for the UK and there is a need to reduce the gap between the South East and London, and the North. Detractors point to the rapidly spiralling costs of the project, and doubt that the benefits are as great as those that could be achieved through the implementation of more gradual improvements, particularly to northern lines. Whilst these incremental improvements are also necessary, HS2 will be the major spur behind closing this gap.

Overall, it appears as though HS2 is justified. This conclusion is reached from an analysis of the benefits provided by agglomeration economies, compressed hours and the proposed gains in productivity. HS2 represents a unique opportunity to bring the UK's rail network into the 21st century, and into line with international contemporaries, otherwise the UK risks falling behind further. In the context of Brexit, it has never been more important for the UK to attract international investment. Productivity gains as a result of HS2 can help achieve this.

Many will argue that HS2 funds could be put to better uses and the environmental benefits of HS2 are questionable. However, improvements to the railways simply will not occur without this vast government investment, as there is no incentive for improvements from the private sector under the present system.

Considering the other proposals put forward as alternatives to HS2, it must be stressed that these also have merit, and it is not an either/or scenario. Several different projects can be put into place, it is not a case of HS2 vs the rest. The key consideration that must

be kept in mind throughout is the importance of a clear, coherent set of improvements that address the historic issues have plagued Britain's railways. Overall, it would be beneficial if HS2 was part of this.