

# Calls for Government to commit to decarbonising Britain's railways by 2040

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The High Speed Rail Group has released a report calling on the Government to commit to decarbonising Britain's railways by 2040 by making a 'transformative investment' in a national high speed rail network.

Responding to the Department for Transport's consultation, Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge outlines how HS2 is central to the development of the Government's plan.

The High Speed Rail Group say: "The submission makes clear that high speed rail must become the longer distance mode of choice for travellers, in particular the ever-growing leisure travel segment.

"There must be a focus on personal mileage, not trip numbers, when assessing carbon emissions in order to shift longer distance, and more carbon intensive, travel to rail- most notably domestic aviation.

"At present, almost half of surface transport emissions come from trips over 15 miles, whilst nearly a quarter of emissions from 50+ mile trips. As such, we have called on the Government to publish an interurban or national Future of Mobility strategy to orchestrate innovation for this longer distance travel. Rail freight must also be considered within this category. With the freed-up capacity created by HS2,

ambitious targets should be set to shift freight from road to rail, starting with a doubling of rail freight mileage when HS2 opens in 2030.

“As decarbonisation requires such rapid change, there is also a danger of focusing entirely on only the most direct emissions. Our submission makes the case for considering wider, whole life carbon impacts beyond the transport sector, including through land use implications of rail.”

Summarising the recommendations set out in the report, the HSRG suggests the Transport Decarbonisation Plan should include:

- Trajectory and scope

1.1 Ensure trajectories for surface and international transport emissions comply with the Paris Agreement, particularly over the next two decades

1.2 Consider “Wider Carbon Impacts” beyond the transport sector, including land use implications, to avoid unintended consequences

1.3 Harness the potential for transformative rail upgrades to create industry clusters in the rail sector and beyond

1.4 Plan for climate resilience alongside planning for net zero

- Modal shift

2.1 Refocus on distance (i.e. personal mileage) not trip numbers when assessing carbon emissions, as this reveals the importance of shifting longer distance travel

2.2 Make rail explicitly the longer distance mode of choice, move from backward looking forecasts to ambitious targets, then fund the necessary enhancements, including a national HSR network

2.3 Harness the potential of cycling, in particular e-bikes, through an ambitious programme of cycleways well integrated with rail stations

- Decarbonisation of vehicles

3.1 Encourage systems thinking across modes to integrate grid connections and storage with transport electrification

3.2 Rapidly move forward a rolling programme of rail electrification as the centrepiece of decarbonising rail by 2040 at the latest

3.3 Make the most efficient use of constrained energy vectors by enabling shorter distance travel by e-bikes and longer distance by rail

- Decarbonising goods

4.1 Set modal shift targets for freight, starting with doubling rail freight mileage when HS2 opens in 2030

4.2 Plan wider upgrades to maximise freight benefits from HS2

4.3 Modernise the HGV road user charge quickly, borrowing off anticipated revenue to improve rail freight options in the interim

- Place-based solutions

5.1 Use HS2 to build momentum for transformative wider sustainable travel upgrades, especially in regions with higher car modal share

5.2 Secure through reforms to the planning system and policy the fullest possible shift to public transport, walking and cycling

- Green technology and innovation

6.1 Publish an interurban or national Future of Mobility strategy to orchestrate innovation for longer distance travel

6.2 Fund Future Mobility Networks for longer distance travel along and around HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail

6.3 Develop standards to enable sharing real time carbon data and comparison of modes across their full life cycles

- Global

7.1 Incorporate IAS emissions into domestic carbon budgets and develop a cross-modal international connectivity strategy

7.2 Improve international rail connectivity across and capacity within London, such as by reviewing HS1-HS2 connectivity

7.3 Modernise Channel Tunnel regulations to attract new services

7.4 Provide policy and funding support to enable new international passenger and freight rail services for modal shift

Click [here](#) to read the full report.

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