

Rail industry experts say clean rail must be the future of travel post pandemic

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- Rail groups call on Government to back clean, green rail as route to net zero
- HS2 will be a key driver in delivering modal shift to rail by offering carbon and journey time savings, as well as released capacity benefits
- Key investments should include national high speed rail spine, low carbon infrastructure and increased rail freight

A new report from leading rail industry professionals makes the case for putting rail at the heart of a green post-pandemic economic recovery.

The report, *Building Back Better: The green case for rail investment after the pandemic*, is written by industry experts the High Speed Rail Group (HSRG) and Rail Delivery Group (RDG), and calls for a major investment in high speed rail to drive growth and cut emissions. The report was launched at an event during Labour Party's virtual conference with Shadow Rail Minister Tan Dhesi MP.

Building Back Better tracks the history of major disruptive events on rail travel, from Spanish flu to SARS, finding that "in a world of constant change, rising travel demand appears to be one of the few certainties."

With rail travel set to continue on this upward trajectory after the pandemic, the report forecasts an increasing focus on longer distance rail travel for leisure – for which high speed rail in particular is suited. To enable this shift, the Government should create a “*green level playing field*” for rail travel to become the green transport mode of choice.

Rail is already a low carbon mode of transport, accounting for only 1.4% of the UK’s domestic transport emissions. *Building Back Better* shows the role that high speed rail can play in increasing environmental gains further still, driving modal shift away from carbon-intensive cars and aviation. HS1 demonstrates high speed rail as the clean transport solution, cutting the equivalent of 60,000 short-haul flights and slashing demand for short haul flights between London and Paris. With flights from Scotland to London a major market of domestic aviation routes in the UK, there are huge environmental benefits to be made by replacing these with improved connections into the HS2 network.

In putting clean rail at the heart of post pandemic transport priorities, *Building Back Better* makes the following policy recommendations:

- A national high speed rail spine, which builds on the sustainable credentials of the railway while also creating jobs across the nation;
- Investment in low carbon infrastructure which will support a long term steady programme of electrification;
- More rail freight capacity to reduce carbon emissions and decongest the road network;
- Growing rail’s market share in the domestic long-distance market by improving connections between Scotland and the north of England to the high speed network;
- A reformed, up to date fares and ticketing system to incentivise more passengers to use the network;
- A change in transport tax policy to create a level green playing field which reflects the environmental impact of the transport mode.

Speaking at the report launch during Labour Party Conference, Shadow Rail Minister Tan Dhesi MP said: “Labour is firmly committed to rail and bringing our nation into the 21st century. HS2 significantly increases capacity in our rail system and supports the green industrial revolution. While we must take mitigation measures against any negative impact on our environment and monitor costs closely, we need to continue investing in both rail and high speed rail.”

Commenting on the launch of the report, a High Speed Rail Group spokesperson said: “As we emerge from this devastating pandemic, we have an opportunity to build a better, cleaner world. By prioritising investment in a green, national high speed rail network, industry and Government can decarbonise transport, create jobs and cut carbon all at the same time.

“Rail is one of the cleanest, safest, and most efficient modes of transport. As we look to reach the Government’s ambitious net zero targets, *Building Back Better* shows how high speed rail can drive the necessary modal shift away from carbon heavy road and aviation to clean rail.”