

# Letters to the Editor



## Rocky ride ahead for high-speed rail?

Sir, People from Newcastle to Newham are starting to realise that High Speed 2 (HS2) is a necessity because it provides the foundation for future economic growth. In its first phase alone it will create 10,000 skilled jobs in deprived communities.

HS2 (report, December 18) will also break down divides, cut journey times and provide a real alternative to flying between Britain's main cities. After phase one, journey times will be cut between London and Birmingham to just 49 minutes. Future phases will link Manchester, Nottingham, Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle, spreading economic, social and environmental benefits to all corners of the nation.

Just as HSI brought Britain and the Continent closer together, HS2 will bring Britain closer together and provide the opportunity to connect the regions directly to Europe in the future.

BORIS JOHNSON Mayor of London; STEPHEN GREENHALGH leader, Hammersmith & Fulham Council; MIKE WHITBY leader, Birmingham City Council; SIR RICHARD LEESE leader, Manchester City Council  
*Plus 16 signatories whose names can be seen at [thetimes.co.uk/letters](http://thetimes.co.uk/letters)*

Sir, In the face of local government cuts, university fee increases and the impending VAT rise, we believe that spending more than £30 billion on HS2 is the wrong priority, even if it delivers the benefits claimed for it (which it doesn't).

We note that the Secretary of State for Transport has pulled back from his previous claims that HS2 will be part of the low-carbon economy (which it is not) and that it has a healthy "net benefit ratio" (achieved by using an excessive demand forecast, exaggerated benefits and a defective assessment method that ignores realistic alternatives).

Instead he claims it will reduce the North-South divide (although research suggests the opposite) and that somewhat faster journeys for a few will be as transformational as the arrival of rail in the 19th century (which is nonsense).

The Birmingham HS2 leg is estimated to cost £160 million per mile, more than ten times the average per mile cost in France. It works out more than half a billion pounds per minute saved. The economic case does not stack up in the UK and will require permanent taxpayer subsidy if built.

Fortunately, there are better, cheaper alternatives that will benefit people sooner. We urge the Government to take a fresh look at its own alternative, Rail Package 2, and alternatives proposed by HS2 Action Alliance.

JERRY MARSHALL Action Groups against High Speed 2; HILARY WHARF HS2 Action Alliance; LIZZY WILLIAMS Stop HS2; ADRIAN HOPKINSON Warwickshire Countryside Alliance; SUE YEOMANS Chiltern Countryside Group