

High speed rail consultation

Qualitative research findings

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I Introduction

1. Background

The Government is proposing to develop a national high speed rail (HSR) network linking London to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, the initial phase of which would be a high speed line between London and West Midlands (HS2) for which a detailed route has been published. A consultation is currently being conducted to ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to comment on the policy proposals. The consultation is inviting views on the strategic argument for HS2, in terms of economic, environmental and quality of life benefits, as well as the line of route between London and Birmingham.

The strategic element of the consultation is being led by the Department for Transport (DfT) and is covering two key issues. Firstly, it is setting out the Government's views on the projected need for additional transport capacity and where that need is expected to arise. Secondly, it is considering the options for meeting that need, seeking views in particular on whether the proposed core network (the 'Y' network) is the right option, and whether the provision of HS2 as opposed to other road and rail alternatives is the right approach.

The consultation is also seeking views on the proposed line of route from London to the West Midlands. This element of the consultation is being led by HS2 Ltd, which was set up to plan, design and build the network. Within this, the process and rationale for selecting the preferred route is being explained and its merits relative to alternative options are being set out.

In this context, research was commissioned to give the Secretary of State an understanding of the knowledge that communities on the line of route, frequent business travellers and members of the general public have about HSR/HS2 and how they feel about the project overall. A further requirement was to understand general comprehension of the issues around the construction of the line, so that communication of the policy can be as clear and straightforward as possible.

2. Research objectives

The overall aim of the research was to ascertain public perceptions of the HSR/HS2 project, in particular to explore:

- The levels and types of concerns within and without the proposed line of route
- Understanding of the economic, environmental and social arguments for HSR/HS2
- The best way of phrasing the explanations that outline the case for HSR/HS2.

3. Method and sample

3.1 Method

A total of 18 group discussions were conducted, split equally across:

- Residents living along the proposed line of route
- Business travellers
- The general public.

Group discussions were chosen as the best method for this research, as it was judged that they would effectively facilitate the elicitation and cross-fertilisation of insight regarding overall views on, and feelings about, the proposals and their communication. They also provided a social forum that would give an indication of how public debate around HSR/HS2 is likely to unfold over time.

An information sheet giving detail about the background to the research was made available to participants if they wanted to know more prior to attending the session. The text used for this can be found in Appendix 2 of this report.

Overall, the sessions were broadly structured as follows:

- Elicitation of spontaneous awareness/understanding of and feelings about HSR/HS2 (participants individually noted down their knowledge/thoughts about the proposals before talking these through with the group)
- Briefing of participants on the basics of HSR/HS2 to provide them with a shared basis of knowledge on the proposals, then discussing the extent to which this had changed their opinions
- Detailed discussion of the perceived benefits of and concerns about the proposals
- Consideration of the detailed arguments developed by DfT making the case for and against the proposals
- Summary of participants' overall feelings about the proposals, the key arguments that defined their position and how their opinions had changed over the course of the session.

The full discussion guide can be found in Appendix 3 of this report, and the briefing information and arguments used for and against the proposals in Appendices 4-6.

Researchers were also given an information sheet giving more specific details on different aspects of HSR/HS2 that they fed in as appropriate within the discussion. This can be found in Appendix 7.

Participants were given information on the consultation website at the end of the session so that they could access this afterwards if they so wished. The information they received can be found in Appendix 8.

All research was conducted by Ann Whalley, Louise Skowron and Simon Riley of thepeoplepartnership between 3rd and 10th March 2011. It should be noted that news about the launch of the consultation had a relatively high profile in the national media from the end of February, just before the research was conducted.

3.2 Sample

Residents

- 6 x 1½ hour group discussions

Group no.	Age/lifestage	Demographics	Location
1	18-40	Mixed gender	Aylesbury
2	Pre-family/		Brackley
3	young family	Mixed SEG	Leamington Spa
4	41+		Aylesbury
5	Older family/	BME communities were represented across the sample	Brackley
6	Post-family		Leamington Spa

Additional recruitment criteria:

- ‘Pre-family’ was defined as young people with no children at home
- ‘Young family’ was defined as having children aged 10 or under at home
- ‘Older family’ was defined as having children aged 11 or older at home
- ‘Post-family’ was defined as older people with no children at home
- A range of ingoing views (positive to negative) about HSR/HS2 were represented within each group/across the sample
- None were local activists actively campaigning for or against the line of route (e.g. none had organised a petition/protest/march/meeting/event or set up a campaigning group/website etc).

Business travellers

- 6 x 1½ hour group discussions

Group no.	Demographics	Other criteria	Location
7	All ABC1	Travelling between London/ Birmingham/Manchester between once a month and once a week	London
8			Birmingham
9	Mixed gender		Manchester

10	Mix of ages/ lifestages	Travelling between London/ Birmingham/Manchester at least once a week	London
11			Birmingham
12			Manchester

Additional recruitment criteria:

- A range of ingoing views (positive to negative) about HSR/HS2 were represented within each group/across the sample
- None lived within 5 miles of the proposed line of route
- Business people from BME communities were represented
- A mix of business travellers using only rail, only road and a mix of road/rail for their current business transport needs were represented
- There was inclusion across the sample of business travellers who currently fly at least twice a year within Britain
- None rejected the use of rail transport for business travel in the future.

General public

- 6 x 1 ½ hour group discussions

Group no.	Age/lifestage	SEG	Location
13	18-35/pre-family	ABC1	Norwich
14		C2DE	Milton Keynes
15	20-45/family	ABC1	Bristol
16		C2DE	Norwich
17	45+/post-family	ABC1	Milton Keynes
18		C2DE	Bristol

Additional recruitment criteria:

- A range of ingoing views (positive to negative) about HSR/HS2 were represented within each group/across the sample
- Each group included
 - At least two participants who had used rail transport within the past two months
 - At least two participants who lived in urban/suburban settings and two who lived in rural settings
 - Representation of BME community groups.

The specific recruitment questionnaires used can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

4. Analysis and interpretation

The process that was used to analyse the qualitative data that was obtained was as follows:

- Each researcher made field notes during and/or following each interview and all interviews were digitally recorded
- The researchers developed an analysis grid based on the discussion guide, covering the key topics discussed within the research
- Using this analysis grid, each researcher went through their field notes and recordings manually noting key themes, issues and patterns for each topic area, and identifying key quotations
- Each researcher then began to develop their own overall hypotheses relating to the emergent findings
- The researchers had a discussion to compare key findings, hypotheses, thoughts and ideas and from this developed a refined framework that served as the basis for the development of an interim PowerPoint presentation
- The structure and content of the presentation was refined and developed over a number of days in the light of thorough analysis of each researcher's own qualitative data – this was an iterative and progressive process, within which an individual researcher developed the presentation and then debated the content with other team members
- The report was initially drafted by the research team on the basis of the presentation content and resulting discussions.

This research was qualitative in nature and therefore intended to elicit insight into the subject for study, rather than generate representative statistics. This report sets out the breadth of attitudes and opinions encountered within the research. Some anonymised verbatim comments have been used within the report to illustrate and provide evidence for the qualitative findings.

II Executive summary

1. Background

The Government is proposing to develop a national high speed rail (HSR) network linking London to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, the initial phase of which would be a high speed line between London and West Midlands (HS2) for which a detailed route has been published. Qualitative research was commissioned as part of consultation activity to understand the knowledge that communities on the line of route, frequent business travellers and members of the general public have about HSR/HS2 and how they feel about the project overall.

2. Research objectives

To ascertain public perceptions of the HSR/HS2 project, in particular to explore:

- The levels and types of concerns within and without the proposed line of route
- Understanding of the economic, environmental and social arguments for HSR/HS2
- The best way of phrasing the explanations that outline the case for HSR/HS2.

3. Sample and method

18 x 1½ hour group discussions were conducted as follows:

- 6 groups with residents living along the proposed line of route
- 6 groups with business people travelling at least once a month between London, Manchester and Birmingham
- 6 groups with members of the general public living outside of the proposed line of route.

Research was conducted between 3rd and 10th March 2011 across the following locations:

- Aylesbury, Brackley and Leamington Spa (residents)
- London, Manchester and Birmingham (business travellers)
- Bristol, Milton Keynes and Norwich (general public).

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Public perceptions of HSR/HS2

Residents along the proposed route were broadly negative due to the perceived negative impact on the community/environment; business travellers along the proposed route tended to be positive, due to an expectation of improved travel

times and passenger experiences; and members of the general public were often undecided due to a lack of perceived information about the proposals.

Within this, there were variations according to behavioural and demographic factors:

- Rail users and the most frequent business travellers were more likely to be positive than those using rail travel less frequently, due to greater perceived personal benefit
- Men and younger people were more likely to be more positive than women and older people, as the former tended to place greater importance on keeping up with technological developments and international competitors than the latter
- Those living in urban areas were more likely to be positive than those living in rural locations, due to their general greater access to the rail network.

Levels of pre-existing knowledge about HSR/HS2 varied greatly, ranging from this being highly detailed and accurate (some residents), to being non-existent and/or inaccurate (some members of the general public).

Understanding of the economic, environmental and social arguments for HSR/HS2

‘Investing in the future’ was the most emotive benefit, with many agreeing that Britain cannot afford to be left behind international competitors. However, more information was required relating to how HSR/HS2 would help to build a modern economy and why it was needed.

‘Bringing Britain closer together’ was accepted literally, as HSR/HS2 would make travel faster between key cities. There were also positive reactions to the idea of job/wealth creation. However, there was scepticism that HSR/HS2 alone would serve to regenerate urban centres and change the way business is conducted.

‘New lines and new trains’ elicited consistent support, given that many had experienced overcrowding on the existing network. It was felt that the benefits regarding the broader customer travel experience, e.g. fewer delays, more comfort and better on-train facilities etc, could also be more strongly communicated. However, participants wanted more information about why new lines, rather than an upgrade, are needed. There was interest in more information on the integration of HS2 with existing lines, as well as further explanation of the reference to ‘no net increase in carbon emissions’.

Environment: the impact on the community/countryside was of great concern to residents; others tended to feel that some impact was inevitable.

Need: consistent questions about perceived need were raised, which included: whether HSR/HS2 should be a priority in the context of public sector spending cuts; why existing lines cannot be used; whether the time savings are significant enough to justify the spend; and whether business people will continue to travel rather than use the internet more for business purposes.

Finance: there were high levels of concern about potential over-spend on the construction of HS2. It was also anticipated that fares would be expensive and, even if they were reasonable to start with, would creep up over time. There were repeated requests for guarantees from the Government relating to ongoing regulation of fare levels.

The best way of phrasing the explanations that outline the case for HSR/HS2

Top line communication would ideally link the international, national and personal as detailed below:

“A national high speed rail link will help Britain to plan for and invest in the future

- High speed rail will introduce world leading technology into the British rail network
- The new lines will improve the speed and efficiency of the network overall, for everyone
 - This will provide much needed extra capacity for passengers and freight operators
 - There will be better/more reliable links between cities
- The new trains will provide a better experience for passengers
 - More comfortable service, with better on board facilities and fewer delays
- Construction will boost the economy by creating jobs and wealth in the long term”

Key supports to this that would be required include information on:

- What precisely is being proposed (in terms of a new line being built, the route, journey times, train frequency, how it will link into the existing network and likely service facilities)
- The capacity issues that will be experienced on the existing rail network (West Coast Main Line) in the future and reasons for a new build rather than upgrade
- Costs and timescales
- Pricing and fare structures
- The evidence for job/wealth creation and how this would affect different areas of the country
- Any environmental advantages that HSR/HS2 would have over other transport options

- How the damage to the environment and local communities would be minimised (and how this has been done on similar projects, if relevant).

III Main findings

1. Public perceptions of HSR/HS2

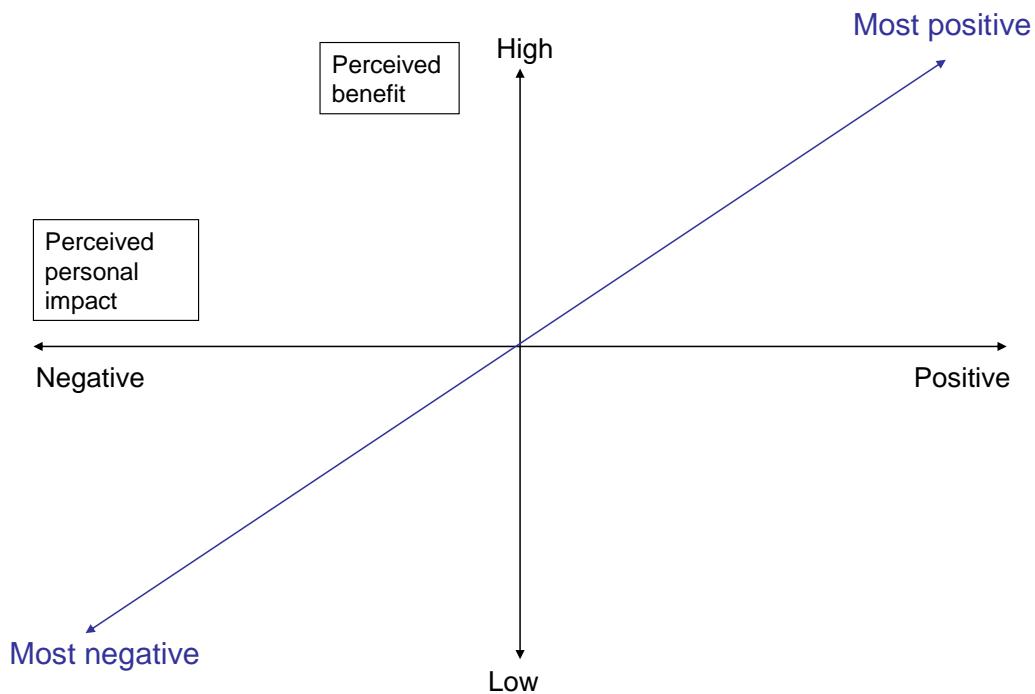
This section presents a framework to help understand the full range of perceptions of HSR/HS2 that emerged during the course of the research. Within this it explores, for each of the three key audiences, spontaneous awareness/knowledge of and attitudes towards HSR/HS2 at the start of the research sessions; as well as perceived benefits and levels/types of concern expressed following exposure to the proposals.

1.1 Overview framework

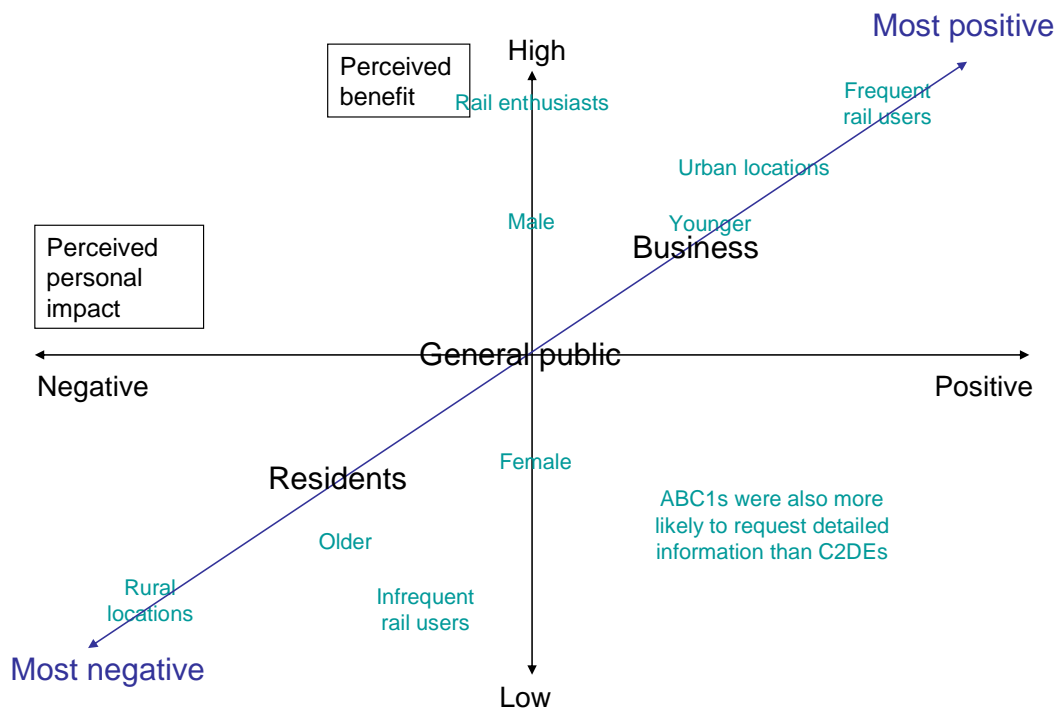
Overall, the range of feelings about HSR/HS2 that were encountered across the sample can be broadly mapped in relation to:

- The overall perceived personal impact of the proposals
- The perceived benefits of the proposals.

This can be illustrated by the diagram below:



How attitudes fell out across the sample in detail can be shown as follows:



Residents were broadly negative, due to the negative personal impact that they perceived HSR/HS2 would have on them and the limited benefit they perceived it would have for the broader population. Business travellers tended to be positive, due to the positive personal impact that they perceived the proposals would have on them and the benefit that they imagined would be felt by others. Finally, members of the general public were most likely to be undecided, due to a perceived absence of information.

Within this general framework, there were specific variations in attitudes according to behavioural and demographic factors:

- Rail users and the most frequent business travellers (travelling at least once a week on business), were more likely to be positive than those using rail travel less frequently – this was mostly due to the fact that they believed that HSR/HS2 would have a high positive personal impact on them
- Men and younger people were more likely to be more positive than women and older people, as the former tended to place more importance on keeping up with technological developments and international competitors than the latter
- Those living in urban areas were more likely to be positive than those living in rural locations, due to their general greater access to the rail network and hence their assumption that the network would be likely to benefit themselves and others

- ABC1s were more likely to want to have access to more detailed information than C2DEs, as they were more likely to want to interrogate the evidence for and against HSR/HS2 in detail.

1.2 Residents

Ingoing attitudes

Residents were more likely to be negative about HSR/HS2 initially although, even within this audience, views varied considerably. Those who were the most negative tended to be living in rural locations, were older and were infrequent rail travellers. Women also tended to be more negative than men. Those who were personally affected by HS2 were particularly upset and concerned about the proposals. These residents overwhelmingly felt that the damage to the community and environment would be irreparable, and that any benefits did not justify these downsides.

“I believe it will ruin miles and miles of lovely countryside, period houses, quiet villages and woodlands”
(Brackley, older)

“The Government are talking about communities but are dividing communities – we can’t just ruin the countryside, our country is so small. We’re not France – we’ve got to understand our own resources – what leads people to believe that people want to get to London quicker?”
(Leamington Spa, older)

Some residents claimed to be neutral about the proposals at the beginning of the sessions. They were typically aware of and sympathetic to the local upset but also wanted to feel that they had properly weighed up the pros and cons of the proposals before making a judgment on them.

“I want to find out what it’s all about really”
(Aylesbury, younger)

“We can’t look at these projects on a purely personal basis – what if something else has been built somewhere else that we use?”
(Brackley, older)

Beyond this, there were some residents who were positive about the proposals. These residents were typically men and younger commuters living in urban locations. The main reason they gave for being positive about the proposals was that Britain could not afford not to build HSR. Another benefit put forward by some commuters at the beginning of the sessions was that they hoped HS2 would improve their personal journey times, although some of these residents

became less positive about the proposals once they realised that the new trains would not stop in the Chilterns.

“The fact that we’re trying to compete with Europe and Asia that for me is a very compelling argument”
(Aylesbury, younger)

“A good idea, that upgrading and moving forward – I’ve been to other countries and their trains are already better and faster... there’s always a price when trying to move technology forward”
(Leamington Spa, younger)

Awareness

There was much higher awareness of HSR/HS2 amongst residents than amongst the other audiences.

Reported awareness amongst residents derived from a very wide range of sources including local and national, formal and informal. The key sources mentioned were:

- Word of mouth, local conversations, gossip
- Local press/TV/radio/news
- Local initiatives in pubs/supermarkets etc
- Local websites generated by those affected
- Petitions
- MP talks in town halls, meetings
- Action groups
- Local protests, for example marches
- DfT website
- National media.

There was some frustration amongst residents about the way in which information about the proposals had been delivered to them. There was a perception that although there had been talk about the proposals for some time, there had been a distinct lack of clear, direct communication to residents. There was a sense that this had led to a lot of myth and hearsay around the proposals, which had generated a feeling amongst some residents that they did not really know what the truth was. Residents specifically complained that there was not enough detail about the proposed route and that there were no independent third party opinions to consult.

“There’s not enough information about it, it’s worrying people”
(Aylesbury, younger)

Some residents were fully aware of the consultation and the specific initiatives aimed at residents within this. However, other residents claimed not to know about the consultation. There were mixed views about the role and credibility of

the consultation, with many feeling that the proposals would go ahead regardless of what residents felt about them.

“You get the impression the decision’s already been made. It’s lack of interaction really. We’ve had very little information about it and very little dialogue between the two parties”
(Aylesbury, younger)

“This is the Department for Transport trying to be fluffy, it’s going to go ahead anyway”
(Brackley, older)

Pre-existing knowledge

Residents exhibited high levels of pre-existing knowledge compared with other audiences.

Most residents knew that there was a proposal for a new high speed line through the Chilterns and that there would be trains from London to Birmingham. Specifically many, but not all, residents knew that the line would be non-stop and had also heard figures relating to the cost of the proposal.

“I know that new tracks will be laid and that it will be quicker to get to and from Birmingham to London. It’s going to be a high speed train”
(Leamington Spa, younger)

“There aren’t any stops so I’m not going to benefit from it – it’s just for the bigwigs going down south”
(Brackley, younger)

“It will mean I can stay in bed longer in the mornings! [commutes to Birmingham from Leamington Spa]”
(Leamington Spa, younger)

There was a lot of debate within the resident groups about exactly where the track would run. Some more informed residents knew exactly where it would run, whereas others were less clear. Some realised that the line had to be straight and therefore that specific sites could not be avoided, whereas others did not.

“Will it go through hillsides?... Stoneleigh’s a beautiful place – Stoneleigh’s got a lot of history, are they going to put a line through that?”
(Leamington Spa, younger)

There was also a great deal of discussion around how the track would be laid. Some reported having seen local TV coverage featuring tracks on stilts. Others

thought they had heard that the track would go through tunnels wherever possible. There was also some debate in Brackley about whether the track would run alongside the pylons.

“The bit I’ve seen [on local TV] is where it’s going to be built on stilts across part of the countryside – all for saving 20 minutes – wow!”
(Leamington Spa, older)

Some residents were aware that the new trains would run very frequently. Timings quoted were from every four to 15 minutes.

Residents talked a lot about the limited length, and therefore usefulness, of the London to Birmingham line. They tended to focus on the fact that the time saving between London to Birmingham was relatively short and that it was not worth ruining communities and countryside for such a small benefit. There was also discussion about how and where the London to Birmingham line would link to other cities, as well as the existing rail and broader transport network, in order that more people would be able to benefit.

“Using countries across Europe and Asia as a point of comparison is not relevant, we’ve only got 120 miles from Birmingham to London – we don’t need it!”
(Leamington Spa, older)

Another area of confusion amongst residents was the terminal stations and whether these would be new or existing stations. There was also debate about how noisy the new trains would be, as well as whether the speed itself (rather than the noise) would be polluting. Residents quoted different speeds of travel for the new trains, ranging from 160 to 250 miles per hour. A few women, in particular, expressed concern about the safety of the trains.

“We can’t use it, all we’ll get is the disruption and the noise”
(Leamington Spa, older)

“I’d heard it will travel at 250 miles an hour ...”
(Brackley, older)

Perceived benefits

The focus of debate amongst residents was very much on concerns related to HSR/HS2 rather than on benefits, although some did mention benefits that would be experienced by others/the wider community. A summary of the benefits that residents recognised, as well as the perceived level of importance they attached to each, is provided overleaf:

Category of benefit	Perceived level of importance	Specific area of focus
International	Medium	Some perception that the country needs to progress and keep up with international competitors
Economic	Medium	Some acknowledgement that HSR/HS2 could benefit business/the national economy
Social	Low-medium	A few believed that there would be social benefits to wider society, although most felt that it would harm their communities irreparably
Environmental	Low	Few believed that it would benefit the environment
Personal	Low	Most felt it would not benefit them directly

On discussion of the benefits in more detail, residents tended to acknowledge that Britain needs to keep up and that HSR/HS2 could benefit business and the national economy through the generation of jobs.

“This is going to build the infrastructure that will connect the whole country together ... you can see the benefits it provides other countries”
(Aylesbury, older)

Levels and types of concern

Many residents focused on their own personal concerns in relation to HSR/HS2. A summary of these, and the perceived level of each concern, is provided below:

Category of concern	Perceived level of concern	Specific area of focus
International	N/A	Outside of the focus of concerns
Economic	Medium	General concerns about the cost to the public purse and that this might rise over time Some worried it could have a negative impact on the local economy (for example Aylesbury losing its status as a prime commuter town)
Social	High	Perceived destruction of local communities
Environmental	High	The destruction of countryside and ancient sites/period houses/irreplaceable woodland

Personal	High	Homeowners not getting market value for properties bought up compulsorily Negative impact on local property prices generally Lack of personal benefit from route Disbelief that local rail services will be positively impacted
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The key concern raised by residents was that HSR/HS2 would destroy local communities and countryside.

There was also significant apprehension that the new line would have a negative impact on local property prices, indeed some claimed that the proposals had already had this effect. Several also mentioned that they believed that compulsory purchase would offer residents affected the structural, rather than market, value of properties and that there would be no further compensation offered. One resident also claimed that the Government had already bought property from homeowners along the line.

“People have already moved out of their houses and been paid off”
(Brackley, older)

A key frustration was that residents would get no benefit from the new line and would have to continue to use what were perceived as run down local stations and services.

“Getting from Aylesbury to London, it’s already jam-packed. That’s already broken, should we not fix that?”
(Aylesbury, younger)

Attitudes at the end of the group sessions

Residents who had been negative at the beginning of the sessions continued to be so.

Residents who had been open-minded at the beginning of the sessions also tended to become more negative on the basis that they felt that the information they had been presented with during the course of the sessions had not been sufficiently detailed or convincing. These more open-minded residents also tended to have been influenced by the more negative residents in the groups.

“It has no benefit to Aylesbury or surrounding areas and has no economic value to us”
(Aylesbury, younger)

“25 minutes saving from Birmingham does not justify a huge cost both financially and personally to those affected by the line – the Government’s pro points can be easily argued against and no real evidence has been given to prove them”
(Brackley, younger)

“Further discussion has made me more against the programme. My main argument would now be it is totally unrealistic to try to project benefits as currently claimed so far in the future”
(Brackley, older)

Some of the residents who had been positive at the beginning of the sessions remained positive but felt that they also needed more information in order to feel convinced that the investment needed was justifiable and that HSR was the best transport option for Britain in the future.

A minority of residents, who had been positive at the beginning of the sessions, because they mistakenly believed there would be stations in the Chilterns, typically became more negative once they realised that they would not personally gain from the new line.

1.3 Business travellers

Ingoing attitudes

Business travellers were more likely to be either open-minded or fairly positive about HSR/HS2 initially. However, within this, a range of opinions was expressed.

Those who were most positive tended to be those travelling most frequently (at least once a week between London, Birmingham and Manchester) and included those who were and were not using rail travel regularly. These business travellers immediately focused on the fact that faster journey times would enable them to spend less time travelling. They were also quick to imagine that the existence of the line would give them greater flexibility around where they could live and work in the future. They also assumed that the line would deliver economic and business benefits to the country and the specific regions joined up by the line.

“I know from my experience of the faster link that’s been put in between London and Manchester that it was significantly different: it made the two cities seem a lot closer. So if it has something that made that impact, it would be positive”
(Very frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“I’m pretty for – not because I know anything in particular about this proposal...but because I’ve done work on economic development in the past...”

(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“It would make a real difference to me – I’m a big fan, definitely...it will put Birmingham on the map”

(Very frequent business traveller, London)

Some business travellers expressed a neutral point of view initially, being open to the idea but wanting more information before coming to an informed conclusion about whether or not to support the proposals. These participants tended to generate a broad range of benefits and concerns, relevant to them personally as well as locally and nationally.

“I don’t know a great deal about it but think it’s a good idea if it can improve travel times for work purposes. I’d just want to know from where to where, where will it stop, how much time will be knocked off the usual train times, how much more cost and when will it be in place”

(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

Finally, some participants articulated negative attitudes to the proposals. These participants tended to be those travelling on business less frequently (once or twice a month) and so perceived the proposals to be of limited value, both to them and to others. Although they felt that reductions in journey times are a desirable aspiration, they did not believe that the need to do this was particularly urgent on the London to Birmingham route, or that the time reduction suggested was significant enough to be compelling. These business travellers were also most likely to be cynical in their beliefs about how effectively the project would be administered by the Government or the body set up to do this. Amongst those who were initially aware of the project timescales, this reduced enthusiasm for the project even further.

“It’s going to make journey times to Birmingham quicker – I also wondered why because it’s an hour and a half to get to Birmingham...is it worth it?”

(Frequent business traveller, London)

“If it goes ahead, it’s going to take till 2032, so I’ll be well retired so why am I bothered about 15 minutes off a train journey?”

(Frequent business traveller, London)

“The figures tie up now but when it comes to happen, like anything in government, cost goes sky high”

(Very frequent business traveller, Manchester)

Awareness

Business travellers had medium levels of pre-existing awareness of the proposals, when compared with the other audiences. Within this, awareness was generally higher amongst those who were travelling most frequently (at least once a week) and in London and Birmingham (compared with Manchester).

Awareness tended to have been raised by general media sources, including TV, radio and online news. This audience was particularly likely to mention the commuter press in this regard, for example Metro and the Evening Standard. However, some had also gained awareness through online searches and generally keeping up with current and Government affairs.

Pre-existing knowledge

Once more, business travellers tended to have medium levels of knowledge about the proposals compared with other audiences.

There was general recognition that HSR/HS2 would deliver time savings on journeys between London and Birmingham.

Some business travellers were also aware of more precise details relating to: the proposed service that would be running, such as the specific journey times between London and Birmingham; which the terminal stations would be; the provision of a high frequency service; and the long term plan to link up with northern towns. Some had picked up on the project timescales. There was also acknowledgement that the proposals had caused local opposition.

“I heard that these high speed trains would be connecting London to Birmingham in just over 49 minutes and that there are proposals for about 14 trains running every hour”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“It’s a Y-shape, is it going to Euston, one bit going to Manchester one bit going to Birmingham...”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“I have heard a little bit about some villages possibly being destroyed, which does give me a little bit of concern”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

However, there was confusion over whether the proposal was to upgrade the existing line or build a new one. Some participants claimed to know the costs involved, although the figures quoted tended to be incorrect and widely varying (from £2 to £16 billion). How the proposed line would integrate with the rest of the network was not widely known.

“Did we decide whether they’d be building whole new lines or would they be using existing tracks?”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

Perceived benefits

Business travellers tended to be strongly focused on the benefits to them personally, as well as the macro-economic benefits of the line. A summary of the benefits they generated, as well as the perceived importance of each, is provided below:

Category of benefit	Perceived level of importance	Specific area of focus
International	Medium	A strong focus for those travelling most frequently: business travellers expressed embarrassment about the UK rail system, when comparing it with international rail networks They also felt it would be attractive to tourists and could possibly attract international businesses to the country
Economic	High	There was an assumption that it would create jobs and potentially encourage international investment There was also a sense that it might help to boost the economies of northern cities and reduce the dominance of the South East as a business base
Social	Low	Some suggestions that the line might increase house prices for homeowners living near transport hubs
Environmental	Medium	Some felt that there must be some environmental benefits
Personal	High	Faster, easier journeys Increased personal flexibility, in terms of where commuters can work/live and providing easier access to Europe (via airport links/HS1) Better travel experience, especially in relation to reduced overcrowding and better business facilities

Overall, business travellers, more than other audiences, were focused on the personal benefit of increased choice for them, in terms of where they are able to work and live in future, being delivered by the line.

“It’s quite a big difference in times – 80 minutes, wow!”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“I wouldn’t mind the opportunity if I was looking for a house to look further afield if I knew I could travel to London on a daily basis – if it’s like 40 minutes from the Birmingham interchange...my journey time from east London into central London, sometimes that’s pushing beyond that”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“Everyone wants to get everywhere faster, to save time, we’re in a fast paced society and this is a natural progression...why spend more time on a train when could be at home, enjoying yourself, working”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“It’s the employability side of it ... very positive I think...it’s making London commutable on a daily basis”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

They also thought through the possible benefits from a business based perspective in detail, including those that might be experienced by the national economy, as well as the regional economies of the areas joined up by the line.

“I think it might cut that north south divide ... businesses all seem to have to be in London, you could open it up a bit more”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

“I like the idea in this area that it may generate more companies from London coming out to places like Manchester – you’d get some really big businesses up here...the BBC are coming, I imagine that there’s going to be a lot of BBC people living in London who won’t move up”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“I think the housing markets there [in the cities that will be linked up] will experience spill overs from each other, like if you’re living in London and can’t afford to bring up a family...why not go and get a big four bedroom house on the outskirts of Birmingham? Decent schools and the train fare may be comparable and you may get a seat!
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“It could put house prices up here – great!”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

Levels and types of concern

Business travellers’ key concerns focused on whether HSR/HS2 would be a worthwhile use of money, especially when they became aware of the

suggested timescales. A summary of the concerns that business travellers raised, as well as the perceived level of each, is provided below:

Category of concern	Perceived level of concern	Specific area of focus
International	Low-medium	Fear of obsolescence by the time it is completed
Economic	High	Concerns about cost, who will be funding and what will happen to costs over time, within this, how commercially viable the line will be Many could not believe that upgrading existing line would not suffice Some scepticism around the likely ability of the line to deliver urban regeneration
Social	Low-medium	Some worries about the possible impact of the line on local residents Concerns that the line will not be needed in the context of greater uptake of technology by business
Environmental	Medium	Concerns about the relative impact of the line on the countryside
Personal	Medium-high	The quoted timescales were perceived to reduce the relevance of the proposal significantly There was debate over pricing levels and – if this was too high – how this could reduce the relevance of the line for personal use Concerns around technical implementation issues leading to delays and/or service disruption

Business travellers were particularly focused on the cost of the proposals, how these might change over time and the impact this might have on ticket prices for the travelling public and themselves. Many were concerned that high ticket prices would undermine the commercial viability of the line, which would ultimately lead to the creation of a ‘white elephant’.

“At the moment I think people are more interested in how it’s going to be funded, how much it’s going to cost me as a taxpayer”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“It’s our taxpayers money, if it over-runs, it’s going to cost us more as we’ve seen before, potential disruption to other rail or even road links as well”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“No one’s going to want to spend £100-odd a day...sometimes for me to go to London it might cost £200 but it’d cost £40 in diesel...it has to be competitive for the average person”
(Very frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“It’s got to be cost effective and it’s got to be used, or it will price itself out like the M6 toll road”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

If they were aware of project timescales, they also tended to criticise the proposals for being so long term as to be irrelevant at the present time.

“A lot of us may not be working, it may not concern us, who knows, we may be dead!...I’m yet to be convinced”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“Something’s nagging at me, saying there’ll be a quicker way or a better way of doing it and by the time we finish this there’ll be something else”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

Attitudes at the end of the group sessions

Business travellers who were very frequent travellers and had been positive or open-minded at the beginning of the sessions tended to become more so over time. This tended to be due to their greater appreciation, via the discussion, of the potential personal and economic benefits of the line.

“I came in not knowing too much, I do feel a little more enthusiastic about it, again job creation, business being able to expand, people being able to relocate, possibly getting onto the property market where they may not be able to do now”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“Go ahead with it, there’s no right time for these projects, we’re in a competitive world, if we want to stay competitive, these things have to be done. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

However, those who were travelling less frequently and who had come to the sessions either in an open or negative state of mind tended to become more negative over time. This tended to be triggered by knowledge about the timescales of the project and a frustration around a lack of detail on the relative costs and benefits of the project, within this how this compares with alternatives to HSR/HS2, such as upgrading the existing line.

“Not for me at the moment, perhaps things will change in the future, but it sounds to me as though we’re introducing another first class which is currently under-utilised, why do it?”

(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

Additionally, some business travellers continued to claim to be unconvinced either way, whether because they wanted further information on which to base their decision, due to the uncertainties inherent in deciding on whether to embark on a large long term project such as HSR/HS2, or due to the fact that they found it difficult to weigh up conflicting issues.

“I’m undecided – initially I looked at the times and thought maybe I would be convinced but now there are so many other questions – the cost thing is massive...I think I’d want more details about exactly the route they’d be building and how does £2bn a year compare: if it went into the NHS what would that look like”

(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“I think a bit more future thinking could be beneficial...the economy has to be right and the money has to go into the right services, where it’s needed – if the economy’s back on its feet then something like this could help”

(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“I don’t really know – I do see it as a good thing as regards infrastructure, it will create jobs, but how long those jobs will be around for...I do see the knock on effects on housing – housing going up in certain areas...and SMEs springing up all over Leeds and places up north. I’m concerned about the environmental thing; I don’t like to see areas of beauty destroyed...”

(Very frequent business traveller, London)

1.4 General public

Ingoing attitudes

Many of the general public claimed they were open-minded or undecided at the beginning of the sessions. These participants felt as though they knew little about the subject and claimed they wanted to know more detail about the proposals before committing to a point of view.

“I didn’t know very much about it ...I would like them to give a clear objective about why they are doing it, I’d like reassurance that it will take more cars off the road and not just be about getting there faster”

(45+, C2DE, Bristol)

Some of the general public, typically those who were most actively engaged with rail, technology and progress in general, were initially positive about HSR/HS2. These participants strongly articulated the potential for HSR/HS2 to enable Britain to become and remain competitive internationally, ideally wanting Britain to overtake these other countries.

“It’s a good idea, I know there will be people saying: not in my back garden and, I know, living in Norfolk, it’s not going to affect us but for speed, economic reasons. If you’ve seen those sort of programmes where they’ve done up St Pancras and that, the regeneration is great”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

“Anything where you’re going to travel quicker makes people’s lives easier”
(18-35, C2DE, Milton Keynes)

A few members of the general public were initially negative and tended to feel that the speed advantage represented by HSR/HS2, which was what they assumed the focus of the HSR/HS2 proposal was on, was unimpressive and would only benefit a small minority of rail users.

“The seats will be at a phenomenal premium...it will just be elitist, won’t it...you’re going to end up with a white elephant at the end of it”
(45+, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

Awareness

There were generally low levels of spontaneous awareness of the HSR/HS2 proposals amongst members of the general public, although there was some evidence of higher awareness amongst those who were rail enthusiasts and who kept most up to date with current affairs.

“I’ve only heard a bit on the news but haven’t taken much notice”
(18-35, C2DE, Milton Keynes)

“It’s called HS2, London to Birmingham from Euston, starting 2015, which is when I think Crossrail is supposed to be completed, it’s supposed to extend to Manchester, Scotland for further phases”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Key sources of awareness included national TV, press and radio channels. The most informed members of the general public had actively looked up information online, due to personal interest, and/or had assimilated the media debate on the issues as a matter of course, due to the profile of the subject in the period prior to the research.

Pre-existing knowledge

The general public had the lowest levels of knowledge compared with the other audiences and there was little that was commonly known about the proposals.

“I didn’t know anything about the project – where it starts, where it finishes and the fact they are using new track...”
(45+, C2DE, Bristol)

Some members of the general public knew that the proposal was for the line to run from London to Birmingham and that this would save around half an hour on typical journey times. There was also some awareness of local opposition to the construction of the line.

“I’ve heard a fair amount on the news but the focus is it’s London to Birmingham, it’s half an hour quicker, it’s more direct”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

There was, however, significant confusion regarding basic facts about HRS/HS2. For example, there was a general lack of clarity around what HSR is and whether the proposals relate to an upgrade of the existing line versus construction of a new line. There were repeated questions as to the rationale for building the new line, the anticipated costs and how this would be funded. More specifically, there were questions around what the terminal stations would be, how the line would integrate with the existing network and how the proposals relate to, or are different from, engineering work currently underway, for example the electrification of the London Paddington to Bristol line.

“Are we talking about the London to Bristol electrification or a completely new line?”
(45+, C2DE, Bristol)

Perceived benefits

The general public generally focused on benefits that would accrue to the nation, rather than themselves, given that a relatively limited proportion of the public perceived that they would directly benefit from the new line.

“You don’t have so much of a strong opinion, it doesn’t have so much personal impact...if I was in Birmingham or Manchester, I’d probably be loving it”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

A summary of the benefits they generated, as well as the perceived importance of each, is provided overleaf:

Category of benefit	Perceived level of importance	Specific area of focus
International	High	There was a strong positive emotional response to the idea of keeping up internationally and not lagging behind other countries
Economic	Low-medium	Some members of the public spontaneously suggested that the line could help to boost urban regeneration efforts
Social	Medium	There was some focus on how it would enable the general population to travel around the country overall
Environmental	Medium	As for business travellers, there was a belief that there must be a benefit environmentally, such as a reduction in road traffic
Personal	Medium	Some perceived that it could benefit them personally, via improved journey times, making it easier to travel around the country and improving the travel experience (for example comfortable, cleaner, more seats, fewer delays, better food, room for bikes, better links with ongoing trains etc)

In this context, the highest profile benefit generated by the general public was that of keeping up to date with technology on an international scale, in the context of their knowledge and experience of HSR abroad, for example on holiday.

There was an expectation that HSR would also enable the general public to travel around the country more easily, thereby improving experiences of travel. Those who perceived that they would personally be a beneficiary of this specifically focused on the fact that it would be likely to improve their own passenger experience.

“It is quite quick...it’s a shorter journey than I thought...49 minutes does sound pretty quick – under an hour to get to Birmingham”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

It would link up bigger cities...it would make the country smaller”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Levels and types of concern

This audience did not generally express high levels of concern about the proposals initially, although concerns did emerge on prompting. A summary of the concerns that were raised, as well as the perceived level of each, is provided below:

Category of concern	Perceived level of concern	Specific area of focus
International	Medium	Some questioned whether the project represents a desire to keep up for its own sake
Economic	High	Cost to the country was a recurring issue, in the context of the current economic climate, a lack of clarity about who will be funding the project and a lack of perceived need There was also cynicism that costs would inflate over time, due to unexpected issues, over-runs on timings and the impact of resident activist groups adding to the costs
Social	Medium	Some were concerned that this would not be an inclusive project, as they felt that it focuses on cities and regions that are already well linked up, and that this does not justify the negative impact on residents on the line of route
Environmental	Medium	There was considerable concern from some about what the environmental impact will be and so reassurance on this from independent experts was requested
Personal	Medium	Few perceived the time savings would translate into significant benefits for themselves There were also concerns about ticket pricing levels and whether they would be able to afford to travel on the line

Once more, the key concern about the project related to the cost to the nation. This was in the context of the general public lacking clarity over the rationale for the project and the timing of the spending that is during a period of highly publicised public sector spending cuts. This concern specifically raised the question of how the project would be funded – it tended to be assumed that public money would be used – and this also led to speculation around the implications of rising costs once construction had begun.

“Everybody’s had to cut back and we’re desperate to hang onto that little bit of money we’ve got...why’ve they got £2bn, why can’t I have a little bit of that?! You do sort of, not begrudge it, but think, is it true what they’re telling us, are we in that much of a state if they can really be thinking about doing this?”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Not all perceived that the line would benefit them at a personal level, which could lead them to reject the proposals overall. Even those who believed that it would benefit them could worry about the impact of ticket prices on their use of the line. They tended to assume that prices would be high and so would effectively price leisure travellers such as themselves off the line.

“People might still use the old services, if it’s double the price...if Manchester was half the time but double the price, I’d stick with the road! You’d have to weigh it up”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

Attitudes at the end of the group sessions

Some members of the general public who had gone into the sessions positive or undecided became more positive once they learnt more about HSR/HS2 and the potential benefits to Britain.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity to make Britain modern again.”
(45+, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

“It will be excellent for the development of the North and makes us better European business partners. They need to consult people who aren’t sentimental about things – they need to be objective”
(20-45, ABC1, Bristol)

Many could see the potential benefits but wanted more information and evidence to enable them to think through the issues to a greater degree before making a final judgment.

“I’m all for it...my only concern is money – if they say it’s going to come in at a fixed cost, then great...it’s progress, isn’t it...jobs, progress, economy, everything”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

“I would like to know more about it now...more of a breakdown of it all, when it’s going to start, how long they predict it’s going to take, all those kind of things...I’m in the middle now...if they can come up with the goods and it will help the country then great but sometimes it’s too early to tell, you’ve got to wait and see what state’s the country’s in”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

However, others (especially ABC1s) could become more sceptical, in the face of the general lack of relevance of the line to them, a perceived lack of detailed information and the general uncertainty of the future situation of the country and success of the project.

“I was really for it, but now I’m a lot more negative ... no local benefits, its proximity to the town, noise pollution”
(45+, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

“It just excludes some of the country...from a personal point of view, because we’re not included, it’s not going to benefit me in many ways at all”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

“Too much hinges on cost to people, you don’t see the results of it until such a long way away, so much can change between then, I think the internet will have a big impact...it’s hard to make a decision on it...”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

2. Understanding of the economic, social and environmental issues

This section explores responses to the detailed arguments provided by DfT relating to the case for and against HSR/HS2. The cases for and against HSR/HS2 were presented to the public separately for consideration and were divided up into themes, which constitute the headings of the sections below. The full briefing information and arguments used for and against the proposals can be found in Appendices 4-6 of this report.

2.1 Investing in the future

Overview

This element of the case for HSR/HS2 was perceived as having high emotional impact. Its tone was felt to be dynamic, progressive and upbeat. It was felt to provide a positive focus and direction and, critically for many, an indication that the Government is planning for the future. It was also seen to feed into a view held by some that investment is needed in times of financial crisis to generate growth and that there may be a danger in waiting too long to act.

“I think they need to sell it to people better by talking about investment for the future – it’s the first I’ve heard of it here – the fact that it’s going to bring more money to the country, more jobs, multi-national companies coming to the UK because they know they don’t have to have an office in London...”

(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“In 2017, if we decide oh let’s hang on another 5 years, we’re even further behind, so I think we need to move forward with the times and take the risk”

(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“This is a major investment for the country and hopefully should be a very positive addition to the country’s transport lines”

(Brackley, younger)

However, the language used in the current iteration of the arguments tended to be rejected, especially by those most negative about the proposal. It was interpreted as ‘corporate’ language that was not authentic or straightforward and lacking in clarity, precision and substance.

“They’re using loads of phrases like ‘once in a generation opportunity’ but what do these things mean? – they can’t be measured they’re just words to make it sound good”
(Brackley, older)

This set of arguments also tended to generate consistent requests for greater substantiation of the implicit assertion that HSR/HS2 is the best means of investing in the future. Many were left wondering what HSR/HS2 could lead to and so suggested that case studies could be used to provide evidence for this, for example what HSR has achieved in other countries, ideally highlighting the similarities with the UK. Others suggested supplying more information on how HS1 constituted a sound investment, for example the economic, social and environmental benefits that were generated and how this compared with the overall cost.

“We need more information, this isn’t enough – a comparison of costs and what investment [would be]”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

Responses to detailed arguments

‘High speed rail is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the way we travel in the 21st century – it would be an investment in Britain’s future’

It was unclear to many why HSR/HS2 represents a ‘once in a generation opportunity’. There was a lack of understanding as to why this type of investment was needed now and could not, for example, be put off until a later date, perhaps when the country could better afford the cost. Some participants also argued that waiting to build a link might be positively beneficial in that there may be access to better/more up to date/cleaner technology and/or other transport options that might represent a better use of money.

“Sounds quite corporate...marketing literature”
(18-35, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

‘An investment in Britain’s future’ was a phrase that generally elicited positive responses, as it gives a sense that the Government is actively planning for the future. However, it can also raise questions regarding precisely what the investment would lead to – what the benefits of this would be, who would be the beneficiaries and what the costs would be.

“Yes, a system for the 21st century that will benefit Britain – that’s the main benefit, I think”
(20-45, ABC1, Bristol)

‘A national high speed rail network would help to build a modern economy fit for the future. Countries across Europe and Asia have ambitious plans for high speed rail and are starting to put these into practice – Britain cannot afford to be left behind’

This argument triggered significant emotional engagement amongst many. It reflects a strong desire to lead the field internationally in this arena, in the context of recognition that the UK was once a pioneer of rail, and that international competition is an important global force.

“The fact that we’re trying to compete with Europe and Asia: that, for me, is a very compelling argument”
(Aylesbury, younger)

“You go abroad and you can guarantee the trains are there on time, you get where you want to go, it does what it says on the tin. You come back here and it’s shocking.”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

“If we want to progress as a country, this is the kind of thing we need. Having invented rail, I think we’re probably lagging behind”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

“Britain cannot afford to be left behind – that’s the main thing I’ve underlined”
(45+, C2DE, Bristol)

However others tended to believe that it is inconsequential what other countries do in relation to rail, as they are responding to their own particular needs, for example large land masses that are not relevant in the British context. These participants tended to feel that it was much more important to retain British countryside, wildlife and heritage than destroy it for the sake of a railway. They also questioned the rationale and/or evidence for the assertion that HSR would ‘help to build a modern economy fit for the future’.

“We shouldn’t compete with them [Europe/Asia] – what’s best for here is best for here, it’s not a contest”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

“France is a massive country and they have massive amounts of countryside where there are just cows and sheep”
(Aylesbury, younger)

“Using countries across Europe and Asia as a point of comparison isn’t relevant – we’ve only got 120 miles from Birmingham to London – we don’t need it!”

(Leamington Spa, older)

Some also felt that it was important to ensure that the entire railway network is working optimally, rather than just building one brand new line.

“In comparison to France and Japan our railways are very, very poor. But all our railway networks need to be improved, not just one”

(Aylesbury, younger)

“We do need to invest in rail but do we need high speed? We need a punctual and efficient service not a faster train – I’d get on a train more with my family if they could guarantee it wasn’t going to be late”

(Leamington Spa, older)

2.2 Bringing Britain closer together

Overview

This idea was well received from the perspective of an acceptance that HSR/HS2 would bring Britain closer together literally, in terms of faster journey times. References to job and wealth creation were also particularly well received, although there was scepticism over the precise figures quoted, in the absence of a more detailed breakdown and explanation of how these had been arrived at, and an attempt to communicate this in a more digestible form.

“You don’t know what £44bn would make in terms of something for the country...you’ve got to put it in context...I can’t really get my head around that figure”

(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

“£44 billion is just a meaningless number”

(45+, C2DE, Bristol)

However, the relative need and wisdom of doing this at the current time was broadly questioned. Participants also generally found it difficult to understand how the proposals would fulfil some of the aims quoted in the arguments, such as how it would regenerate urban centres and transform the way that businesses work and compete.

“The thing that is true is that it is bringing Britain closer together...but because it’s true doesn’t mean it’s worth it”

(Frequent business traveller, London)

Responses to detailed arguments

'A new national high speed rail network would create jobs, spread prosperity and transform the way that businesses work and compete'

The concept of job creation particularly appealed to participants in the context of sensitivity to high levels of national unemployment. However, there was some concern about whether the jobs created by HSR/HS2 would make an impact on unemployment figures: it tended to be assumed that the jobs would be in very specific, highly skilled sectors solely related to the construction and running of HSR/HS2. Within this, due to concerns about British skills shortages, there was an assumption that many of these jobs would go to foreign workers, thereby reducing the appeal of job creation amongst many. There was some agreement that HSR/HS2 has the potential to 'spread prosperity' by stimulating the economy in the long term so job creation would be more broad based, however participants wanted more reassurance on this issue.

"I think the job one, I'm quite impressed with creating the jobs but I think it's a bit of a sales pitch"
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

"I'd like to know: jobs created where, how, on the trains, in the city?"
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

"What's the betting you'll get there and it will be all built by Germans?"
(45+, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

The reference to how HSR/HS2 could 'transform the way that businesses work and compete' was felt to be of interest but there was confusion as to precisely how HSR/HS2 would do this. In addition, some participants spontaneously argued that remote technology has had, and is likely to have in the future, a greater impact on businesses practices than transport options.

Those who felt likely to least benefit from proposals namely residents, older people, those living in rural locations and those not working, tended to stress that this argument serves to highlight the lack of relevance that the proposals have for them.

'Journey times between Britain's major cities would be slashed, which would help to regenerate urban centres, bridge the North-South divide and provide an alternative to short haul aviation'

There was agreement that journey times between Britain's cities would be reduced, although there was some debate over the significance of this. The most frequent rail travellers tended to agree that the time savings between

London and Birmingham were significant, as they anticipated that this could have a positive impact on their lives. Others were less impressed, although it was the case that journey times between London and Manchester and Leeds were felt, across the board, to represent a significant time saving.

“It is good – it’s very impressive if you look at the current time to the possible high speed time”

(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“I think the route to Manchester’s more interesting than the route to Birmingham – to get to Manchester in 1 hour 13 minutes that sounds crazily quick”

(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

There was debate over the extent to which the proposals would help to regenerate urban centres. There was some agreement that there is some potential to encourage businesses to relocate to northern cities. Some participants also imagined that it would improve the housing markets of the areas nearest to the transport hubs. However, their overall focus was on the boost that would be experienced by the regions of the West Midlands, North West and North East, rather than urban centres.

“It will decrease the north south divide by enabling companies in London to shift and be more mobile”

(45+, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

“[It would be] putting the second city on the map – making us more accessible”

(Very frequent business travellers, Birmingham)

Others were significantly more sceptical about the likelihood of the line stimulating urban regeneration. Many believed that it would only benefit London, indeed could reinforce its centre as the business capital of the country, as they assumed that the line would encourage more commuting to London. There were also questions about how building a line in itself would necessarily lead to regeneration – there was a belief that more direct action would be needed to stimulate effective regeneration. In addition, there was a perception that there were other places that were in greater need of economic regeneration than Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, as there was a perception that these cities had already benefited from significant investment.

“I think direct funding in urban areas would be more beneficial to them than a high speed network – ploughing money into the local economy rather than a fast train to London”

(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

The reference to the ability of the line to 'bridge the North-South divide' was also queried. Whilst there was some agreement that it had the potential to boost the economies of the linked up cities and regions, there was confusion as to what effect this would have, given that Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds were perceived as being relatively well connected to London already. Participants tended to feel that linking other cities and regions, for example Newcastle or more rural areas, could benefit more from the line.

"It's going to create a little bit of a boost in the areas where they are working. You can't deny that, it's going to happen"
(45+, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

"If it was going to more rural parts of the country then maybe [it would regenerate]...you're linking up the places that are already good"
(Frequent business traveller, London)

Finally, the reference to short haul aviation generated some debate. Some, including very frequent business travellers, expressed a general preference for HSR over use of internal flights, due to their perception that it is a more direct means of travel that involves less hassle and waiting time. They also believed that there must be some environmental advantages of HSR over internal flights. However, many also felt that there would only be an impact if pricing between the different transport options was comparable, that is if train tickets were pegged at a similar level to those of the budget airlines. Additionally, participants thought that the main benefit would be in a continuous HSR line linking London to Scotland, as these are the places that travellers most commonly fly to and from internally.

"The short haul flights I thought was quite good...you still have to check in, which usually takes you half an hour to an hour either side...it's going to be even shorter [using HSR]...so you could leave long haul flights for when you need to go abroad and it's a good positive aspect for the environment"
(18-35, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

"Air travel's cheap, it's not ridiculously expensive, it's obviously easier to get on the train to go to somewhere like Birmingham now either by rail or by driving but to get to Scotland you can get cheap flights to get up there"
(Frequent business traveller, London)

‘A high speed rail network would generate economic benefits of around £44 billion – the first phase alone would support the creation of more than 40,000 jobs’

Participants were generally eager to hear about the potential economic benefits of the proposed line, however presenting a top line figure without further explanation of how it has been arrived at, how it would break down, how it relates to costs and over what time period the benefits would be experienced, triggered scepticism.

“I would definitely tell them to be a little more descriptive in how we’re going to benefit – all they’ve said is how they’re going to boost our economy and create jobs, this will need to be expanded a little bit more and the downsides need to be examined and presented to the public”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“I’m thinking it’s going to create loads of jobs and it’s going to have all this economic benefit, how do they know this, how did they make that up?...are they all going to be building the rail line?...it seems a bit Stalin-esque”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“I put a question mark against: ‘the high speed rail would generate economic benefits....’ What time period is the first phase, that’s what I’d like to know...they’ve given us a figure but not a timescale”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Once more, the provision of a figure for the amount of jobs that would be created by the line was appealing. However, more information was requested relating to the timescales involved in the first phase of the project and details of the jobs created, in terms of whether these would represent short or long term jobs and the sectors in which the jobs would be created. Ideally participants also wanted reassurances that at least some of the contracts would go to British companies and that jobs would go to British workers. The provision of this figure could also lead on to discussion of how the same amount of jobs could be created by other means, possibly at a lower cost.

“All you see on the news at the moment is people complaining there aren’t enough jobs, unemployment rates are really high...for the country as a whole, this would be a really big plus”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

“The government always throw figures at you...it doesn’t mean anything. I think more catchy is the fact that there’s more jobs available”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“Have they got the engineers in the UK to build a rail network like that from scratch? It will probably be foreign people brought in to get technical expertise from around the world, probably a foreign train as well”

(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

2.3. New lines and new trains

Overview

This benefit was of critical importance to many participants, especially those who had been less informed at the start of the debate. Capacity issues in particular were felt to provide a credible rationale for the proposals and evidence of the Government planning for the future. This was especially persuasive for more frequent rail travellers, who tended to have had personal experience of overcrowding – but this was also the case more generally.

“They should be making more of a point of over-crowding...that would be important but they’re not really talking about it – people are so sick of it already”

(Frequent business traveller, London)

There was significant interest in understanding more about how HSR/HS2 will improve the rail network in terms of the broader customer experience.

“They’re not mentioning the service at all...integrate it and make it a pleasant experience and we’ll use it”

(Leamington Spa, older)

“The only positive I can see is that it will improve the number of seats on existing services”

(45+, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

However, despite the relevance of these arguments, not all necessarily understood or agreed with the assertion that new lines were the most appropriate solution to the issue and there was frustration that more evidence on this was not provided.

“Why don’t they just put more carriages on the trains to stop the standing?”

(Leamington Spa, older)

Many also felt that the environmental benefits of HSR/HS2 versus other transport options had the potential to be a greater focus of communication.

Responses to detailed arguments

'Britain's railways are increasingly crowded and more and more people are having to stand when they travel. The West Coast Main Line – Britain's key rail artery – will be completely full by 2024, so investment in new lines and trains is needed'

Many participants had experienced overcrowding and agreed that it is a key issue for the rail network that needs addressing directly. Many were shocked by the assertion that the West Coast Main Line would be full in the future, although wanted further substantiation regarding the projections for this and how they had been arrived at.

“Overcrowding is a massive issue for people who commute ... it's a nightmare”
(18-35, C2DE, Milton Keynes)

“The fact that it's going to be full by 2024, so we've got to do something, so we might as well make the service better rather than re-do what we've got...that's quite worrying, but I'd like to know how they came up with that figure and that date”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“It's easy to think now, oh we don't need it, but things will be different in 15 years' time, the over-crowding thing will be a massive issue, so if we can upgrade our existing network...then brilliant but we will have to do something, for sure”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

On further exploration of the West Coast Mainline case study, some accepted that a new line would cause less disruption and would provide a more efficient solution.

“I think we do [need it], when you compare us to other countries – existing lines can't really be upgraded because they're so badly designed, you're going to be botching all the time – it would cost more to botch and upgrade because you'd be upgrading a small bit and then another one would need an upgrade”
(Very frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“I'd want to know what the argument is for not upgrading existing lines”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

However others queried why a new line was necessary given that upgrade had led to an improvement in journey times. In addition many could not understand why providing more services and/or more carriages on each train would not

provide a relevant solution and there was a general desire to know more about how the decision not to upgrade had been arrived at.

“They’re saying that the West Coast rail line is more crowded – make the platforms longer, make the trains longer, stick a few more carriages on”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“If they couldn’t upgrade...and they have to build another line, it would be interesting to see the cost of another line being put on the existing basis, so you could make a more informed decision”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

Some participants also went on to question why the route to the Midlands and North West was the focus, when they perceived other regional networks to be equally as inadequate, for example in the South East.

A lack of disruption to current services during construction was recognised as a benefit of a new line, although there was scepticism about whether this would be the case in reality.

“When they did the work for the Pendolino, it had a massive [negative] effect on services...”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

‘Moving long distance services onto high speed rail would free up slots for extra regional and commuter services’

This argument was useful in introducing the idea of how HSR/HS2 would help to enhance and optimise the national network overall. In particular, it was felt to imply that it would mean that everyone using the rail network could benefit from the proposals, which served to increase its relevance to those less positive about it. However, in terms of how the argument is currently stated, there was a sense that this direct personal benefit could be more clearly articulated, so that it more strongly brings out the likely improvements to the services, such as getting a seat on local commuter services rather than having to stand.

This argument was not universally well received, however, as the most negative residents were not convinced that they would see a direct improvement on their local service.

“They won’t do up Leamington Spa station though, will they? It’s a real hole”
(Leamington Spa, older)

Others also felt that rail companies would need to co-operate to make the proposals work at this level and were sceptical that this would happen in the competitive context within which they currently operate. Many feared that local

services would not be subject to investment and would be closed down due to low passenger numbers.

“It’s whether they’d keep these [local] services running if they’re only a quarter full”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

The reference to ‘moving long distance services onto high speed rail’ also led to queries over whether this is part of a Government strategy to reduce road traffic.

‘High speed rail would bring a huge increase in passenger seats for no net increase in carbon emissions’

This argument was often criticised as unclear and ambiguous. The more informed interpreted it as HSR/HS2 delivering more passenger journeys without contributing to rising carbon emissions. However, this was not felt to be a particularly appealing or impactful statement in the absence of comparison with alternative scenarios. Other participants did not understand this statement at all.

“It sounds odd to say that HSR will have more spaces but no increase in carbon emissions, that doesn’t sound logical...”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

In addition, some of the more informed focused on whether this assertion would only be true if certain criteria were fulfilled, for example if all of the seats were filled. Others wondered what aspects of HSR/HS2 were being taken into account in relation to this statement and wondered whether the impact of construction had been included in the calculation.

“This one goes back to cost and if they’re charging too high they’re not going to get bums on seats so therefore it is costing carbon emissions”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

“If they’re going to start talking about carbon emissions, what, are they going to build it by hand?”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

More generally, some participants were negative about any reference to ‘carbon emissions’ at all, as these were generally not well understood as a concept or dismissed as unimportant. The most cynical interpreted this as a phrase used to confuse the public intentionally by presenting something as positive when it was not.

“Everybody cares about carbon emissions but that’s a PR thing – you can work anything out to be carbon neutral”
(Very frequent business traveller, Manchester)

2.4 Environment

Overview

There were variations in terms of how top of mind the issue of the environment was. It was particularly high profile for older residents in rural areas. ABC1s also tended to raise it as a concern spontaneously. Participants who were positive about HSR/HS2 were more likely to feel that the environment was a worthwhile sacrifice to make for the line. Other participants were much less likely to focus on it as an issue.

“It would be good to understand the sustainability of it – is it going to be an electric train? How is it going to run? Is it going to use solar energy or another form?...”
(Leamington Spa, younger)

“I’m not a big fan of it going through the countryside, but if it’s got to, then needs must”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

Specifically, residents concentrated on the impact HSR/HS2 would have on their local environment in the round, including their homes, communities and heritage sites, as well as green space, woodland and habitats. Some residents strongly felt that the construction of HSR/HS2 was at odds with the Government’s stated focus on developing strong local communities. Others also highlighted the possibility that the negative impact on local communities could lead to lower levels of tourism in areas along the line of route.

If there were to be measures taken to minimise the environmental impact of the construction of the line, there was general interest in learning more about what these would be.

“Will they give people a breakdown of what they’re going to do and how it’s going to affect them?...what species are going to be moved along...?”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Despite specific concerns about the impact of the construction of HSR/HS2 on the local environment, there was also a consistent sense from the general public and business travellers that HS2 must be beneficial environmentally at a broader level, in terms of helping to reduce car and aviation use. However,

there was some frustration that more information on this issue had not been provided.

“I’d like to see a comparison between car and train – the environmental impact is much more important to think about than speed”
(20-45, ABC1, Bristol)

“I think we should go for it because it gets people off the roads, we’re congested enough as it is”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Some participants had detailed knowledge about the construction of HS1, whether through living near the line or having taken an interest in the project, and tended to feel that the construction of the line had been carefully managed to minimise the environmental damage caused. They were convinced that the same level of care would be taken in relation to HS2.

“The environmental impact, having seen the high speed link built through Kent, is quite minimal...they moved houses, they put a lot of it underground and ran it alongside the motorway for most of the journey, so there was a lot of consideration there”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“I saw a documentary about the Eurostar when they built it...the lengths they go to lessen the impact on stuff is unbelievable really”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Responses to detailed arguments

‘A high speed rail line would have a major impact on Britain’s beautiful countryside, as it would cut through the Chilterns and could harm ancient woodlands and important wildlife habitats’

The potential impact of HSR/HS2 on the British countryside was an emotive issue for all, as there was a perception that green space is constantly being subjected to attrition, and all participants wanted to have the opportunity to access this for leisure purposes. Residents were specifically focused on the damage they felt that the line would cause to the Chilterns: its communities and heritage sites, as well as its woodlands.

“The Chilterns is beautiful and I can’t believe they’ll get permission to start cutting that down...I’m not a big environmental fruitcake but it’s nice to go out of London and have a bit of greenery and walk and actually hear the birds sing and smell something that isn’t pollution”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

However, wildlife habitats were less of a concern generally, as it tended to be assumed that important species would be saved or moved on to other appropriate habitats, or otherwise that wildlife would adapt to the new environment that would be created by the construction of the line.

“You’re not telling me that no motorways and roads go through the Chilterns now...you might lose a couple of toads...the toads will be alright”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

‘The speeds at which high speed rail trains would travel would cause noise pollution, which would spoil the tranquillity of the countryside’

Noise pollution was highlighted spontaneously as a concern by some, especially residents. However this was a much less top of mind issue for others.

“Would it be noisy if you lived in proximity?...if someone lives quite close to there and they’re forever coming past, it would be quite disruptive...”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

Once the argument was raised, some claimed that they believed that the new trains would be quiet and hence would not be problematic for residents. This was backed up by those living in Kent by HS1 and others who had experienced continental HSR services. However, more commonly participants wanted to know what would be done to minimise the impact on residents living near the line.

“High speed rail isn’t that noisy...it’s the local ones that are noisier”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

2.5 Need

Overview

The issue of need was raised spontaneously and repeatedly throughout the research. It was more of a focus for residents and members of the general public, although some business travellers also requested more information as to the rationale for the line.

The key questions that were raised included:

- Why is there a need for the line
- Why is HSR/HS2 the best solution, versus other courses of action that could be taken

- If this is the best solution, why is it a priority at the current time, given the financial climate.

“It depends on the why – why have they come up with the idea, is there a problem they’re trying to find a solution to or is it that they’ve got a budget and they’re going to use it?”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

Participants tended to feel that the information that they had seen prior to, or that been given as part of, the session had focused too much on the speed of HSR/HS2 and the improvements in journey times that would be achieved, which caused some to question whether it would be wise to communicate more strongly the rationale for and benefits to emerge from the line, as opposed to its features.

Responses to detailed arguments

‘There are more important considerations for the country at the moment than building railways that allow us to travel at world beating top speeds’

Participants, especially those who were more negative about the proposal, found it relatively easy to generate a range of ‘more important’ considerations than HSR/HS2. These included social issues, such as health, education, housing and unemployment, and fiscal issues, such as addressing the budget deficit and reducing tax and VAT.

“The government keeps saying there is no money to fund housing development or construction ... this shouldn’t be a priority for the government’s spending, in my view.”
(Frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

However, not all agreed with this argument, maintaining that the size and ambition of the project would make it worthwhile. This element of the sample, who were more likely to be positive about the proposals and the idea of investing in the future, tended to feel that the possible benefits that would be achieved by the project would make it a worthwhile investment. These participants tended to argue that Government spending can create waste in other ‘worthwhile’ areas, for example in the health service and education, in any case.

“I think we’ve poured a lot of money down the drain on other things which I don’t think we’ve got much benefit out of...something like this could help me and other people because of the job potential. It’s a long way off but you’ve got to look to the future”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

The specific reference to speeds in this argument triggered some to voice their concerns that the current focus of communication is too strongly on this feature of the line and should focus more clearly on how faster trains will create other benefits, for example for business or tourism. It was thought that this might include:

- Increased capacity
- Improvement to the network overall
- A better customer experience
- Environmental benefits at a national level.

'A new line does not need to be built because existing lines could be upgraded instead'

There was a consensus that this was a very strong argument against the construction of HSR/HS2 in the absence of any evidence to the contrary and a lack of a clear understanding of the advantages of building a new line over an upgrade. It was also generally assumed that an upgrade would be cheaper than building a new line. Consideration of upgrade work encouraged participants to think through other possible solutions, such as running more (high speed) services, increasing the number of carriages on trains or using double decker trains.

"If they can upgrade it that would be much better than wrecking the countryside"
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

"All you hear now on the news, the country's in this much of a state, our prices are going up...why can't they upgrade the existing rails, surely that would save money?"
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

"To accommodate longer trains, they're building longer platforms, or to make the trains more efficient they're increasing the capacity they can hold... I've always wondered why they don't have double decker trains"
(Frequent business traveller, London)

For example, many had experienced the West Coast Main Line upgrade and the improvement that this had made to their journey times and so assumed that a similar project could be established to improve journey times to an even greater extent. Indeed, some perceived the Pendolino service on this line to be almost as fast as HSR.

"When we got tilting trains they got faster and they upgraded the existing track that they'd got"
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“It can’t be faster than the Virgin train”
(18-35, C2DE, Milton Keynes)

There was some acceptance that the disruption to the service had been major during the upgrade work, however there was low awareness/recall of any other issues related to the work, such as costs and timescales.

On reflection, participants also tended to think more broadly about transport options and discuss other solutions, such as building the new line alongside current motorways or investing in alternative forms of transport.

“I reckon you should take a lane off the main motorways and stick rails along it, there’s no environmental impact, you’ve got your direct routes and you stick something along the slow lane of the motorway”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

‘The time saving on rail journeys is not enough to be significant for most people’

Residents and the general public tended to be unimpressed about the time saving that HSR/HS2 would achieve on journeys between London and Birmingham. This underlined, for many, the point that Britain is too small to make HSR the necessity that it is for countries in Europe and Asia, hence the limited need for the project.

“What percentage of people is it going to improve their life, quicker train access to London and back? It can’t be very many, surely...it will be more business people”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

However, there was more interest in the total journey times between London and Manchester/Leeds. Additionally, very frequent business travellers were particularly positive about this aspect of the proposals, due to the fact that they stand to benefit most from this and can clearly see the potential personal benefits that they may experience in terms of where they are able to live and work.

“It looks like it’s halving the time from Manchester so that, for me, would be a positive”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“They are significant time savings...that’s a really good focus point for the project”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

‘High speed rail would not be needed if business people start to use the internet more for meetings and conferences’

Many residents and members of the general public, especially those who were younger, agreed with the sentiment that business people are less likely to need to travel in the future, due to the advances in remote technology that are likely to happen over time.

“The one about business people using the internet more because I do that...that’s a real example of why it’s not a good thing because that’s going to increase more and more”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

Business audiences were more likely to debate this idea to a greater extent. As might be expected, those travelling most frequently were most likely to feel that face to face meetings will always be important for business. Those travelling less frequently were more likely to feel that the overall proportion of meetings conducted face to face would decline over time.

“I think that whole video conference thing – although technology’s much better – one to one will always be there”
(Very frequent business traveller, London)

“We have a lot of video conferences and tele-conferences and it does make you question, do I have to go...? It isn’t the same but it definitely is a close second, you can do it if you know the person...”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

It was the case that, on exposure to the projected completion date of 2032, this argument gained more traction across the board, as participants tended to feel that technology would have changed out of all recognition by that date.

2.6 Finance

Overview

Participants were generally highly sensitive to and quick to raise issues of finance in relation to the proposals. Specifically, they were worried about the potential cost of the proposals to the country and whether the country could afford them, especially at the current time. There were also concerns around how much individuals (and businesses) would be required to pay for the privilege of travelling on HSR/HS2.

“We’re in a terrible economic situation and we’re going to be for another 10 years, I would imagine ... we need investment at some point, but is this the right time to be even contemplating it?”
(Frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

Whilst participants wanted to know what the costs would be, there was a consistent sense that the figures need to be contextualised in terms that the public will understand, in comparison with similar/other projects, as they are meaningless if provided in the abstract.

“£2bn a year, it’s difficult to have a comparison to what it costs, what does a new hospital cost, a new school...is that a hospital a year...?”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

Responses to detailed arguments

‘High speed rail would be too expensive for ordinary people to use as train companies are bound to charge high prices for the privilege of travelling on these lines’

There was a consistent assumption that ticket prices for the service would be more than the cost of travelling on the standard line, due to the faster speed of the service. Some participants were more cynical and assumed that ticket prices would be used as a means of recouping the construction costs of the line. Overall, participants tended to believe that the result of this would be that HSR/HS2 would become a premium service, used exclusively by business travellers and affluent commuters.

“The first thing people are going to think is: how does it affect me...there’s nothing about the end user and how much it’s going to cost them”
(Very frequent business traveller, Manchester)

“I think it’s still all about price – unless the prices are right, people aren’t going to buy into it and all these positives aren’t going to be there, it’ll get left to the side – the service would always be empty”
(18-35, ABC1, Milton Keynes)

When participants were informed that fare structures would be broadly similar to those in place today, they were not necessarily reassured. This was in the context that they perceived prices to be high in any case, and the structure of fares confusing. Some were also sceptical that reassurances so far in advance, especially if they are under the control of the train company running the service, rather than the Government, are irrelevant.

‘A cost of £2 billion per year for high speed rail is too expensive for the country to afford at a time of economic hardship and it may commit future generations to subsidies and debt’

The presentation of the cost of the line was welcomed in theory but the presentation of this as a cost per annum was felt to be inappropriate. Few participants felt they understood £2 billion as an amount and wanted more detail in terms of how this would compare with other large social projects or alternative transport solutions. They also felt that it was important to be clear about the overall time over which the costs would be paid, within this whether this refers to the first phase of HS2, i.e. London to Birmingham, or beyond. Additionally, they wanted it to be used in relation to the estimated benefits, to enable a clear top line cost benefit comparison.

“I think that £2bn figure has been plucked out of the air”
(20-45, C2DE, Norwich)

There was also some cynicism that any figure quoted would bear any relation to the costs in reality, as participants were quick to highlight other national projects within which costs had inflated significantly as they had developed over time and/or had over-run. Others felt that the figures might also have been over-inflated, so that the project would be seen to come in under budget.

“It’s the same as the Olympics, isn’t it? They came out with a figure and they’re well over that already”
(18-35, C2DE, Milton Keynes)

Participants were informed that construction would not begin until 2017 and that the majority of the burden of funding would fall after that. However, this did not necessarily reassure participants, as those who were most worried about the costs to the country felt that this would not necessarily be any easier to bear in five years’ time, as it was unclear to them as to whether the country will be economically better placed then.

“I don’t think it’s justified to spend this money if the country’s still in debt”
(Frequent business traveller, Manchester)

Additionally, this information also served to alert participants to the project timescales, which significantly reduced enthusiasm for it in some quarters. For example, business travellers who had been initially open-minded about the proposals sometimes became highly negative about them, given the realisation that they would not benefit from these personally. It could also encourage participants to question whether the HSR technology proposed will be relevant or superseded by the time the line will be built: some were concerned that the technology might become obsolescent by 2032 and others worried that the likely limited availability of oil then would undermine HSR as a transport option.

“For that amount of money going in, that’s a long time to build it”
(18-35, C2DE, Milton Keynes)

“What’s killed it for me is the time [involved]...not 15 years, it’s just ridiculous”
(Frequent business traveller, London)

“If I’d known it was 20 years away, I’d have said no at the beginning”
(Very frequent business traveller, Birmingham)

“Surely by the end of 15 years there’s going to be something better that’s come along, like with cars”
(18-35, ABC1, Norwich)

3. Communication implications

This section provides guidance on how best to phrase the communication of the case for and the issues around the construction of HSR/HS2.

Communication of the proposals would ideally link arguments that relate to the top line international, national and personal benefits of the proposals, to maximise understanding of the relevance of the line to the country and the individual. A suggested wording is provided below:

‘A national high speed rail link will help Britain to plan for and invest in the future

- High speed rail will introduce world leading technology into the British rail network
- The new lines will improve the speed and efficiency of the network overall, for everyone
 - This will provide much needed extra capacity for passengers and freight operators
 - There will be better/more reliable links between cities
- The new trains will provide a better experience for passengers
 - More comfortable service, with better on board facilities and fewer delays
- Construction will boost the economy by creating jobs and wealth in the long term’

Key supports to this that would be required include information on:

- What precisely is being proposed (in terms of a new line being built, the route, journey times, train frequency, how it will link into the existing network and likely service facilities)
- The capacity issues that will be experienced on the West Coast Main Line in the future and reasons for a new build rather than upgrade
- Costs and timescales
- Pricing and fare structures
- The evidence for job/wealth creation and how this would affect different areas of the country
- Any environmental advantages that HSR/HS2 would have over other transport options
- How the damage to the environment and local communities would be minimised (and how this has been done on similar projects, if relevant).

Appendices

1. Recruitment questionnaires

1.1 Residents on the line of route

The government is in the process of conducting a consultation on a proposal to build a high speed rail link between London and Birmingham. As one aspect of this, we have been asked to conduct some research to find out what the general public thinks about the proposed link, so that everyone's views can be taken into consideration when the government makes the decision about whether to build the rail link or not.

We are asking a wide range of people a few questions to understand whether they are willing to take part in the research and to make sure they are representative of the general public. The research will involve attending a 1½ hour group discussion at a local venue. All the information that you give today will be kept private, held securely and will not be used for any purpose beyond this project.

A public consultation website will also be available from 28th February if you would like to contribute your views about the proposed rail link online. The web address for this will be <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/>.

Q1. Have you ever taken part in a group discussion or in a research interview in the past?

Yes _____ No _____

When was it?

If less than 6 months: **CLOSE**

Close if this took place less than six months ago

Q2. Do members of your family or close friends work/used to work in any of the following professions or occupations?

	YES	NO
ADVERTISING AGENCY OR PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPANY	CLOSE	
MARKETING OR MARKET REASEARCH COMPANY	CLOSE	
JOURNALISM / PRESS	CLOSE	
TRANSPORT/ DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT	CLOSE	
RAIL COMPANY	CLOSE	

Please close the interview if the individual answers yes to any of the above

Q3. How old are you? Mention age clearly _____

GROUPS 1-3
All must be aged 18-40

GROUPS 4-6
All must be aged 41+

Q4. Do you have any children who live with you at home?

NO [] Go to Q5
YES [] Go to Q4b

Q4b. How many children do you have and what are their ages?

How many children: _____

Child/ren's ages: _____

GROUPS 1-3
Within each group, please include a mix of those who do and do not have children living at home – if they do have children at home, all of their children to be aged 10 or under

GROUPS 4-6
Within each group, please include a mix of those who do and do not have children at home – if they do have children at home, all of their children to be aged 11 or older

Q5. Gender

Male []
Female []

All groups to be mixed gender

Q6. What is your occupation? And your partner's? In which sector? And your partner's ?

Participant / _____ / _____ /

Partner / _____ / _____ /

SOCIAL GRADE-BASED ON HOH OCCUPATION

A []
B []
C1 []
C2 []
D []
E []

Please provide a mix of SEG in each group where possible

Q.7 Which of these ethnic groups do you consider yourself as belonging to?

- White –
 - British []
 - Irish []
 - European []
 - Eastern European []
 - Other white background []
- Mixed –
 - White and Caribbean []
 - White and Black African []
 - White and Asian []
 - Any other Mixed background []
- Asian or Asian British –
 - Indian []
 - Pakistani []
 - Bangladeshi []
 - Southern Asian []
 - Any other Asian background []
- Black or Black British –
 - Caribbean []
 - Black African []
 - Any other Black background []
- Chinese []
- Other []

Please represent people from a range of black and minority ethnic groups across the sample, so that each group represents the ethnic makeup of the local area/population

Please include at least 6 people from black and minority ethnic groups across groups 1-6

Q8. You may have heard that the government is proposing to build a high speed rail link between London and Birmingham. Which of the following statements best reflects what you think about this?

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| a. | I know nothing about it | [] |
| b. | I am dead against it | [] |
| c. | I am not in favour of it | [] |
| d. | I have heard about it but I have no strong feelings either way | [] |
| e. | I think it seems like a good idea | [] |
| f. | I am strongly in favour of it | [] |

As far as possible, please aim to represent people with a range of different answers in each group, ideally including those answering b/c (i.e. negative), a/d (i.e. neutral) and e/f (i.e. positive).

Q9. Please can you confirm the area in which you live?

GROUPS 1 & 4

All to live in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

GROUPS 2 & 5

All to live in Brackley, Northamptonshire

GROUPS 3 & 6

All to live in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

It is important that all participants live in these specific local areas, as they may be affected by the route of the proposed rail link

Q10. Have you been involved in any of the following in the context of campaigning for or against the proposed high speed rail link between London and Birmingham?

- Signing a petition []
- Organising a petition [] CLOSE
- Taking part in a protest/march/meeting/event []
- Organising a protest/march/meeting/event [] CLOSE
- Donating money to a campaign group []
- Volunteering for a campaign group []
- Setting up a campaign group [] CLOSE
- Reading/following a campaign website []
- Contributing to a campaign website (e.g. writing an article/commenting on an article etc) []
- Using Facebook (e.g. making friends with HS2 related campaigners/liking their posts etc) []
- Using Twitter (e.g. following HS2 related tweeters/tweeting articles etc) []
- Highlighting the issue on other websites (e.g. commenting on an article) []
- Setting up a campaign website [] CLOSE
- Writing to/contacting an MP/minister []
- Writing to/contacting local/national press []
- Other (please specify):..... []

Whilst we do not want to exclude those having taken a range of actions on this issue to date, we do not want to recruit active campaigners/lobbyists, e.g. people who have organised petitions/protests/marches/meetings/events or set up local campaigning groups/websites

If the participant answers 'other', please probe in detail what action(s) they have taken and make a judgement as to whether you believe they are active campaigners or not

Please explain to any active campaigners that this research aims to understand the views of the general public and please direct them to the consultation website (<http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk>), so that they can make their views known through this channel from 11th March

Q11. The government may decide to do more research on this subject in the future and may wish to follow up on some of the issues raised by this piece of research – if so, do you give your permission to be re-contacted about it?

YES []
NO []

Name	
Address	
Home phone no.	
Work phone no.	
Mobile phone no.	
Email address	
Group	
Recruiter	

1.2 Business travellers

The government is in the process of conducting a consultation on a proposal to build a high speed rail link between London and Birmingham. As one aspect of this, we have been asked to conduct some research to find out what business people think about the proposed link, so that everyone's views can be taken into consideration when the government makes the decision about whether to build the rail link or not.

We are asking a wide range of people a few questions to understand whether they are willing to take part in the research and to make sure they are representative of the business community. The research will involve attending a 1½ hour group discussion at a local venue. All the information that you give today will be kept private, held securely and will not be used for any purpose beyond this project.

A public consultation website will also be available from 28th February if you would like to contribute your views about the proposed rail link online. The web address for this will be <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/>.

Q1. Have you ever taken part in a group discussion or in a research interview in the past?

Yes _____ No _____

When was it?

If less than 6 months: **CLOSE**

Close if this took place less than six months ago

Q2. Do members of your family or close friends work/used to work in any of the following professions or occupations?

	YES	NO
ADVERTISING AGENCY OR PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPANY	CLOSE	
MARKETING OR MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY	CLOSE	
JOURNALISM / PRESS	CLOSE	
TRANSPORT/ DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT	CLOSE	
RAIL COMPANY	CLOSE	

Please close the interview if the individual answers yes to any of the above

Q3. How old are you? Mention age clearly _____

Please recruit a range of ages in each group, as far as possible

Q4. Do you have any children who live with you at home?

NO [] Go to Q5
YES [] Go to Q4b

Q4b. How many children do you have and what are their ages?

How many children: _____

Child/ren's ages: _____

Please recruit a mix of lifestages in each group, as far as possible

Q5. Gender

Male []
Female []

All groups to be mixed gender

Q6. What is your occupation? In which sector?

/ _____ / _____ /

SOCIAL GRADE

A []
B []
C1 []
C2 []
D []
E []

All to work in the private sector and to be ABC1

Q.7 Which of these ethnic groups do you consider yourself as belonging to?

- White –
 - British []
 - Irish []
 - European []
 - Eastern European []
 - Other white background []
- Mixed –
 - White and Caribbean []
 - White and Black African []
 - White and Asian []
 - Any other Mixed background []
- Asian or Asian British –
 - Indian []
 - Pakistani []
 - Bangladeshi []
 - Southern Asian []
 - Any other Asian background []
- Black or Black British –
 - Caribbean []
 - Black African []
 - Any other Black background []
- Chinese []
- Other []

Please represent people from a range of black and minority ethnic groups across the sample, so that there are at least 6 people from black and minority ethnic groups across groups 7-12

Q8. Which of the following areas of Britain do you travel to regularly on business?

- South East/London* []
- West Midlands/Birmingham* []
- North East/Manchester* []
- Scotland []
- South West []
- North East []
- Yorkshire []
- East Midlands []
- East Anglia []
- Other (please specify):..... []

**NB Please delete as applicable for the location from which you are recruiting, i.e. if you are recruiting in Manchester, do not ask if the individual travels regularly to Manchester on business etc*

All to say that they regularly travel to the South East/London, West Midlands/Birmingham or North East/Manchester – close if none of these are mentioned

Q9. How often do you travel to London/Birmingham/Manchester on business?

- Less than quarterly []
- At least once a quarter but less than once a month []
- At least once a month but less than once a week []
- At least once a week []

GROUPS 7-9
 All to travel to London/Birmingham/Manchester at least once a month

GROUPS 10-12
 All to travel to London/Birmingham/Manchester at least once a week

Close if travelling to London/Birmingham/Manchester less frequently than once a month

Q10a. Which mode(s) of transport do you use when you are travelling to London/ Birmingham/Manchester on business? Please mention all that you use.

Rail []
Road []
Air []

Please represent in each group business people using single modes of transport (e.g. only rail or road) and those using a mix

For those who do not mention using rail, please go to Q10b

Those who mention using rail, go to Q11

Q10b. Which of the following statements best represents your attitude to using rail travel for business in the future?

I would never consider it [] CLOSE
I would consider it if my circumstances changed []
I would consider it if there were different or more convenient options available for me to use []

None to reject completely using rail for business travel in the future – close if they answer that they would never consider using rail travel for business in the future

Q11. Do you ever use domestic flights to get to other destinations in Britain when you are travelling on business, e.g. to travel to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Southampton etc?

YES []
NO []

Please include at least 8 business people across the sample who say they use domestic flights

Q12. You may have heard that the government is proposing to build a high speed rail link between London and Birmingham. Which of the following statements best reflects what you think about this?

- a. I know nothing about it []
- b. I am dead against it []
- c. I am not in favour of it []
- d. I have heard about it but I have no strong feelings either way []
- e. I think it seems like a good idea []
- f. I am strongly in favour of it []

As far as possible, please aim to represent people with a range of different answers in each group, ideally including those answering b/c (i.e. negative), a/d (i.e. neutral) and e/f (i.e. positive).

Q13. Please can you confirm the area in which you live?

GROUPS 7 & 10

All to live in London

GROUPS 8 & 11

All to live in Birmingham

GROUPS 9 & 12

All to live in Manchester

Please check that participants living in London or Birmingham do not live within 5 miles of the proposed route for the high speed rail link

Q14. The government may decide to do more research on this subject in the future and may wish to follow up on some of the issues raised by this piece of research – if so, do you give your permission to be re-contacted about it?

- YES []
- NO []

Name	
Address	
Home phone no.	
Work phone no.	
Mobile phone no.	
Email address	
Group	
Recruiter	

1.3 General public

The government is in the process of conducting a consultation on a proposal to build a high speed rail link between London and Birmingham. As one aspect of this, we have been asked to conduct some research to find out what the general public thinks about the proposed link, so that everyone's views can be taken into consideration when the government makes the decision about whether to build the rail link or not.

We are asking a wide range of people a few questions to understand whether they are willing to take part in the research and to make sure they are representative of the general public. The research will involve attending a 1½ hour group discussion at a local venue. All the information that you give today will be kept private, held securely and will not be used for any purpose beyond this project.

A public consultation website will also be available from 28th February if you would like to contribute your views about the proposed rail link online. The web address for this will be <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/>.

Q1. Have you ever taken part in a group discussion or in a research interview in the past?

Yes _____ No _____

When was it?

If less than 6 months: **CLOSE**

Close if this took place less than six months ago

Q2. Do members of your family or close friends work/used to work in any of the following professions or occupations?

	YES	NO
ADVERTISING AGENCY OR PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPANY	CLOSE	
MARKETING OR MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY	CLOSE	
JOURNALISM / PRESS	CLOSE	
TRANSPORT/ DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT	CLOSE	
RAIL COMPANY	CLOSE	

Please close the interview if the individual answers yes to any of the above

Q3. How old are you? Mention age clearly _____

GROUPS 13 & 14

All to be 18-35

GROUPS 15 & 16

All to be 20-45

GROUPS 17 & 18

All to be 45+

Q4. Do you have any children who live with you at home?

NO [] Go to Q5

YES [] Go to Q4b

Q4b. How many children do you have and what are their ages?

How many children: _____

Child/ren's ages: _____

GROUPS 13 & 14

None to have any children at home

GROUPS 15 & 16

All to have children at home aged under 18 – please recruit a mix of people in each group with children aged 10 and under at home, and those with children aged 11-17 at home

GROUPS 17 & 18

None to have children at home aged under 18

Q5. Gender

Male []

Female []

All groups to be mixed gender

Q6. What is your occupation? And your partner's? In which sector? And your partner's ?

Participant / _____ / _____ /

Partner / _____ / _____ /

SOCIAL GRADE-BASED ON HOH OCCUPATION

- A []
- B []
- C1 []
- C2 []
- D []
- E []

GROUPS 13, 15 & 17

All to be ABC1

GROUPS 14, 16 & 18

All to be C2DE

Q.7 Which of these ethnic groups do you consider yourself as belonging to?

- White –
- British
 - Irish
 - European
 - Eastern European
 - Other white background
- Mixed –
- White and Caribbean
 - White and Black African
 - White and Asian
 - Any other Mixed background
- Asian or Asian British –
- Indian
 - Pakistani
 - Bangladeshi
 - Southern Asian
 - Any other Asian background
- Black or Black British –
- Caribbean
 - Black African
 - Any other Black background
- Chinese
- Other

Please represent people from a range of black and minority ethnic groups across the sample, so that each group represents the ethnic makeup of the local area/population

Please include at least 6 people from black and minority ethnic groups across groups 1-6

Q8. When was the last time that you used rail transport?

- Within the last month
- Within the last two months
- Longer than two months ago CLOSE

Please recruit at least two people within every group who has used rail transport within the past two months

Q9. You may have heard that the government is proposing to build a high speed rail link between London and Birmingham. Which of the following statements best reflects what you think about this?

- a. I know nothing about it []
- b. I am dead against it []
- c. I am not in favour of it []
- d. I have heard about it but I have no strong feelings either way []
- e. I think it seems like a good idea []
- f. I am strongly in favour of it []

As far as possible, please aim to represent people with a range of different answers in each group, ideally including those answering b/c (i.e. negative), a/d (i.e. neutral) and e/f (i.e. positive)

Q10. Please can you confirm the area in which you live?

GROUPS 13 & 16

All to live in the Norwich area

GROUPS 14 & 17

All to live in the Milton Keynes area

GROUPS 15 & 18

All to live in the Bristol area

Please recruit in each group at least two participants who live in an urban/suburban setting and two participants who live in a rural setting

Q11. The government may decide to do more research on this subject in the future and may wish to follow up on some of the issues raised by this piece of research – if so, do you give your permission to be re-contacted about it?

- YES []
- NO []

Name	
Address	
Home phone no.	
Work phone no.	
Mobile phone no.	
Email address	
Group	
Recruiter	

Appendix 2

Research information sheet

Thank you for expressing an interest in taking part in this piece of research for the government on the proposed High Speed Rail link between London and Birmingham. The aim of the research is to understand the views of the general public and business community on the proposed rail link. You will be asked about your opinions on the proposals for the line, for example what you think the benefits of the link will be or any concerns you have about it. All of your comments will be fed back directly to the government and all points of view expressed within the research will be taken into consideration.

thepeoplepartnership is the independent research agency that has been commissioned to carry out this work. *thepeoplepartnership* is a member of the Market Research Society and is bound by their code of conduct (for further details please visit www.mrs.org.uk).

The research will consist of a series of group discussions amongst members of the public and the business community. All participants will receive a monetary incentive, in recognition of the time given up to participate.

Comments will not be attributed personally to individuals and will be kept anonymous. Any information that is collected as part of the process will be held securely, will not be used for any purpose beyond this specific project and will be destroyed at the end of the project.

This research is only one aspect of the public consultation work that is being conducted by the government on the proposed rail link. For more information, please visit the dedicated consultation website, which will be online from 28th February <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/>.

Appendix 3.

Discussion guide

Topic	Objectives/notes
<p>Introductions Introduce the research by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stating that DfT wants to draw together the broadest range of opinions from the public as possible and, to that end, is talking to a wide range of members of the public who may be affected by HS2, which includes local residents living along the proposed line, commuters and business travellers and members of the general public • Emphasising that all comments will be reported back directly to DfT, who will take all of these into consideration • Stressing that it is important to explore all points of view and that it is alright for group members to disagree <p>Ask each participant to introduce themselves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A little about who they live with, their interests and what they do • Briefly summarise where they tend to travel to in the country, how frequently they do so and what types of transport they use 	<p>To present the research in as objective a fashion as possible and reassure participants about the process</p> <p>To warm up participants for discussion</p>
<p>Spontaneous awareness of HSR/HS2 Ask each participant to write down their initial knowledge of and feelings about high speed rail/the proposed link between London and Birmingham, reassuring them that any response is valid</p> <p>Discuss what individuals within the group have written in turn, ensuring each participant's viewpoint is brought out, then talk more generally about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What they understand 'high speed rail' to be • What they know about the HS2 proposals and any specific questions they have at this point • What they feel about it (probing their overall sense of whether it is a positive or negative project) and why this is 	<p>To understand gut level perceptions, feelings and knowledge about HSR/HS2</p> <p>Moderators will draw out each individual viewpoint and use very neutral language to facilitate this element of the session, so that they do not inadvertently lead participants</p>

<p>Prompted exploration of HSR/HS2 Expose briefing sheet and network map</p> <p>Ask each to note down their thoughts/feelings given this more in depth information and discuss in the group how this information has developed their thinking, if at all</p> <p>Exploration of perceived benefits Focus on probing the perceived benefits of the project and exploring the issues to which these are perceived to relate, e.g. easier business/leisure travel, easing overcrowding, reducing journey times, reducing dependence on short haul aviation etc (noting how those generated vary by target audience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do each of these benefits relate to • Which are perceived as most significant and why – how does this vary amongst members of the group – if so, why is this <p>Exploration of perceived concerns Probe concerns and what issues these are perceived relate to, e.g. local impacts on local residents, environment, economy, value for money, relative need etc (noting how they vary by target audience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do each of these concerns impact on • Which are perceived as most significant and why – how does this vary amongst members of the group – if so, why is this <p>Explore awareness of the consultation process and the desire to be informed about this (if there is a desire, discuss preferred information channels)</p>	<p>To explore the issue more deeply, once participants are more informed about HSR/HS2 and help elicit spontaneous thoughts/assumptions about likely benefits/issues</p> <p>Once more, ensuring that moderators draw out individual viewpoints and use neutral language so as to avoid bias</p> <p>If concerns about the specifics of the proposed route are raised (as is likely), moderators will reiterate that they will take all concerns about to DfT and try to move on from these issues if they become an overwhelming focus for the group</p>
<p>Exploring the case for HS2 Reiterate the themes that participants identified as underlying the benefits of/arguments 'for' HSR/HS2 in the previous exercise</p> <p>Expose more detailed stimulus on the case for HS2, asking each to note down any thoughts/ideas/responses to the arguments on the sheet given to them</p> <p>For each argument, probe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension of the argument, understanding 	<p>To explore understanding of the economic, environmental and social arguments for HS2 and how to phrase these optimally</p> <p>To compare participants' perceptions of these arguments versus the benefits/concerns they generated in the previous section of the discussion</p>

<p>of language and perceived need for further supporting evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How interesting/relevant/convincing they find it and why (and if there are differences within the group, why this is) • Any issues with the argument and, if so, why <p>After having seen the full suite of arguments, explore how convincing the suite is overall, including which are the strongest arguments and anything that has been missed out</p> <p>Repeat for the arguments against HS2</p> <p>Ask each to write down the top three benefits that they would highlight and their top three concerns relating to HSR/HS2 and rate on a scale of 1-10 how positive/negative they are about the project (where 1 is very negative and 10 is very positive) – discuss responses in the group</p>	<p>Researchers to use a prompt sheet to probe the extent to which the HS2 disbenefits can be countered with supporting information</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>If DfT is going to communicate with the public on this issue and the consultation that has been launched</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What information should be provided • What arguments should be used and what should the balance between arguments ‘for’ and ‘against’ HS2 be • What information channels should be used 	<p>To summarise views on HSR/HS2, key arguments and how views have changed throughout the discussion</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Thank and close</p> <p>Give details of how the consultation can be accessed and the proposed timetable for this</p>	

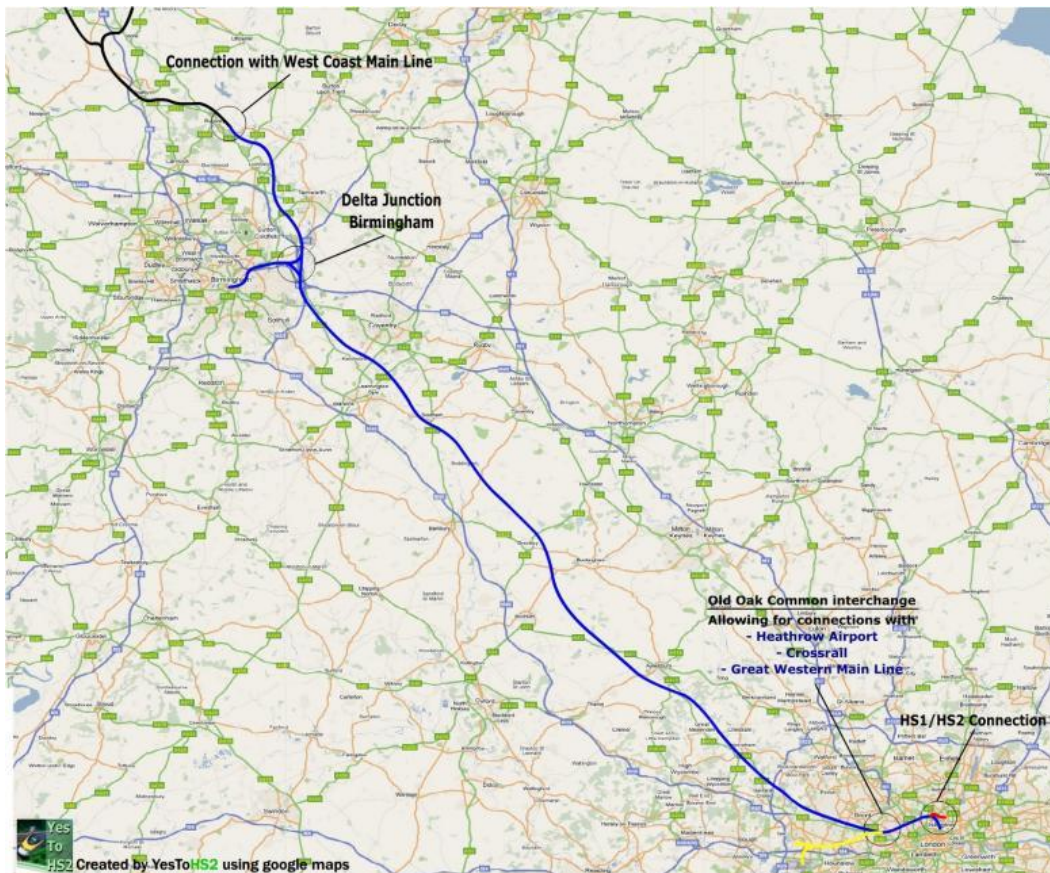
4. High speed rail briefing information

High speed rail is a type of passenger rail transport that runs significantly faster than normal rail – up to 160mph. The Channel Tunnel rail link is a high speed rail link.

The Government is currently consulting on proposals for a ‘Y-shaped’ high speed rail network that would reduce journey times from London to Birmingham to 49 minutes, and from London to Manchester/London to Leeds to around 80 minutes.

This rail network would connect into existing rail lines, to allow new high speed services to serve cities off the new line. This would enable current commuter, regional and freight services to be expanded. Links to Heathrow, other airports and the Channel Tunnel would also be built.

A route for the rail line between London and Birmingham has been proposed, which is shown below:



5. High speed rail map



6. The case for and against high speed rail

Investing in the future

- High speed rail is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the way we travel in the 21st century – it would be an investment in Britain's future
- A national high speed rail network would help to build a modern economy fit for the future. Countries across Europe and Asia have ambitious plans for high speed rail and are starting to put these into practice – Britain cannot afford to be left behind

Bringing Britain closer together

- A new national high speed rail network would create jobs, spread prosperity and transform the way that businesses work and compete
- Journey times between Britain's major cities would be slashed, which would help to regenerate urban centres, bridge the North-South divide and provide an alternative to short haul aviation
- A high speed rail network would generate economic benefits of around £44 billion – the first phase alone would support the creation of more than 40,000 jobs

New lines and new trains

- Britain's railways are increasingly crowded and more and more people are having to stand when they travel. The West Coast Main Line – Britain's key rail artery – will be completely full by 2024, so investment in new lines and trains is needed
- Moving long distance services onto high speed rail would free up slots for extra regional and commuter services
- High speed rail would bring a huge increase in passenger seats for no net increase in carbon emissions

Environment

- A high speed rail line would have a major impact on Britain's beautiful countryside, as it would cut through the Chilterns and could harm ancient woodlands and important wildlife habitats
- The speeds at which high speed rail trains would travel would cause noise pollution, which would spoil the tranquillity of the countryside

Need

- There are more important considerations for the country at the moment than building railways that allow us to travel at world beating top speeds
- A new line does not need to be built because existing lines could be upgraded instead
- The time saving on rail journeys is not enough to be significant for most people
- High speed rail would not be needed if business people start to use the internet more for meetings and conferences

Finance

- High speed rail would be too expensive for ordinary people to use as train companies are bound to charge high prices for the privilege of travelling on these lines
- A cost of £2 billion per year for high speed rail is too expensive for the country to afford at a time of economic hardship and it may commit future generations to subsidies and debt

7. Researcher information sheet

Environment

The Government is committed to lessening the impacts of any new line on the landscape and on local people.

High speed rail lines have to be quite straight to maintain their speed. There are no viable routes for a high speed rail line between London and the West Midlands that do not cross the Chilterns at some point. However, the proposed route through the Chilterns makes full use of tunnels, cuttings and existing transport corridors to minimise the impact on the landscape. Specifically, trees and 'green tunnels' (where the line is built in a deep cutting, and covered with a 'roof' which is planted with grass) would be used to disguise the line and make it blend in with the local environment.

Over 10% of the line would be in a tunnel and the line would be no more than 22 metres wide in any place, about one third the width of a motorway.

Train technology is improving, the latest high speed trains are already significantly quieter than those from recent decades, and noise mitigation technology is now greatly improved: noise barriers or earth bunding would be used to block noise.

The environmental impact of the alternatives – new or wider motorways – would require significant land take and would affect air quality and noise pollution.

Upgrading the existing rail network, as well as being an ineffective solution to the problem, would also have a large impact on those living along those routes.

A high speed rail line would allow a huge increase in travel, would generate economic benefits and would be broadly carbon neutral.

Need

Britain's railways are struggling to cope with huge increases in passenger numbers. In 1994 rail passengers travelled fewer than 18 billion miles: this rose to almost 32 billion miles in 2009. This upward trend is expected to continue.

The 1998-2009 upgrade of the West Coast Main Line demonstrated the difficulties of upgrading a busy 'live' rail line. The upgrade took over a decade, cost £9bn and caused huge disruptions for the passengers using the line.

Another upgrade, such as 'Rail Package 2', would provide nowhere near the new capacity of a high speed line or its speed and connectivity benefits, while again causing disruption for passengers.

Finances

Building work on the London to Birmingham line is expected to require average funding of around £2 billion per year, broadly similar to the level of annual expenditure on London's current Crossrail project.

Major construction works would not begin until 2017, so the largest amount of funding will fall after that date. Building a new high speed line would be a long term commitment, with spending spread over 15 years or more.

The Government proposals assume a fares structure in line with that of the existing railway.

If anyone brings up the issue of the business case assuming that passengers do not work on trains

Travelling by train gives people the opportunity to work but factoring in passenger productivity would be unlikely to produce any overall change in the business case for HS2: it might produce lower benefits from some business travellers who would otherwise still travel by train, but it would also be likely to produce increased benefits from people switching from other transport to high speed rail and from reduced crowding. Furthermore, as existing intercity railways reach capacity, their trains are becoming more and more crowded and it is becoming more difficult to be productive on those services.

8. Information on the consultation

The Government consultation on high speed rail was launched on 28th February and will run until 29th July 2011.

The consultation website can be found at <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/>.

The website contains information about high speed rail, the proposed route and events that are taking place to inform people about the proposal. You can also use the website to say what you think about the proposal.