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PRESS RELEASE

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RAILFUTURE CALLS FOR HS2 ROUTE RETHINK – CAPACITY NOT SPEED

Rail campaign group Railfuture has weighed in to the debate about high speed rail. Director Ian McDonald said: “We’re pleased that the Government is pushing ahead with planning a High Speed Rail route from London to the West Midlands. We know that budgets are tight, **but there is a pressing need for increased capacity on the railways.** We need to meet increasing demand for moving people and goods efficiently, and rail is the only way we can do this while keeping our carbon emissions down, and not by building new motorways and airport expansion.

However the new line must be part of a planned integrated network, and be connected to existing city centre stations, with through trains able to run to destinations beyond the new route itself, including continental Europe. We welcome the intention to create a network to serve the north west, north east, and Scotland, but this masterplan should include all UK regions and be determined in detail now, not after the completion of the first stage from London to the West Midlands.

We urge full and thorough consultation on a much wider choice of routes for the first stage. Unfortunately the route chosen is controversial and would pass through an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). This choice is driven by the idea that the line should run close to Heathrow, but will not actually get there! The proposed interchange at Old Oak Common (West London) will be unattractive for air passengers, if the intention is to persuade them not to travel by car or taxi.

There are other more direct routes to Birmingham and the north which should be examined in more detail, including options following existing transport corridors such as the M1, West Coast Main Line and Midland Main Line, which would have much less adverse impact on the countryside, and need less tunnelling. It is expensive, unnecessary, and environmentally destructive to plan a route for train speeds up to 400 km/h, when no other country has lines equipped for speeds of more than 320 km/h, and very few above 300 km/h. A separate link should serve Heathrow instead.”

Railfuture have said they will respond to the consultation paper in full. “We remain firm that this project is highly desirable, but it must not displace other railway investment, including electrification schemes, more and longer trains, and new stations.”

Notes for editors:

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Railfuture is Britain’s only completely independent voice on railway development. We are not affiliated to or sponsored by any political party, trade union, or private industry. We are funded almost entirely by our members.

Rail is a vital part of an integrated efficient transport system serving a modern, vibrant, environmentally sustainable economy. We are pro-rail but not anti-road. Railfuture maintains that investment in rail travel and rail freight is vital to the future of the UK economy and environment.

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