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PRESS RELEASE

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LAST CHANCE TO GET IT RIGHT FOR HIGH-SPEED 2

Pro-rail campaigners are warning that time is running out for the government to make crucial changes to HS2 before it commits to a final scheme. The pressure group Railfuture is urging Justine Greening to take on board the Transport Select Committee's reservations, which they claim will result in a better and less damaging scheme.

"MPs are basically in agreement with us that there are major flaws in the current proposals" said Ian McDonald from the group. "We think it's time to go back to the drawing board and get it right"

The Transport Select Committee recently gave a lukewarm endorsement of HS2 Limited's scheme, but had a number of reservations. It agreed with the government that there is a need for new tracks northwards from London, but questioned the controversial route through the Chilterns AONB and the design speed of 250 mph - faster than any rail service in the world. "We are concerned that the decision to build a 250 mph line has prematurely ruled out other options such as building HS2 alongside an existing motorway corridor such as...the M1/M6." it said.

"High-speed rail doesn't have to slice through our most valuable countryside. With a route designed for a maximum of 200 mph, it would be easier to follow existing transport corridors" said Ian. "We think the Transport Select Committee was damning HS2 with faint praise. Were they too polite to point out there is a better alternative, connecting more communities together, reducing CO2 emissions, which the government admit their plan does not, and addressing the north-south divide by connecting more midlands and northern towns while the government admit their plan will only make it worse?"

The TSC said it was "...disappointed that the Government has not developed a strategy for transport..." for "... the biggest single transport investment in this Parliament..." It also stated: "It would be unacceptable...if investment in HS2 led to a diminution of investment in other parts of the rail network".

Ian agrees. "The main need for HS2 should be to relieve overcrowding on the congested classic network, to provide more capacity for improved regional and local services, to get freight off the roads, and like HS1, reduce the number of short-haul flights. We want assurances that it will not be at the expense of other rail improvements such as electrification of the Midland main line."

"There's also the issue of capacity. Along with the TSC, we have doubts about whether 18 trains per hour can be fitted on a 2-track railway. Why not future-proof it from the outset and make it capable of widening to four tracks? The select committee also agreed with us that details of the full Y network should be published before a decision is made on Stage I from London to Birmingham. "

"We need to learn the lessons from other countries' experience of high speed rail too. The select committee was clear that high speed rail must be accompanied by regional and local strategies for transport. This means city centres must be served and not the proposed out-of-town parkway stations which are seldom well-served by public transport."

"Many of the Select Committee's proposals would substantially improve the case for HS2, and we are urging the DfT to adopt them. Justine Greening, this is your cue."

A government decision is expected in mid-December 2011.

Notes to editors:

The Transport Select Committee's report can be viewed in full at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmtran/1185/118502.htm>

Railfuture's submission to the HS2 consultation can be viewed here:

http://www.railfuture.org.uk/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=285

Notes for editors:

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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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