

Getting infrastructure done

The government wishes to crank up the scale and pace of new infrastructure investment in the UK. Many agree we need better railway links, more road capacity, more schools, hospitals and houses given the rising population, faster broadband and more water and electricity supply.

The government inherits a very expensive large railway project. The costs has spiralled before much work has been done on the ground. The eventual completion of the project linking northern cities to the southern and Midlands sections will not be complete until 2040. That is in five full Parliaments time. Who knows what our needs will then be, what technology will then be available for personal transport, and what the size of the population will then be.

HS2 is a reminder of what is wrong with UK infrastructure procurement. It takes far too long. It is highly contentious with the public. It is ruinously expensive. The governments that back it and take the flak in the early stages for it do not enjoy the benefits of its completion.

The Taxpayers Alliance has now drawn up a schedule of many transport projects we could afford if we cancelled the big line. Some of these are ready to go, and some are very popular in their localities. They are all much smaller than HS2 but taken together could provide a lot of improvement.

In order to speed up infrastructure investment there are some rules the government could adopt that would make it easier. Backing schemes that are strongly supported in an area would assist. Offering compensation as part of the plan to those who will be inconvenienced or adversely affected by the development would be a great help in speeding projects and reducing opposition. If someone's house is close to a planned new rail line they should be offered enough money to be able to move if they don't like the noise.

It is easier to put in broadband, water and power investments than to put in new roads or railway lines, as they have much less impact on people. They are much needed and can attract wholly or mainly private finance to pay for them. The government needs to expedite permissions and licences.