

Speech: HS2 will be an integral part of our national rail network, and it will make the whole work better

Introduction

It's an honour to open today's (22 June 2017) conference.

It's an honour; not least because of where we are this morning.

In Birmingham, the city where a thousand-strong HS2 team is getting the project off the drawing board and into reality.

On Curzon Street, just over the road from Birmingham's original station – opened in 1838, abandoned in the 1960s, and which we want to open again for HS2.

And in Birmingham Science Museum, whose halls show what this city has already achieved for science, technology and transport – and point to what it will achieve in future.

But if it's an honour to be here, today's conference is for me also a special occasion for one more reason.

New role and progress on HS2

This is the first speech I've delivered in my new job – as Minister for HS2.

For most of the past year, I've been working as Minister for Rail.

Taking responsibility for everything to do with our railways.

Except for HS2.

A year ago, that division made sense.

Back then, the HS2 Bill for Phase One – the stretch from Birmingham to London – was a concept that had yet to be approved by parliament.

The route for much of the second phase of HS2 – from Crewe to Manchester and Birmingham to Leeds – had yet to be announced.

The procurement for the main engineering works, the rolling stock, and the franchise for operating the railway – all had yet to be triggered.

Back then, HS2 was still in the planning phase.

A distinct, stand-alone project.

But today, things have moved on.

Those plans are now starting to be implemented.

On sites up and down the route, the first enabling works are underway – we've begun the utility diversions, land clearance and environmental surveys.

We'll shortly award the multi-billion-pound contracts for the main engineering works.

In April, we began the hunt for designers for 3 brand new stations, at Curzon Street, Birmingham Interchange and London's Old Oak Common, as well as the expansion of London Euston.

We've launched the competition to design, build and maintain HS2's fleet of trains, and we expect to award the contract in 2019.

By the end of this year, we expect to deposit the bill for the stretch of track beyond Birmingham and on to Crewe.

And we have announced our preferred route for much of the sections from Crewe to Manchester and Birmingham to Leeds.

Yet today is the start of our integrating this part of the future rail network into the rest of the passenger network.

Because, most significantly of all, I am delighted that today we have announced the shortlist of bidders for the West Coast Partnership franchise – the franchise to operate services both on HS2 and the existing West Coast Line.

One of the 3 consortia in the final round, each with a vast range of skills and much experience, will deliver that integration with us.

One of these bidders will take on the role of running both the West Coast Main Line and HS2 simultaneously.

Their responsibility – for integrating HS2's services as part of the existing national rail network – mirrors my responsibility, in my new job, to oversee both our existing railways and HS2, and to ensure the successful integration of the two.

The uniting of the HS2 brief and the rail brief under one minister for the first time should be taken as a signal.

Of how far HS2 has come.

But also of the government's expectations for this project.

That HS2 should not be a railway apart, or a better, faster alternative to the classic rail network.

But rather for HS2 to join the existing network, to expand and enhance it.

The case for HS2

That vision of HS2 as an enhancement of the existing network has always been integral to the case for the project.

And it's a case still worth making.

Take that old station over the road.

Twelve years after it was built, the West Coast Main Line was completed.

For the first time it became possible to take a direct train from London to Glasgow.

That year, the UK population was 15 million people.

That year, those 15 million people made 60 million rail journeys.

It's an impressive figure.

But it's small fry compared to the numbers our rail network caters for nowadays.

Today we have a population of 65 million people.

In 2015 we took 1.7 billion rail journeys.

And the numbers keep going up, year on year.

Already it can be a struggle to get a seat at peak times across much of the network.

If we do nothing, the situation will get worse.

Benefits of HS2

But when we've built HS2, our railways will be able to carry an extra 300,000 people every day.

It will be a radical upgrade to Britain's rail capacity – and not just for the places that HS2 will directly serve.

Yes, there's the 8 out of 10 of Britain's biggest cities that will be directly connected by HS2.

And the many more places that will be served by HS2 trains running onto the existing network.

But it's because we're treating HS2 as an addition and enhancement to our existing network that the benefits of HS2 won't be restricted to its passengers – or even just those who live near a future HS2 station.

Thanks to the way that HS2 will free space on our existing network, over 100

towns and cities across the country could benefit from new services on that existing rail network.

We know that transport has a unique power to transform places.

And I'd like us to start thinking about how HS2 will help places along the length and breadth of the country.

I am grateful that, thanks to the hard work of many people in this room today, we are already making good progress: looking at how HS2 can have the same positive effects that high speed rail has had in cities such as Bordeaux and Utrecht.

And how we can bring those effects to places such as Euston, Old Oak Common, Curzon Street, Crewe, Toton, Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds.

It's great to see, for instance, the plans already being made by the councils and local enterprise partnerships of Staffordshire and Cheshire.

Plans for how HS2 could help support 100,000 new homes and 120,000 new jobs in the area.

Then there's Leeds City Council's plans for how HS2 could help reshape the South Bank area of the city.

And Greater Manchester Combined Authority estimates that, by 2040, HS2 will help create 180,000 new local jobs and add £1.3 billion to the region's economy.

These are some of the big cities and regions directly served by HS2.

Their plans are well advanced, and I am grateful to everyone here who has contributed to these plans and many others.

But I also want to maintain a focus on the smaller places along the route who will receive better rail services as a result of HS2.

Even if, in many cases, it might still be too early for us to make concrete plans in every place.

It's not too early for us to start to shift expectations.

To think what it might mean, for example, if HS2 can create more seats for passengers travelling between places such as Milton Keynes and Leicester.

Or better intercity services to London from Shrewsbury and Telford, Tamworth and Nuneaton.

Or more intercity services to London, perhaps from Middlesbrough, Hull and Lincoln.

Along with many other places along the line of route.

We know that HS2 will transform Euston and parts of Birmingham, Leeds,

Manchester and Crewe.

But we also need to start planning for the way that HS2 will bring improvements across much of the existing network.

Skills

Of course, I also want to be clear that the opportunity of HS2 is by no means restricted to the rail network.

It's an opportunity for our economy as a whole.

Even someone who never travels by train stands to benefit from the thousands of jobs and apprenticeships created on the project.

As well as thousands more created by the better connections HS2 will bring.

During peak construction, we expect HS2 to employ 25,000 people.

And when HS2 is complete, it will support many, many times that number of jobs in the wider economy.

Then there's the thousands of skilled engineers who will be trained at our High Speed Rail Colleges in this city and in Doncaster.

Each of whom will gain the skills to work on HS2, but also the skills needed to maintain and enhance our existing infrastructure and to work on new projects.

Then there's all those who will be employed at the HS2 regeneration sites across the country.

Where, in the Leeds South Bank project, 35,000 jobs are expected to be created.

And in this region, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull growth strategy for the areas around the HS2 stations is planning for 36,000 new jobs – and 4,000 new homes.

I could go on – but I know that later today you'll hear much more about these plans and others.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude by saying thank you.

Thank you to everyone here who has already done so much to prepare the way for HS2.

Whether you're planning for regeneration, preparing to bid for contracts on the project or already involved in any way.

The political case for this project has already largely been won.

But to win the public case we need people to see what this project will do for our country.

How it will transform places.

Raise skill levels.

And spread new opportunity.

That's exactly what – in one way or another – everyone gathered here is helping to do.

So, thank you – and I look forward to working closely with you in the months and years ahead.