



Rail

Unlocking the potential of rail

Background

Rail represents a genuine solution to the challenge of reaching the government's target of a 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050.

The infrastructure already exists, but is in desperate need of funding and strategic planning if rail is to fulfil its far-reaching economic and environmental potential.

The UK's rail infrastructure is a system under severe pressure. It has seen little significant investment for a long period and is languishing behind many networks in other countries, both in the EU and beyond.

For this reason ICE welcomes the recent DfT white paper 'Delivering a Sustainable Railway' with its commitment to growing railway capacity and its demarcation of £15bn funding for the UK's railways.

ICE also welcomes plans to improve the rail network at Reading and Birmingham New Street, the provision of an additional 1,300 passenger carriages, and the commitment to the Thameslink and Crossrail schemes. These measures all represent a significant step forward.

The crucial element which remains absent is any sort of definite strategy for the period beyond 2015. Unless rail improvements in the UK follow a strategy, they will never be more than piecemeal. If the UK's rail network is ever to see any sort of major new build, such as a high-speed rail link, then preparatory work must begin now.

Furthermore, freight and rail policy is still London-centric. While improvements in and around London are essential, ICE is concerned that Crossrail, Thameslink, the Olympics and the East London line will quickly exhaust funding, leaving nothing for the rest of the country or for major new builds.

Recommendations

Government

- It is imperative government begins to formulate a post 2015, long-term strategy for the UK's rail network. (The recent white paper was the first government backed technical strategy on rail for over 50 years.)
- In order to consider the most effective way to increase rail capacity, a detailed study into the feasibility of a high-speed rail link between London and Scotland versus a dedicated freight route is required.
- Further investment is necessary if parts of the UK not set to benefit from Crossrail, Thameslink and the East London line are to see any significant improvement whatsoever.

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Key statistics

- East to west coast rail links will reach capacity by 2015.
- Crossrail will cost an estimated £16bn.
- Left unchecked transport emissions will account for the UK's total carbon allowance, with air travel taking up the entire transport carbon quota by 2035.
- Flights currently account for 93% of business trips between Scotland and London. Research shows passengers will only consider changing from air to rail if the journey time is under three hours – only possible on land with a high-speed rail route.
- Per tonne carried, rail produces between five and 10 times less emissions than road transport.
- Over the past six years rail travel is estimated to have saved 2m tonnes of pollutants, 6.4bn lorry kilometres and 31.5m lorry journeys.
- The average freight train journey accounts for 75 individual lorry journeys.

Further information

The Missing Link: A report on high-speed rail links on the UK, published by ICE in 2005.

Which Way: Assessing the technical options for a high-speed railway in the UK, published by ICE in 2006.

Reading Station

Reading Station was first built as part of the Great Western Railway nearly 200 years ago and is now used by 16 million passengers every year, making it the second busiest station outside London.

The station serves Paddington and Waterloo and has direct services to cities across the west of the country, from Edinburgh to Penzance.

However, the number and frequency of trains able to use Reading Station are currently limited by platform capacity and track layout and as a result the station has a reputation as a major network bottleneck.

In July 2007 the go-ahead was given to improvements at Reading, which will see train lines increase from four to seven, mainlines double from two to four and the addition of five new platforms.

The work is expected to cost £515m and result in a 37.4% performance improvement at the station. Construction is currently due to start in 2009 and will be completed in phases over five to seven years.

Birmingham New Street

Birmingham New Street does not benefit the UK's second largest city. Its last redevelopment in 1967 saw the Victorian, glass roofed structure give way to a below-street level facility covered by a shopping centre. In 2003, readers of Country Life magazine voted it the ugliest building in the UK.

The 13 platforms accommodate inter city, cross country and local services; some 120,000 passengers a day pass through, twice the intended capacity, and total yearly usage exceeds Gatwick Airport. A revamped station would help free up one of the nation's biggest rail bottlenecks, create over 3,000 jobs and enrich the local economy by £1.7bn.

The Birmingham Gateway redevelopment would cost £550m and increase passenger capacity to 52 million people a year; there would be a new concourse, waiting lounges, brighter platforms and new lifts and escalators. The project has support from Birmingham City Council, transport authority Centro, development agency Advantage West Midlands and Network Rail.

A total of £350m of public money from four agencies would free up £200m of private investment. In July 2007 the government reserved rail funding £128m. Construction on phase one is due to start in winter 2008, with completion in 2011. The full redevelopment would open in 2013.