

Experts report confirms HS2 Stoke Route delivers much greater value

Top advisors on the economic impacts of HS2, Volterra, have confirmed that the High Speed 2 rail project would deliver far greater economic benefit if it was routed through Stoke-on-Trent rather than Crewe.

The highly respected expert team, who regularly advise Government and big business, say that evaluation guidance applied by the Department for Transport “is counterintuitive for a scheme where the major objective is rebalancing Britain.”

Volterra reports that an HS2 station in Stoke-on-Trent would result in a step change in employment and productivity in the city, of a much greater magnitude than that achieved by the Crewe parkway station proposal.

The report comes just as the powerful House of Commons Public Affairs Committee expressed concern that HS2 may not deliver maximum value for money for the tax payer by maximising the regeneration benefits.

The Volterra report reinforces this view. Experience of high speed rail developments elsewhere in the world has demonstrated that city centre stations have a much greater impact in terms of generated jobs and growth.

A 10% increase in employment would lead to £689million increase in economic growth in Stoke-on-Trent, compared to just £197m in Crewe.

A 6% growth in employment in Stoke-on-Trent would achieve the same increase in annual increase in prosperity as a 20% increase in Crewe.

The report goes on to say that evaluation criteria used by HS2 excludes the growth impact of transport investment on the wider economy, on the city economies that can be boosted most. So the positive impact on Stoke-on-Trent is masked in the current HS2 analysis.

Bridget Rosewell OBE, one of the UK's leading economic experts, said the analysis conducted by HS2 failed to capture the very benefits which HS2 was meant to be all about.

“The appraisal of HS2 does not allow for the transformational impacts which are enabled by transport infrastructure investment. This seems counterproductive when the stated aim of HS2 is to connect up our cities and transform their economic output and productivity.

“The effect is to underplay the impact of HS2 on jobs growth in cities like Stoke-on-Trent, when all the evidence indicates that such investment would have significantly more impact in boosting prosperity than similar investment in Crewe.

“HS2 has admitted that this is a limitation in their decision making. Perhaps this is why they have failed to select the best location in terms of impact on the economy,” she said.

Chambers of Commerce Chairman Jonathan Mitchell said the business community was 100% behind the Stoke Route.

“We fully support the development of HS2 to supercharge the nation’s regional economies. That’s what HS2 is all about and we have even more evidence now to present to Government that shows that Stoke-on-Trent is the best choice for a station.

“The Government has not made a decision yet and we have been assured that they are taking this city seriously. This is a city with a massive appetite for growth and success. People are hearing that message loud and strong in the corridors of power,” he said.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Chairman David Frost said the city and the business community would not relent in pressing the case for the Stoke Route.

“This decision is of ultimate importance to the city and the region. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to boost our economy and maximise our connections to growth and prosperity. We have to ensure we maximise the benefits from HS2 for the region,” he said.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council leader Mohammed Pervez said there was growing recognition that the Stoke Route delivered maximum value for the tax payer.

“The House of Commons Public Affairs Committee and Volterra are both saying that HS2 should be all about getting value for money for the tax payer by maximising economic growth. That’s exactly what the Stoke Route achieves. It delivers more city to city connections, faster and cheaper. Business and respected economists agree that the Stoke Route makes total sense,” he said.