

SEPTEMBER 2015

HS2

JAKE UNSWORTH



DEBATING MATTERS
**TOPIC
GUIDES**

MOTION:

**“WE SHOULD BUILD
HS2”**

ABOUT DEBATING MATTERS

Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.

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KEY TERMS

[Richard Trevithick](#)

[Shinkansen Trains](#)

INTRODUCTION

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With the news that the government plan to commence building the controversial HS2 rail network as early as 2017 [Ref: [The Times](#)], the debate about whether the UK should embark on such a large and expensive infrastructure project has ignited once again. Almost 230 years since Richard Trevithick’s pioneering steam locomotive journey of 10 miles in 4 hours in South Wales [Ref: [BBC News](#)], it will be possible to travel hundreds of miles between London and Manchester in under 70 minutes – halving the current travel time, and between Leeds and London in well under 2 hours. [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Supporters contend that building HS2 will be economically worthwhile, not least by helping to improve Britain’s creaking infrastructure – ranked 27th in the world according to a recent study – but also that it will ease congestion and reduce pollution [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Moreover, fundamental to their argument, is that the new rail network will be economically beneficial for cities in the North and the Midlands – so much so that Transport Secretary Patrick McLaughlin states that: “HS2 will change the transport architecture of the north. But it will also change the economic architecture” [Ref: [The Times](#)]. Despite this, opposition to the project is both broad and robust – with environmental concerns combined with the fact that the project will cost somewhere in the region of £50 billion and – as the 2033 timeframe suggests – take over 15 years to build [Ref: [Spectator](#)] being of particular concern. With these arguments in mind, does HS2 symbolise the kind of ambition the UK needs, facilitating growth in the North as supporters suggest? Or, is it better to spend the money on improving the current rail network? Should Britain build HS2?



THE HS2 DEBATE IN CONTEXT

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What are the economic arguments?

A key argument that advocates make, is that HS2 will transform the economies of the Midlands and the North. Journalist Larry Elliot uses the examples of Berlin during the period of 1880 and 1914, and Canary Wharf as examples of the rejuvenation that occurs with investment in public transport infrastructure [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Evidence of the economic benefits of HS2 is highlighted in reports which claim that the project would enable economic growth in areas such as Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds – and some estimates suggest that the West Midlands area will gain most from HS2, with economic output expected to rise from £1.5bn to £3.1bn by 2037 [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. In a similar vein, others point to the potential for jobs and redevelopment in London, with Andrew Adonis claiming that the area west of Paddington station could see as many as many as 24,000 homes built, and in excess of 55,000 jobs created [Ref: [City AM](#)]. Another key argument for supporters, is that linking large northern cities such as Manchester and Leeds with London via high speed rail, will help curtail the economic dominance of London, and create a “Northern Powerhouse” as Chancellor George Osborne suggests [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. However opponents Allister Heath and Ian Jack question this thinking – remarking instead that evidence suggests that the link is likely to benefit London more, as the “wealthier metropole” [Ref: [Telegraph](#)], meaning that, “the likely consequence of HS2 is to turn northern cities into far flung London suburbs, rather than places with their own dynamic economies” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. The current price tag of £50bn is broadly equivalent to six London Olympics, three Heathrow runways or alternatively 3 years’ of the UK’s research and development expenditure [Ref: [spiked](#)], and is perhaps

the largest area of criticism. In this respect, for sceptics, HS2 represents, “a political vanity project without historic parallel” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. This, one commentator argues, is because money could be spent on a broader range of badly needed rail investment, which would benefit more people around the country, and improve Britain’s trains which are currently, “a European embarrassment” [Ref: [Guardian](#)].

Environmental considerations

Environmental concerns are also important in this discussion. As one advocate puts it: “Once completed, 18 trains an hour, each taking 1,100 passengers, will run from northern cities to London and vice versa, taking nearly ten million car journeys off the road” [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Government research has corroborated this, suggesting that HS2 would transfer over 13 million journeys from the air and roads, including removing lorries from busy routes [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. The principles behind public transport are simple; reduced pollution, eased congestion and improved environmental prospects; HS2 is a vital part of the UK’s strategy in this regard, hence its inclusion in the ‘environment’ section of the coalition agreement of 2010 [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. However, despite these arguments, some are still critical of the broad environmental impact that HS2 will have. The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee for example, concluded that, “there is some debate about whether HS2 will deliver a reduction in emissions... at best, the savings are likely to be relatively small.” [Ref: [Guardian](#)] Moreover, notwithstanding proposals to ensure that the environment is protected as much as possible, through the introduction of wild havens, green bridges and natural areas along the route of HS2 [Ref: [Wildlife Trusts](#)], doubts



THE HS2 DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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remain about the negative impact HS2 will have. With a report at the end of 2013 finding that 32 hectares of ancient woodland, 4,800 hectares of farmland, and 250 acres of forest would need to be destroyed during construction [Ref: [The Times](#)] viewed by some as particularly damaging. Others worry about the impact to people's homes along the proposed route - with over two thousand properties, and the people that live in them, potentially disturbed during construction [Ref: [Financial Times](#)], resulting in the government creating a compensation scheme for affected homeowners [Ref: [BBC News](#)].

Ambition

Over 50 years ago, in 1964, Japan pioneered high-speed rail with their Shinkansen network [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)], and for advocates, showing this level of ambition is a key reason why the UK should build HS2. One Times editorial remarks: "Progress is popular, and investment begets progress", going on to argue that in spite of opposition: "We must invest with courage and foresight to prosper in the future. The whole country deserves high speed rail." [Ref: [The Times](#)] Furthermore, far from being a vanity project, it is argued that HS2 represents a plan which may act as a spur to bring Britain's railway infrastructure into the modern age [Ref: [spiked](#)] – as well as easing the pressure on rail services after a doubling of passenger numbers in the past two decades [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Opponents though dismiss these claims, contending that aside from all of the associated problems with cost and disruption: "It's an outdated project, the answer to last century's transport question". Instead, they note that real technological innovation such as conference calling, means that: "If the digital revolution continues apace, most of us won't make

this journey at all" [Ref: [Spectator](#)], because we will not need to. So, how should we view the building of HS2? Does it represent ambitious infrastructure planning for 21st century rail travel, or is it an unnecessary and costly project that will do more harm than good?



ESSENTIAL READING

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FOR

[Full speed ahead](#)

The Times 16 July 2015

[HS2: if they build it, will people come?](#)

Larry Elliott *Guardian* 28 June 2015

[High Speed 2: an impoverished debate](#)

James Woudhuysen *spiked* 16 September 2013

[HS2 will give people in the north the best of both worlds](#)

Kevin Meagher *Guardian* 4 July 2013

AGAINST

[HS2 has just claimed its first victim: the rail upgrades we so badly need](#)

Simon Jenkins *Guardian* 26 May 2015

[Folly of £50bn HS2 project must hit the buffers](#)

Jeremy Paxman *Financial Times* 15 May 2015

[How HS2 has blighted my parents' lives](#)

Melissa Kite *Spectator* 6 December 2014

[HS2: this environmental report should be the final blow](#)

Stanley Johnson *Guardian* 7 April 2014

IN DEPTH

[HS2: full steam ahead for new high speed rail line](#)

The Week 3 June 2015



BACKGROUNDEERS

[The HS2 debate is over: time to embrace the benefits](#)

Andrew Adonis *City AM* 20 July 2015

[Scrap HS2 to put Britain on the internet fast track](#)

Nic Fildes *The Times* 15 July 2015

[HS2 is not a useless railway: merely the stupidest](#)

Simon Jenkins *Guardian* 2 June 2015

[The anti tarmac vote](#)

Economist 18 April 2015

[High Speed Rail: make haste, slowly](#)

Guardian 16 April 2015

[Problems down the line](#)

Economist 10 January 2015

[How the Shinkansen bullet train made Tokyo the monster it is today](#)

Philip Brator & Masako Tsubuku *Guardian* 30 September 2014

[HS2: 12 arguments for and against](#)

BBC News 24 September 2014

[Labour must scrap HS2 to avoid a rail disaster](#)

Damian McBride *The Times* 19 August 2014

[Working on the railway](#)

Economist 26 July 2014

[What's the point of HS2?](#)

Christian Wolmar *London Review of Books* 17 April 2014

[Shamed by Britain's railways, I longed for HS2. But I've changed my mind](#)

Ian Jack *Guardian* 19 July 2013

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[The ludicrous 20 year timescale for HS2 is reason enough to abandon the whole thing](#)

Rory Sutherland *Spectator* 25 May 2013

[Fast train to nowhere?](#)

George Monbiot *Monbiot.Com* 17 May 2010

ORGANISATIONS

[Go HS2](#)

[Gov.UK](#)

[Stop HS2](#)

[Wildlife Trusts](#)

IN THE NEWS

[Significant woodland at risk of being destroyed by rail line, says new report](#)

Independent 2 August 2015

[HS2 Chief hits out at unjust division of rail assets between north and south](#)

Guardian 16 July 2015

[UK infrastructure spending rises almost 72%](#)

Financial Times 28 June 2015

[Suppressed HS2 report reveals serious cost concerns](#)

Guardian 26 June 2015

[HS2 is 'cannibalising' the rest of the transport budget Taxpayers Alliance claims](#)

City AM 25 June 2015

[HS2 to start work within the next two years](#)

The Times 2 June 2015

[HS2: more cash for homeowners living near rail line](#)

BBC News 16 January 2015

[HS2 trains to reach the north six years early](#)

Telegraph 17 March 2014

[HS2: more people back northern rail improvements than north-south project](#)

Guardian 15 March 2014

[Build northern stretch of HS2 first to boost poorer cities](#)

Guardian 1 March 2014

['Betrayed' rural body turns against HS2](#)

The Times 22 January 2014

[HS2 report reveals the toll on the countryside](#)

The Times 26 November 2013

[HS2 will tear up rural England](#)

Telegraph 20 July 2013

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AUDIO/VISUAL

[MORAL MAZE: Nimbyism and HS2](#)

BBC Radio 4 2 February 2013



ADVICE FOR DEBATING MATTERS

DEBATING MATTERS
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GUIDES**

www.debatingmatters.com

FOR STUDENTS

READ EVERYTHING

In the Topic Guide and in the news - not just your side of the argument either.

STATISTICS ARE GOOD BUT.....

Your opponents will have their own too. They'll support your points but they aren't a substitute for them.

BE BOLD

Get straight to the point but don't rush into things: make sure you aren't falling back on earlier assertions because interpreting a debate too narrowly might show a lack of understanding or confidence.

DON'T BACK DOWN

Try to take your case to its logical conclusion before trying to seem 'balanced' - your ability to challenge fundamental principles will be rewarded - even if you personally disagree with your arguments.

DON'T PANIC

Never assume you've lost because every question is an opportunity to explain what you know. Don't try to answer every question but don't avoid the tough ones either.

FOR TEACHERS

Hoping to start a debating club? Looking for ways to give your debaters more experience? Debating Matters have a wide range of resources to help develop a culture of debate in your school and many more Topic Guides like this one to bring out the best in your students. For these and details of how to enter a team for the Debating Matters Competition visit our website, www.debatingmatters.com

FOR JUDGES

Judges are asked to consider whether students have been brave enough to address the difficult questions asked of them. Clever semantics might demonstrate an acrobatic mind but are also likely to hinder a serious discussion by changing the terms and parameters of the debate itself.

Whilst a team might demonstrate considerable knowledge and familiarity with the topic, evading difficult issues and failing to address the main substance of the debate misses the point of the competition. Judges are therefore encouraged to consider how far students have gone in defending their side of the motion, to what extent students have taken up the more challenging parts of the debate and how far the teams were able to respond to and challenge their opponents.

As one judge remarked *'These are not debates won simply by the rather technical rules of schools competitive debating. The challenge is to dig in to the real issues.'* This assessment seems to grasp the point and is worth bearing in mind when sitting on a judging panel.



**“A COMPLEX
WORLD REQUIRES
THE CAPACITY
TO MARSHALL
CHALLENGING IDEAS
AND ARGUMENTS”**

**LORD BOATENG, FORMER BRITISH HIGH
COMMISSIONER TO SOUTH AFRICA**