



ASLEF Response to Transport Select Committee Inquiry October 2009
Priorities for investment in the railways

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and Overground. With our long experience and extensive knowledge of the UK rail industry, ASLEF is well placed to comment on the current issues and developments in the sector.

2. ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Transport Select Committee Inquiry into Priorities for Investment in the Railways. The long term objective for rail investment must be to increase capacity and reduce carbon emissions.

3. The union believes that a dedicated freight line would bring a range of long term benefits to the railway and transport infrastructure in the UK. The Eurorail Freight Route, as advocated by Kelvin Hopkins MP, would link the Channel Tunnel to Glasgow via all the main economic and population centres up the backbone of the UK. It requires only 14 miles of new track of which 9.5 miles would be in tunnels. The plan would cost less than £4 billion.

4. The Committee will recognise that freight trains and passenger services operate at different speeds so a plan to help reduce the two services using the same track would have palpable benefits. A freight line would remove traffic from of the west coast mainline and the east coast mainline. The result would be greater capacity and faster services for passenger trains and would boost the rail freight sector allowing more capacity and reliability and therefore less trucks and carbon emissions as lorry miles reduce.

5. ASLEF believes that a High Speed line would have a dramatic impact on the UK rail network's future capacity issues. The West Coast Mainline is likely to be at full capacity by 2020 preventing the essential growth of rail travel. Network Rail has said "by 2020 we will be turning away passengers." The high speed line proposed by Network Rail would cost £34 billion but lead to £55bn of value. On top of this it would reduce domestic air travel due to the reduced journey times to the north of England and Scotland.
6. In addition ASLEF welcomes the Government's recent announcement on the electrification of the Great Western line and recognition that such an infrastructure development will improve efficiency, journey times and reduce carbon emissions. At present only a third of the railway network is electrified and Britain has many diesel trains running over electrified tracks.
7. Electrification has many long term savings and due to there being fewer moving parts, maintenance on the trains becomes simpler and cheaper. Also, because the vehicles vibrate less and are more rugged, electric traction trains have far longer operational lives meaning they are more cost efficient. We would urge the Committee to examine the case for greater electrification of the network including the Midland main line and many of the suburban routes around Leeds and Sheffield.
8. We welcome the pilot projects of the European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and urge Network Rail to roll out this infrastructure development as rapidly as possible. ERTMS would greatly assist in the capacity challenges the UK rail network faces.
9. We would also point out that gauge work can help increase the amount of freight taken by trains. There are many areas of the country that could benefit from gauge enhancement such as, for example, the Tottenham Hampstead Line.
10. ASLEF believes that a key aim of investment in the railways has to be cultivating a modal shift from air to rail and from car to train in order to aspire to the objectives of the Government's carbon reduction strategy. An increase in rail capacity is strongly linked to a decrease in car journeys undertaken with the result that there is less

carbon emissions. Decisions must therefore be determined by which will best deliver these outcomes.

11. The union takes the view that infrastructure work can have a positive effect on the economy not least in terms of generating counter-recessionary employment in the rail industry and beyond as well as stimulating demand in the economy and assist in driving the economy out of recession. Rail could be used to direct the Government towards meeting climate change targets in addition to being part of our overall “greening the economy” policy. Rail enhancements have the potential to boost employment across the construction, motor manufacturing, intermodal, steel and infrastructure sectors by improving the distribution networks for these industries.
12. Moreover major infrastructure developments would also help stimulate activity in the rail freight industry which is highly dependent on Network Rail’s infrastructure contracts. For instance, the largest rail freight company in the UK DB Schenker receives 40% of its revenue from Network Rail. There are also huge benefits to business in faster journey times between regional cities and London.
13. ASLEF believes that while it is important to balance long term and short term investment, it is also essential that works are not simply missed due to large projects such as high speed rail. Short infill projects, for example, can give extremely high value for money. For example, routes that are electrified except for a short stretch often have diesel locomotives running under electric lines. A small infill would allow electric traction and gives similar value for money as a whole line being electrified.
14. The union also believes that Network Rail ought to give more consideration to disused lines in order to enhance the capacity of the rail network. In the southern region, for instance, reopening the Lewes Uckfield line could reduce many of the capacity issues around Gatwick Airport.
15. ASLEF takes the view that Britain still lacks a fully integrated transport network and longer term visions are needed for planning. There is often a lack of co-ordination between train operating companies on timetabling. Freight depots must allow containers to travel the length of the country by rail, with only the last few miles

being taken on road. Bus and train times should be considered together to ensure ease of use. Only with this integration will we be able to cultivate the modal shift necessary to incentivise people out of their cars and on to trains and move freight off of the road and on to rail.

16. To conclude, ASLEF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. We applaud recent announcements on electrification and high speed rail which go a considerable way to addressing the long terms capacity needs of the UK rail network.

17. We believe there is a need for a designated freight route to free up capacity on the East and West Coast mainlines and don't believe the £200 million allocated for a strategic freight network is anywhere near sufficient.

18. Compared to air and road, rail is the most benign form of transport in environmental terms. Investment in rail is not only vital to greening the economy but also to stimulate demand in a range of linked industries from steel to car manufacturing.

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