

# HS2 – apologies for the cancelled service

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Well now, are we on the verge of a sensible decision being made on the UK's "high-speed" rail shenanigans? One can't help but hope that sense will finally prevail over HS2 – a project that should have never have seen the light of day.

There is a plethora of projects that transport an infra hack (of a number of years' standing) through history from their inception, procurement, eventual financial close and then launch of operations. And so many of them leave you with a warm feeling of achievement.

With so many of them – the likes the [Panama Canal extension](#), the [Port of Miami Tunnel](#), the [M25 widening scheme](#), the list is lengthy – we stand on the sidelines reporting on progress... but the genuine hope is that these projects come to fruition and provide the service for which the need is so abundantly apparent.

When HS2 reared its hideous head back in 2010, I have to admit to a certain amount of scoffing. It felt at the time like a ludicrous folly... slicing 20 minutes off travel times on an HSR that could never hit "high speed", but selling it on capacity increase.

As it progressed, it increasingly felt like the sort of vanity project that should never have made it off the drawing board. And when Covid landed, revolutionising the way we work (from home being not only an option but a viable alternative) it looked increasingly out of focus with reality.



Thinking back to those early days, railing against the lunacy of a project that – fundamentally – made no sense to me, I parked complaints after a discussion with an old chum who laid the argument to rest.

This view was: "It doesn't matter whether it makes sense or not, it has cross-party support, so it's going to be delivered."

My view was that if the Conservative government wanted to revive the economy and sling-shot the UK out of the doldrums of the Global Financial Crisis, a slew of nationwide infrastructure investments would have the desired impact... you know, the sort of programme that the Labour government drove with its Building Schools for the Future programme.

This would have provided jobs for people at a local level, throwing a lifeline to struggling construction companies, rebuilding educational facilities that (still) are in dire need of an upgrade. That would have been impactful.

But no, they wanted to bet the farm on a single project that – on paper – would open up the nation and continue decentralisation of the UK, allowing greater proliferation in the north of England which is in dire need of support.

Plans for HS2 were officially endorsed by the Department for Transport on [10 March 2009](#). A couple of months later,

Network Rail published the results of an [investigation into the strategic case](#) for a new high-speed line to the Midlands, the north west of England, even mulling the option to continue it all the way to Scotland.

In those early stories it had a capex of £34 billion, with the promise it would generate revenue and benefits worth £55 billion. Now the price tag is estimated at £71 billion and nobody's talking about the financial impact.

While it is not project finance, IJGlobal has tracked HS2 as it wibbled through construction, was slashed back to terminating in outer London, and now it looks like the Manchester extension and stopper service (ideal for an HSR!) faces the axe.

It's been painful to watch.

## **Copper bottomed project**

Apart from a couple of barbed comments over the years in editorials, the whole HS2 debate was parked and acceptance settled in that a project designed to solve an historic problem (not as society evolved) would be realised in the goodness of time.

The only positive taken from HS2 ploughing through the English countryside has been numerous archaeological discoveries (which have been fascinating to read about). However, the destruction of native forestry and demolition of historic buildings have been horrific to observe.

The furore of today is that news has broken that a decision will be made this week on whether or not the HSR link between (not central) London and Birmingham will now not extend to Manchester.

Needless to say, politicians from the north east are appalled with former chancellor George Osborne saying that axing the extension was a "gross act of vandalism"... too late, Georgy Boy, the English countryside has already been vandalised by this project.

Just take a look at the Google satellite image of the Euston Station area and that's vandalism for you.

I will never forgive HS2 for the demolition of the Bree Louise which was one of London's most magnificent real ale pubs. It was a landmark for so many commuters who travelled out of Euston and a place of worship for CAMRA members.

Drummond Street was renowned for glorious vegetarian Indian restaurants and that has been so heftily impacted by construction work that it's a shade of its former self.

To be honest, the whole area is a bit of a wasteland.

## **What to do?**

If they are mulling the option of axing the extension, I think they should take a moment and ponder whether it might not just be for the best to call it quits on the whole stinker of a project.

How can they undo the vandalism of more than a decade of unpopular decisions?

Just turn it into the single most glorious cycle track – Happy Cycle 2 – and rewild the environment.

Plant native species along an environmental corridor with hostels and amenities that will impact local communities and give something to the communities you have so negatively impacted.

OK – so it won't have the economic impact that you promised originally, but it was never going to do that.

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Alternatively, you can leave a legacy of environmental impact with archaeological sites and educational facilities that would be worth travelling to... by rail, if you like, from one of the train stations that already exist in the area!

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