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Rt. Hon. David Cameron
The Prime Minister
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High Speed 2

The recent report of the Economic Affairs Committee of the House of Lords on HS2 concluded that the case for the HS2 project had not yet been made. We, the undersigned, who represent some of the most senior engineers, transport planners and economists in the UK, share their Lordships' concerns and question whether it is appropriate to push ahead with such an expensive and potential environmentally damaging scheme. We are therefore writing to urge your new Government to act quickly, call for a pause to look again at alternative ways of tackling the problems that HS2 is supposed to address, and allow a thoroughgoing review of how best to bring our national rail system holistically into the 21st century.

Areas that such a high level review should address include:

- The **regeneration of the North** and closing of the north-south economic divide, a key purpose advanced by the advocates of HS2. It appears unlikely that HS2 would further this objective; more likely it could further strengthen the South. More targeted transport and other investments in the North are likely to be more effective.
- Examination of the principal rationale put forward for HS2, the **provision of extra rail network capacity**. There is a case for increasing capacity on parts of the north-south West Coast corridor and London approach in the medium term. But other major rail corridors into London are closer to their capacity limits. Moreover, the routeing, lack of integration with the WCML, and limited capacity of HS2 will not only deprive a number of cities of a high speed service, but remove the premium intercity services to London that these cities currently enjoy. The views of their Lordships should be taken most seriously, and further analysis conducted into alternative and more cost-effective means for dealing with the capacity shortfall.
- Addressing a **set of principles for rail investment** against which plans can be assessed. Our appreciation of the key advantages of rail in the geography of Britain suggests the following principles be included: city centre access; complementarity of local and long-distance passenger services; high connectivity with high frequencies; widely distributed advantages of speed and reliability rather than a concentration of

excessive speed; appropriate links to airports and ports; access to HS1; and routes for freight. Does HS2 score adequately against these principles?

- Reconsideration of whether HS2 will lead to a **reduction in carbon dioxide emissions**. The most recent official estimates, which may be optimistic, are that it would slightly increase emissions in the first 60 years. We would expect transport spending to contribute effectively to CO₂ reductions.
- Reviewing the **economic justification** of the scheme which currently appears to rely upon assessments based solely on comparison with an unrealistic “do minimum” alternative. Such a comparison can provide a necessary justification for “doing something”, but does not provide a sufficient justification for any scheme. Nor does it ensure that the best option is selected, especially when alternative strategies to HS2 that would achieve similar objectives but involve much lower costs and risks were not considered thoroughly enough or were inadequately considered.

It is doubtful whether HS2 even passes the “do minimum” test. We question whether benefits have been exaggerated and major adverse impacts omitted from the assessment. For instance:

- By far the most important item of economic benefit claimed for HS2 is the time savings that passengers may realise, especially those travelling on business. This provides the main rationale for choosing a high speed solution. There is plenty of evidence that business users find long distance rail travel to be a productive use of time. Yet even if business travellers were unproductive on the HS2 section of their journeys, and were to value the time savings as highly as suggested, does it follow that the taxpayer should pay for them?
 - No value has been placed on what many regard as the most negative effects of HS2, its environmental and socio-economic impacts. If the established rules of cost benefit analysis had been followed, there would be a much larger negative cost item in the appraisal that reflected these impacts.
- The subsidy required from Government for the **capital and operating costs of HS2** over two decades risks placing in jeopardy the economic recovery and weakening the economy in the longer run, at a time when public debt needs to be reduced. By the time HS2 is fully operational, there is a serious risk that technological advances will render the demand forecasts obsolete.

This is a short and incomplete summary of reasons for questioning HS2 that we could expand upon. We hope you will agree that the points raised are, nevertheless, more than sufficient to establish the urgent need for a thorough, impartial and expert reappraisal.

Such a reappraisal could not be carried out with any credibility while at the same time the HS2 project proceeds apace. We therefore urge your new Government to call a moratorium on work on HS2 pending completion of the reappraisal.

The transport infrastructure decisions of Government in the next few years will have enduring consequences for at least a century. Please take the time with a clean sheet in

front of you to make the right judgements, setting aside the preconceptions that seem to have underlain the development of the HS2 project.

Yours sincerely

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Signing on behalf of the following signatories to the above letter:

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