

The HS2 Debate

High-speed rail first appeared in the UK in 2003, with the High Speed 1 link connecting London to the Channel Tunnel and therefore Europe. The UK government set up High Speed 2 Ltd, which considered whether a second high-speed rail line would improve travel in the UK, so the HS2 debate began. In 2009, the High Speed 2 (HS2) was launched: a high-speed rail link connecting London to the Midlands and eventually beyond to Manchester and Leeds.

Supporters of the HS2 say it will herald a new era, making travel between the Midlands and London much quicker and easier than ever before. However, for the project to become successful, the proposed route will cut through many natural areas and even people's residences. Whether you think the disruption is worth the benefits the project will bring or not, the debate will continue to rage on. Which side of the argument represents your point of view?

For

- When completed, the HS2 will be approximately 330 miles long and will connect the North and South of the country together.
- More than half of the 140-mile route between London and Birmingham will be in cuttings or tunnels, so will therefore will have low visual impact on the surrounding areas.
- The HS2 trains will run up to 400km per hour, which is faster than other European high-speed trains. People will be able to travel from place to place much faster, allowing for easier commuting.
- 2 million trees will be planted along the proposed route between London and the West Midlands to counteract any damage to the natural environment.
- It is estimated that 4.5 million air trips and 9 million road trips a year will become redundant due to the rail link, which will help the UK government to cut carbon emissions.
- The HS2 will reduce the strain on our already over-congested roads, allowing for less stressful travel.
- The rail link is expected to create benefits of £59 billion, having a great impact on the economy of the entire country.
- The whole country will benefit from HS2, with 100,000 jobs predicted to be created through its construction. The line will boost the economy in the North particularly, as well as the economy of the UK as a whole.
- £36.2 billion of investment will go into the project between 2017 and 2033, which is roughly about £2 billion per year.
- Due to better travel links, businesses may be encouraged to start up in areas that previously were neglected.

Against

- Around 14 different Grade II listed buildings will be affected by the route between London and Birmingham, destroying many important historical sites.
- A £500 million tunnel will need to be built through an area of the Chiltern Hills in the south east of England. This has been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- Many natural environments and animal habitats across the country will be completely destroyed.
- A 400km per hour train will use three times the amount of power and energy that regular 200km per hour trains use.
- The amount of concrete needed to complete the full network would cover an area equivalent to the size of Manchester.
- It is thought that 27% of the projected passengers will only travel at all because HS2 is built, therefore increasing carbon levels through unnecessary journeys.
- Three times as many passenger journeys will be towards London, meaning that the distribution of possible benefits will go primarily to that area and nowhere else.
- Estimated costs keep continuing to rise and rise. Some say that the costs are spiralling out of control.
- Many believe the money it will cost to build the HS2 would be better spent elsewhere, on areas such as education or the NHS.
- Ticket prices are expected to be too expensive for the average rail user to afford, therefore only wealthy people of business will use it.
- The cost to the British taxpayer will be around £1000 per household, many of whom will not benefit at all from the creation of the rail link.
- All the negative impacts listed above, will only allow people to get from London to Birmingham 20 minutes faster, something which could be solved by simply catching an earlier train.

It is clear to see both the potential costs and benefits of a project such as this one. Many people feel extremely passionate about the project one way or another, with affected residents even starting campaign groups to protest the construction of the train line. In these places, posters and placards can be seen objecting to the HS2. But despite all the controversy and disagreements, it appears that the HS2 will plough on regardless.

The HS2 Question – Comprehension

Section A

1. When did the first high-speed rail link appear in the UK?

2. In what year was the HS2 project launched?

3. What does the phrase 'people's residences' mean in the context of this text?

4. How many jobs are predicted to be created by the construction of the HS2?

5. Which of the benefits discussed do you find the most convincing?

6. Do you agree that the money would be better spent on education or the NHS?
Explain your answer.

Section B

7. Where is the HS2 rail link planned to start and end?

8. Why does the 'For' section suggest the train will have a low visual impact at first?

9. What does the 'For' section suggest will allow for 'less stressful travel'?

10. How will the Chiltern Hills be affected by the construction of the HS2?

11. How are affected residents showing their feelings about the HS2?

12. Which side of the argument do you think is the strongest? Explain your answer.

Section C

13. What do you think the writer means by the phrase ‘herald a new era’?

14. What does the word ‘proposed’ suggest about the route of the HS2?

15. Do you think planting 2 million trees is a good enough to counteract the damaged caused to the natural environment? Explain your answer.

16. Why do you think the rail link will make some air and road trips unnecessary?

17. What does the phrase ‘spiralling’ suggest about the cost of the HS2?

18. What does the word ‘controversy’ suggest about the HS2 debate?

19. Which side do you think an environmentalist would relate to? Justify your answer using evidence from the text.

Section D

20. Who do you think will be the main group to benefit from the construction of the HS2?

21. How does the costs to British taxpayers make you feel? Explain your answer.

22. Why do you think the final point about saving travellers 20 minutes was left until last in the 'Against' section?

23. What do you predict will happen when the construction work first begins?

24. What sort of text would you suggest this is?

25. Do you think the text is mainly fact or opinion? What impact does this have on the text?

26. Can you think of possible questions to pose to people both 'for' and 'against' the HS2's construction?

The HS2 Question – Challenge Activity

Section A

Tick the correct answer.

High Speed 2 (HS2) was launched in...

2090 ☐

2009 ☐

2900 ☐

2019 ☐

The aim of HS2 is to speed up travel between the Midlands and...

Cardiff ☐

Edinburgh ☐

Belfast ☐

London ☐

The HS2 train will run up to...

200kmph ☐

400mph ☐

400kmph ☐

40kmph ☐

The Chiltern Hills have been designated as an...

AONB ☐

ANOB ☐

AOBN ☐

ABON ☐

HS2 will make the journey from London to Birmingham quicker by...

12 minutes ☐

20 minutes ☐

200 minutes ☐

2 hours ☐

Section B

Use the information in the text to decide whether these statements are 'for' or 'against' the development of HS2.

	For	Against
A 400km per hour train will use three times the amount of power and energy that regular 200km per hour trains use.		
When completed, the HS2 will be approximately 330 miles long and will connect the North and South of the country.		
Estimated costs keep continuing to rise and rise. Some say that the costs are spiralling out of control.		
The HS2 will reduce the strain on our already over-congested roads allowing for less stressful travel.		
Due to better travel links, businesses may be encouraged to start up in areas that previously were neglected.		
Ticket prices are expected to be too expensive for the average rail user to afford.		

The HS2 Question – Challenge Activity

Section C

Use the information in the text to decide whether these statements are true or false.

	True	False
20 million trees will be planted along the proposed route between London and the West Midlands.		
£36.6 billion of investment will go into the project between 2017 and 2033, which is roughly about £2 billion per year.		
Around 14 different Grade II listed buildings will be affected by the route between London and Birmingham.		
The amount of concrete needed to complete the full network would cover an area equivalent to the size of Manchester.		
Many natural environments and animal habitats across the country will be completely destroyed.		
The cost to the British taxpayer will be around £10,000 per household.		

Section D

Complete this chart using information from the text.

Places that will be linked by HS2	
Length when completed	
Top speed	
Investment per year	
Timescale of project	
Cost to taxpayer	