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Spatial Economics Research Centre

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High Speed 2: Latest opinion poll reveals ...

The UK Department for Transport have been [asking people about high speed rail](#). What does this tell us about whether or not the scheme is a good idea?

According to the [Yes to High Speed campaign](#) the poll tells us: "the majority of the respondents were in favour of a high-speed rail system." From the survey: 47% of British adults were in favor, 9% against. So, that sounds like resounding support.

Unfortunately, they choose not to highlight the fact that half of respondents (50%) agreed that 'High Speed Rail is £30bn we cannot afford' while only a quarter disagreed with this statement.

So, the public are in favour of high speed rail, providing that they don't have to pay for it. I am not sure that this gets us much further one way or the other.

The poll is also interesting on the benefits. 56% of adults agreed that High Speed Rail would be better for the environment, while 63% thought it would create jobs and growth. As I have said before, the evidence is fairly [weak on both these points](#). This suggests that most people don't know much about the scheme (which turns out to be true - 42% say they know little or not very much about the scheme, while 47% say they know nothing).

In short, I think this poll tells us that people are willing to express opinions about things on which they know very little. I have the same attitude towards my football team, but I understand why the manager may sometimes choose to ignore me.

More seriously, I think the exercise reveals that there is still a big job to do in properly informing the public about the expected costs and benefits of the project.

Disclosures:

1. I sit on the HS2 Analytical Challenge Panel
2. I am sceptical about some of the claims being made for HS2: [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#), [\[3\]](#)

Posted by [Prof Henry G. Overman](#) on [Wednesday, June 01, 2011](#)

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1 comment:

Ryan E said...

It certainly is £30bn we cant afford for a dubious economic case. Why not focus the money on developing tram and urban rail in major cities to promote agglomeration benefits and more balanced regional growth?

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