

Now, before we start discussing anything else, I want to ask you all a question. You don't have to tell anyone the answer, just keep it in your head. I want you to retain in your head how much money you make every year. Do you have it in there? Alright, good. Now I want you to throw that number out because it's probably below 28 million pounds – and because that is the figure that the new High Speed 2 railway between Birmingham and London is going to cost. Per *second* saved over using traditional rail. That figure may end up being hard to grasp, big numbers tend to – so here's a little visualisation. The average wage in the UK is *around*, let's say, 30,000 a year. For you alone to pay for a single second saved on the journey from Birmingham to London, it would take you over 900 years.

However, if you are someone who supports the construction of HS2, you might already have an answer in mind, and it's *probably* to do with lifetime cumulative usefulness, which is a term I have just invented to describe the total usefulness of something over the course of its use. In HS2's case, it may be apparent how this applies; as HS2 grows older and it is used more and more, it will begin to offset the massive cost. And to be honest, this is a fair point – until you realise probably less than 1000 Birmingham residents *actually commute to London at all*. And anyway, what about the other thousands of towns and cities around England that will gain absolutely nothing from HS2? Residents of towns like Aylesbury, Brackley and Southam will have the path of HS2 blasting almost through their back gardens, and will gain nothing but a decade of construction works and road closures around their towns – all the Pain and none of the Gain.

But still you may be unconvinced. I can hear it now – “That's the price you pay for development. HS2 is a necessary step if England wants to remain strong after we left behind the EU!”, and if you're someone who says that I would also like to say something – you're a drag on society. But regardless of how true such a statement is, there is also a major factor I haven't mentioned yet. For most it's the primary reason they're against HS2, and that's the environmental impact. If you've driven around many of the major construction sites in places like Buckinghamshire and Warwickshire, you may have seen them – the protesters. In some places they're almost impossible to miss. I know around where I live there's an encampment of sorts, full of tents and banners protesting the giant line being cut across the face of Britain. And the fact of the matter is this: almost 700 local wildlife sites, over 100 ancient woodlands and 30 protected sites of scientific interest are being irreparably damaged by HS2 – including many endangered wildlife species such as the willow tit, the white-clawed crayfish and the dingy skipper butterfly. Just imagine for a second – you're a tree. Seems absurd at first, but just go along with it. Imagine you're a tree that's been standing for hundreds, or even almost a thousand years. You've seen empires rise and fall, species come and go, the seasons cycle almost a thousand times. And all of a sudden, a couple men in high-vis jackets come to your roots, check off a clipboard and a few days later you're gone. Presumably to be processed into a table, or something. I don't know about you, but honestly I haven't a clue what type of person would sign their name under a proposal like that. Actually, scrap that, I do; that would be a politician.

So before I leave the stage there's one last thought I want you to retain. And I think of all things, it speaks the loudest about how bureaucratic the whole project is. Back when the HS2 project began, it was projected to cost £55 billion, with 1 billion going towards purchasing property, and the London-Birmingham leg was due to open during 2026. But now, in the year 2022, HS2 Ltd. Has gone *Two Hundred Percent* overbudget, let alone the property money which has gone *Five Hundred Percent overbudget*. And of course, in classic UK style, it's now due to open in 2033. Almost double the construction time. 100 billion pounds, 12 years, 700 habitats obliterated – all for 30 minutes of travel time.

**By Joseph Newborough**