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GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS FOR HIGH-SPEED RAIL NETWORK NEEDS CONCRETE TRACKS

Government aspirations for a 200mph high-speed rail service modelled on the Japanese bullet trains could fail if the right rail track is not provided warns transport infrastructure group Britpave.

The transport minister, Lord Adonis, is proposing the building of a £20 billion high-speed line from London to Manchester that would reduce the journey time from 2hr 7min to just 80min. His proposals come ahead of a government report to be published in the spring on the viability of a high-speed rail network in the UK.

The government's review of the rail network comes at a time of significant growth in UK rail travel. In 2007, rail passengers travelled 30.1 billion miles, the greatest distance since the second world war and 10 billion miles more than in 1996. With the number of passengers rising by some 8% per year, the UK rail network is struggling to cope.

The London to Manchester line is one of the UK's busiest. Despite an £8.8 billion line upgrade completed this year it is believed that extra capacity will be necessary by 2024. Ministers want to start work on the new London to Manchester line as soon as possible so that it can be in place within 20 years. Other high-speed lines could run from London to Edinburgh via Leeds and Newcastle upon Tyne and from London to Cardiff via Bristol.

"If the Government plans for a high-speed rail network are to work then it must invest in the appropriate rail track technology", warned David Jones, director of Britpave. "The reason why the Japanese high-speed network is so successful is that, unlike the UK's ballasted track, it is largely based on concrete slab track".

40 years ago, when commencing their high-speed rail network, the Japanese government replaced much of their ballast system with concrete slab track. This provided a rail track that has maximised operating efficiency by eliminating

unplanned maintenance, provided high levels of safety and comfort and impressive whole life costings.

“The inherent robustness, low-maintenance, long-term performance and whole-life cost benefits of concrete means that it can offer the rail tracks necessary to provide the high-speed rail network that Britain needs”, said Jones.

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Notes to editors

1. Britpave, the British In-situ Concrete Paving Association, promotes the better and greater use of concrete for transportation solutions. Its members include major contractors, specialist equipment and material suppliers, consulting engineers and interested trade associations. Together they provide a single voice for the in-situ concrete paving industry. For further information see: www.britpave.org.uk
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