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## **WRONG TYPE OF TRACK COULD DERAIL HIGH SPEED PROPOSALS**

**The wrong type of track could scupper Network Rail plans for a £34 billion high-speed railway line linking Scotland with London warns Britpave, the transport infrastructure group.**

The Network Rail proposal would see journey times from London to Glasgow cut to just two hours and 16 minutes. Journeys from London to Birmingham would take just 45 minutes. The company, which runs Britain's rail infrastructure, said that the new line would require 1,500 miles of new track plus 138 bridges over roads and current railway lines. The first section of the line would be operational by 2020 with the line reaching both Glasgow and Edinburgh by 2030.

"These proposals are for a 21<sup>st</sup> century railway line. However, the use of a 19<sup>th</sup> century-based ballast rail track system could undermine the speed, efficiency and safety of the high-speed trains", warned David Jones, director of Britpave. "In addition to the ongoing maintenance requirements of ballast tracks, there is the issue of ballast pick-up whereby the pressure and vibration of high-speed trains lifts up ballast from the track. This damages train wheels and so increases operating costs.

The French opted for traditional ballast when the high-speed TGV network was developed. They have managed to make it work – but at a cost. On some lines the rails have to be swept clean and the ballast replaced and repacked every night. The French are now reported to be examining replacing the ballast track with slab track".

Jones believes that concrete slabtrack, as used by the highly successful Japanese and German high-speed rail network is the way forward. 40 years ago, when commencing their high-speed network, the Japanese replaced much of the ballast system with concrete slab track. This provided a rail track that has maximized operating efficiency by eliminating unplanned

maintenance, provided high levels of safety and comfort and impressive punctuality. The Germans now use slab track on all new high-speed lines, and other European countries are following their lead.

Concrete slabtrack has been used in the UK for tunnels and for short stretches of the Heathrow Express, Stansted airport links and at the Eurotunnel terminal. Initial cost has always been given as the reason why slabtrack is not more widely used in the UK. "This is a short-sighted and a false economy. The maintenance costs of slabtrack are dramatically less than ballasted systems and the long-term performance is significantly superior", argues Jones. "If Networks really wants to deliver a 21<sup>st</sup> century high-speed railway line then it must invest in a 21<sup>st</sup> century track system."

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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.britpavew-bus-rail.org.uk](http://www.britpavew-bus-rail.org.uk)

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