Phil Whittingham,
Lead Executive, Virgin Trains
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B5 4HH

29 October 2014

Dear Mr Whittingham,

The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, which I chair, is currently undertaking an inquiry into the economic case for High Speed 2. You can see more details about the inquiry, including written evidence submitted and oral evidence sessions with previous witnesses on the Committee’s website: http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/economic-affairs-committee/

I understand that the Committee’s requests for a representative of Virgin Trains to provide oral evidence to the Committee as part of the inquiry have so far been refused on the grounds that Virgin Trains are not in a position to comment on the economic case for High Speed 2. While I appreciate these concerns and agree that questions purely on the Government’s Economic Case are not best directed at Virgin Trains, the Committee’s inquiry is covering a number of areas where the opinion of the train operators and in particular Virgin Trains will be crucial to coming to a considered opinion on the issue.

The Committee would like the opportunity to discuss the following issues with a representative of Virgin Trains:

- The Government’s argument that providing additional capacity on the West Coast Main Line is crucial as the Line is reaching its maximum capacity in terms of both the number of seats available and train paths on the line.

- Demand forecasts for the use of train services provided by the Government and whether these forecasts tally with the data and modelling undertaken by Virgin Trains.
• Alternative options for extending capacity on the West Coast Main Line.

• Possible franchising and pricing models for the HS2 and the impact these could have on train operators including Virgin Trains both in terms of operating HS2 and the operation of existing services.

• The impact HS2 could have on existing lines, in particular services to towns and cities that will not have a station on the HS2 route.

I appreciate your offer to provide written evidence however I would be grateful if you could reconsider your position on providing oral evidence on Tuesday 11 November. Without providing a representative to discuss the issues in person you will reduce the opportunity for Virgin Trains to provide an opinion on these important issues.

I look forward to your response.

(Hollick)
Chairman of the Economic Affairs Committee