Connecting and Severing: a Deconstruction of the Language of HS2 Ltd

Abstract

This paper reviews some of the language used by the Department for Transport, in the guise of HS2 Ltd, to describe and promote the UK's largest ever high-speed rail project, and to encourage public acceptance of the scheme.

Key facts about the proposals for HS2 are set out, in order to contextualise examples taken from relevant publications. The relationship between landscape, infrastructure, politics and language is explored, and the concept of hegemony is applied to the language of landscape. A close analysis of examples of the Department for Transport's use of language to describe the present and future landscapes of HS2 identifies and explores two emerging themes. These are firstly, the language of the north/south divide, and secondly the language used to describe the anticipated connecting and severing of places. In conclusion, the language of the 'promotion' of HS2 is found to be at odds with the concept of landscape justice as it attempts to conceal and distract from the inequality in distribution of benefits and disbenefits arising from the new infrastructure.

Introduction – the challenges of HS2

High Speed Two (HS2) is the UK government's biggest ever rail project. It is proposed that it will link cities in the north of England with Birmingham and London by 2033. It is important to understand something of the context of the project as a background to exploring its language. In 2010 the Department for Transport chose the Y-shaped network (see Figure 1) as its preferred strategy for increasing passenger connectivity from north to south, at speeds of up to 400 kph (National Audit Office, 2013: 17). The total length of the 'site' for HS2 is approximately 531 km, and the width will vary according to local and operational factors. Where the line is 'at grade', meaning at the level of the adjacent ground, the total width of the infrastructure, including vegetation-free zones on either side of the line, will be 110 metres for four-track sections, and 75 metres where it is two-track (HS2 Ltd, 2009). In cutting or embankment, as will be the case in many places along the route, it will usually be wider, increasing the area of land taken by compulsory purchase order, which is the mechanism for all land acquisition for the project. By any standards, it is a huge site, with noise, ecological and visual impacts extending far beyond the line itself.
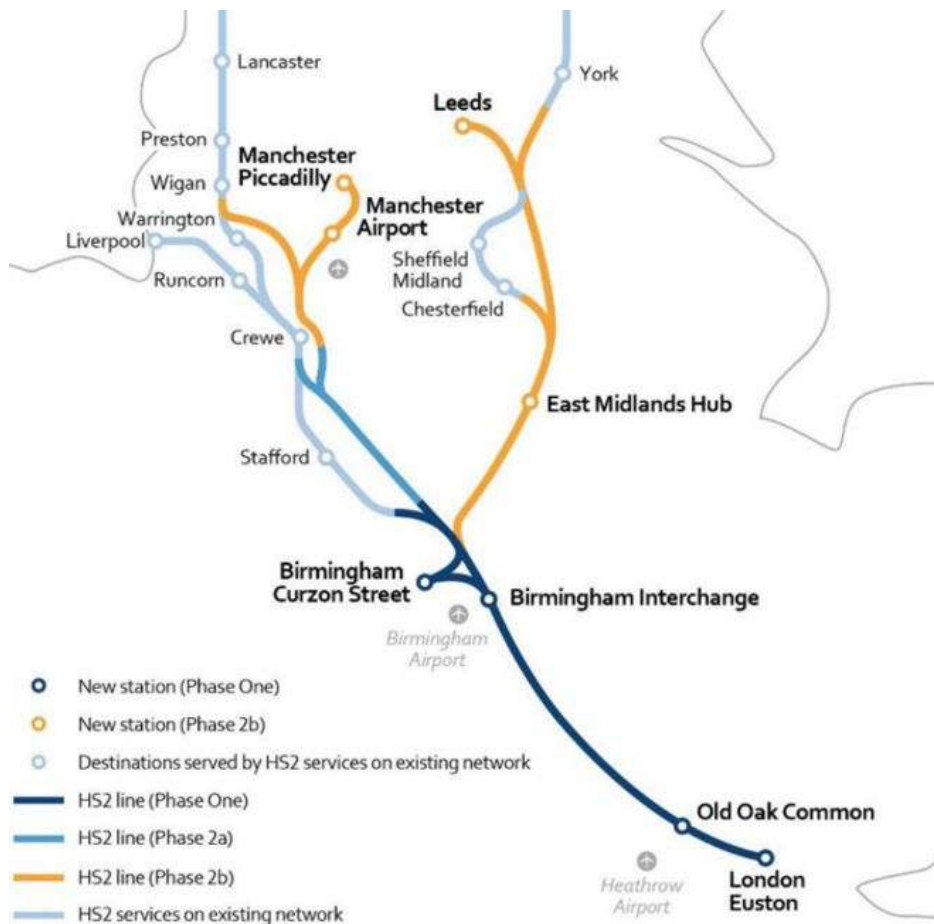
As Figure 1 shows, the line is to be built in three phases, with preparatory demolition near Euston station in London having begun in 2017 (HS2 Ltd, 2019b). Parliamentary approval, known as 'Royal Assent', for Phase 1 was gained in February 2017, meaning that this phase of the project became inscribed in UK law as an Act of Parliament, overriding all local planning processes. This first stage of construction begins in London and moves north to Birmingham, where there will be a station in the city centre and another on the outskirts, near Birmingham International Airport. Timelines originally showed that Royal Assent for Phase 2a, from the Midlands to Crewe, would be gained by the end of 2019, but up-to-date timelines are not currently publicly available (as of January 2020). There are no stations proposed between the Midlands and London (Old Oak Common). North of Birmingham there will be four new stations, two for Manchester, one at Toton in the East Midlands, and one in Leeds. HS2 services will run to some other existing stations, on existing track, at reduced speeds.

Each phase of the line is described in its own Hybrid Bill which is examined by cross-party select committees of firstly the House of Commons and then the House of Lords. These committees hear representations, known as petitions, from individuals and organisations directly affected by the line. During 2019 the Environmental Statement was being prepared for the Phase 2b Bill. Meanwhile, there has been a resurgence of media interest in the project, in response to the publication of a House of Lords report *Rethinking HS2* (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 2019), which is very critical of some aspects of the project. This report is likely to

have precipitated the recent Oakervee Review, commissioned by the government in August 2019. The review, which had within its remit the potential to result in cancellation of the entire project (UK Government, 2019), examined "benefits and impacts … affordability and efficiency … deliverability and scope " as well as the phasing of the project (UK Government, 2019). It was due to be complete by Autumn 2019 but publication was delayed until February 2020.

There are several successful high-speed rail systems around the world, the Shinkansen in Japan and the TGV of France being the two most long-standing. The construction of HS2, however, presents a distinct set of challenges in the English landscape context. The combination of a high population density and the heritage of a closely woven web of road, canal and rail infrastructure means that the insertion of a new linear form within and between settlements is challenging. Both the duration of the build and the physical extent of the site mean that HS2 is already having, and will increasingly have, a considerable impact on every aspect of landscape and how it is inhabited. The Environmental Statement for Phase One (HS2 Ltd, 2013), makes it apparent that the aspects of the landscape that will be affected by the project will include, but not be limited to, the following;

- place identity,
- connectivity of human and other communities,
- the functioning of city centres,
- homes and business premises due for demolition,
- water courses and their associated flora and fauna,
- availability of land for agriculture,
- integrity of ancient woodland,
- integrity of sacred places,
- heritage value of landscapes and buildings,
- functioning of local road networks,
- and rural tranquillity.

Many of these aspects will be negatively affected, including that of connectivity, as the linking of major city centres will be at the cost of severing land, communities and transport routes along the way. HS2 presents a 'wicked problem' (Jorgensen, 2016; Horst and Webber, 1973) in the sense that many landscape problems are. It has all the multiple actors, differing perspectives, conflicting interests, significant intangibles and pervasive uncertainties of a wicked problem (Garcia *et al.*, 2013). It is perhaps 'wickeder' than most, due to the sheer physical scale of the build and the numbers of parties affected. Given such a complex range of impacts of this simultaneous destruction and production of a landscape (Mitchell, 2003), it is perhaps inevitable that landscape justice will be at issue along the length of the line.

Thus, a significant problem for the Department for Transport and its subsidiary, HS2 Ltd, has been how to achieve public acceptance of the project despite continually rising estimates of its financial costs. According to the recent dissenting report of Lord Berkeley, former Deputy chair of the Oakervee Review group, the cost of the whole project is currently estimated to be at least £107 billion at 2019 prices (Lamb, 2020; Berkeley, 2020). It is worth noting that in 2010 the estimated cost for the whole network was £30 billion (Department for Transport,

2010). The Department for Transport is referred to throughout the proceedings of the parliamentary select committees as 'the Promoter' of the project. This language highlights the problem at the heart of this exploration of landscape justice and HS2, a problem succinctly put by protestor Joe Rukin from the organisation 'Stop HS2', in his final appearance in front of the House of Commons select committee for Phase One: "there is an inherent conflict of interest in having an organisation that exists, not only to build HS2 but to promote it. Because when you promote something you start to ignore the downsides" (House of Commons, 2016: 47, paragraph 302). Arguably, the Department for Transport has, from the start of the project, sought to construct through language a persuasive and expedient depiction of the railway and its landscapes: an attempt which raises questions about landscape justice. Unsurprisingly, given the large quantity of writing produced by HS2, it has not been possible to consistently control this message.

At a time of political upheaval in the UK, either cancelling or forging ahead with the project would have won support in some quarters and lost it in others. The findings of the independent review and decision on the future of the project were not made public on schedule, just prior to the general election in December 2019. In this context, choices made about the language used to describe the project, and the future of the project, become a serious consideration for political success.

FIGURE 2. PROTESTERS IN CUBBINGTON WOOD (PHOTO: CLARK, 2019)

A significant problem for the people anticipating HS2 in their local landscape, is whether they should expend their time and energy in finding ways of coming to terms with the proposals, or in attempting to resist them. To some extent, the 'state-citizen conflict' (Calderon and Butler, 2019) between what government seeks to impose and the lived experience of people along the route is expressed in the physical presence of protesters (Taylor, 2019; Dean, 2019). In autumn 2019, for example, up to fifty protesters at Cubbington Wood near Leamington Spa chose to camp in the ancient woodland over many nights (see Figure 2), to prevent HS2 Ltd's contractors from felling trees during the Oakervee review period (BBC News, 2019). Lacking in any official channels of communication, or the funds to employ PR firms, physical presence perhaps offered the protestors the best chance of success in meeting their aim. They were served with a notice to vacate in October and given assurances that the felling, there and in ten other ancient woodlands in Warwickshire and Staffordshire, would be postponed until 2020 (Elofson, 2019; HS2 Ltd, 2019a). Again, the language used to promote the railway is crucial, as it could prove to be a key factor in either activating such protesters or assuaging them.

HS2 Ltd have increasingly prioritised their public relations over the last few years. In 2015, they did not have their own distinct website. By 2017, however, in response to a parliamentary question, they revealed that the public purse was then funding seventeen different public relations companies to deal with communications (Chapman, 2017) and effectively market the project back to taxpayers. The list of seventeen companies does not include the unknown number of consultancies used by local authority governments to persuade the Department for Transport to make land-use decisions which are favourable to the economy of their region (Reed, 2015). Clearly, control of the language of HS2 is something for which national and local governments are prepared to pay.

The key questions that this paper will address, therefore, are these;

1. What is the relationship between landscape, politics and language?
2. How does government use language to describe the present and future landscapes of HS2?
3. How does this language construct the relationship of citizens to their landscape and what is the relevance of this to concepts of landscape justice?

1. Landscape, Politics and Language

This analysis of how a citizen's relationship with landscape might be constructed through language is based in a view of landscape as simultaneously a material and a political entity, in which both the intangible and the physical are ultimately shaped by relations of power (Olwig, Mitchell and Sveriges, 2007). Landscape architects have, at times, been accused of treating landscapes as if they were apolitical sites, when in truth, landscapes can be a form of expression of the political values of any dominant group (Gailing and Leibenath, 2017).

The political nature of landscape is manifold. Before examining the language of HS2, I will briefly explore ways in which large-scale linear infrastructure can politicise landscapes. It has long been recognised, for example, that

imperial powers will make strategic changes in landscape as means of both achieving and expressing military, cultural or economic dominance. Transport infrastructure is often the instrument for this. Examples such as the construction of railways across India by the British, for rapid troop transit and to establish the pattern of colonial trade through the second half of the nineteenth century (Guha, 1983) support this view. Flagship infrastructure projects, such as dams, bridges, roads and ship canals have long been used as political instruments by governments around the world, and these often represent cases where a government has sought to "make the landscape reflect its interests rather than the interests of its inhabitants… and in the process to instil a new relationship between land, law and justice" (Mitchell, 2003: 787-8).

Ongoing events around the world sometimes provide high-profile examples of such landscapes. In some cases, they are redeveloped or appropriated for nationalistic purposes. The US border with Mexico has become a highly politicised landscape (Whitehead , Perry and Baker, 2018; Yang, 2017) where president Trump's proposal for a wall built to prevent immigration exemplifies a landscape subject to nationalistic ideology through built symbolism. Like HS2, the impacts of that linear infrastructure will extend far beyond the physically-narrow strip of built form (Lakhani, 2019). The wall has considerable influence over thought and emotion even though, substantially, it is only partially built, and may never fully materialise. It could be said to already 'exist' in language, and powerfully so, as a conceptual landmark, a real threat to local ways of life and also as a political rallying point, as heard in the refrain 'build the wall', chanted throughout the presidential re-election campaign across the US (Gage, 2019). HS2 does not share this nationalistic purpose, but it does have a real political presence, with complex material and social impacts across England, before it is built.

The politics of landscape has, with the rise of neoliberalism (Turnhout, Neves and Lijster, 2014), become increasingly discussed in terms of exploitation for profit, for example in the high-profile case of the privately owned Dakota Access oil pipeline across sacred lands from North Dakota to Illinois (Whyte, 2017). This "increasing hegemonic market rationality" (Calderon and Butler, 2019) as applied to landscape, is seen in the UK in our developing methods of financially evaluating the ecosystem services 'supplied' by landscapes, usually referred to as natural capital accounting. These methods are increasingly embraced by government, industry and academia. It is important to recognise that this approach is not apolitical, promoting as it does a taken-for-granted view that a landscape's properties can be objectively financially assessed (Turnhout, Neves and Lijster, 2014; Gailing and Leibenath, 2017) and regarded as a resource to feed economic growth (Calderon and Butler, 2019). In other words, valuing landscapes in terms of profit and loss promotes a hegemony of economic growth that is, arguably, counter to the intrinsic value of the landscape as a place. The indefinite suspension of fracking for shale gas in the UK, resulting in rapidly falling share prices for the companies involved, is a recent example of this. In this case, the attempt to situate a landscape as being ripe for exploitation for profit has faltered. The fracking protestors were treated as transgressive and in some cases extremist (Jackson, Gilmore and Monk, 2019) but protests were successful in drawing attention to the negative impacts of fracking on much-loved places.

Discourse in which an ecosystem is referred to as 'the asset', or where ecosystems are described using the word 'stocks', such as in natural capital accounting (Philips, 2017) may well have an influence over politicians' thinking

and decision-making. Indeed, that is its intended purpose. The language used to support the framing of landscape as a commercial resource is vital because it is largely through language that these landscapes will be represented in the arenas of local and national government, rather than being directly experienced by individuals in powerful roles. This is the function of an Environmental Impact Assessment, and is very much the case with HS2, due in part to the large extent of the site and its relative remoteness from the institutions in which decisions are taken.

Thus, rather than viewing landscapes as simply co-produced by nature and culture (Dalglish *et al.*, 2018), it is fundamental to acknowledge the role of manipulation, and even destruction, of landscapes by political and economic forces. These are the dominant processes in some places, and the resulting landscapes "establish the hegemony of certain classes, groups or actors" (Gailing and Leibenath, 2017) because the physical shape and material content of the altered landscape has been decided by those in power, who may be remote, not just those who inhabit a place. In consequence, the modes and practices of living in that landscape are also dominated. In the case of a railway, the long-lasting nature of the infrastructure and its far-reaching impacts on settlement and employment patterns mean that its construction embeds an enduring hegemony.

Given the unequal nature of this struggle to control language output on the one hand, and receive and interpret it on the other, the concept of cultural hegemony is usefully applied in understanding how disputes over the landscapes of HS2 are played out. In his 'post-mortem construction' of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Bates defines it as "political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularisation of the world view of the ruling class" (Bates, 1975). Arguably, the DfT have sought to create through language a hegemonistic view of the landscapes of HS2. The nature of the world view it seeks to promote, will be explored here.

2. Describing the present and future landscapes of HS2

In order to examine how the language employed by HS2 Ltd describes the landscapes along the proposed line, I have chosen a small number of key texts produced since 2009. These have been selected because they feature writing about landscape, and in some cases were produced at a significant milestone in the development of the HS2 project. In the main, they are intended to be public-facing communications, such as *Understanding the Environmental Statement* (HS2 Ltd, November 2013). I have also drawn to some extent on documents intended for use within parliament, such as the *High Speed Rail* command paper of 2010, where they contain additional insights. A close reading of these texts has led me to group my observations under two emerging themes; 'north and south', and 'connecting and severing'.

2.1 North and South; the growth agenda

According to a retrospective government report, the intention for the HS2 project when it was launched in January 2009 was "to support sustainable economic growth following the financial crisis [of 2008]" (National Audit Office, 2013: 19). The strategic case has continued to be expressed primarily in terms of economic growth, specifically in the guise of 'rebalancing' the UK economy across the North/Midlands and Southeast/London. The choice of this word has continued to depict the North as being in deficit as compared to the wealth of the South. Places in the North and Midlands tend to be characterised as 'lagging behind' in terms of productivity (HS2 Ltd, 2017). The evidence from the HS2 texts suggests that it has been important to the DfT to promote this as the dominant narrative regarding the current state of mainland Britain. It has not, however, been straightforward to control this message, and publications can seem to be marketing the project to influential business interest in the Southeast, rather than interested parties in the North.

The proposal was always to begin by building a new railway 'from London to Birmingham' (Department for Transport, 2010), rather than, for example 'from Birmingham to London' or 'from Manchester to London'. The prioritisation of the needs of the capital city has been frequently evident, for example, in the 'High Speed Rail' command paper of 2010, which states that "by far the largest market for High Speed Two would be for travellers to and from London, who would comprise more than 80 per cent of High Speed Two's passengers" (Department for Transport, 2010: 19). Thus the project has been framed at times as an attempt to 'service' the needs of London-based businesses, and this is a thread of the narrative that has continued to weave through the written material; "The world's economic capitals have a network of well-connected cities around them. London needs the same." (HS2 Ltd, 2016: 26).

From the earliest stages of the project, HS2 Ltd's documents have cast the landscapes of the 'North and Midlands' of England as being in need of change and as potential sites for producing greater national wealth. New investment in Leeds' Station Quarter, for example, was anticipated to "support 13,000-20,000 jobs and 1,700+ new homes, and attract over £400m investment..." to a development that was to be at the heart of "...the regions around Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham and Birmingham in an economy of over ten million people (HS2 Ltd, 2016: 6). Particular local and regional landscape characters tend to be erased by the language of economics, which, in this case, casts much of the North and Midlands as a potential single 'economy' rather than a vast and diverse landscape made up of places with distinct identities. Cheshire, Staffordshire and the large towns of the Potteries are often included as part of the generic 'North'. In the HS2 literature, Stoke-on-Trent is described by a city council leader as "a new growth point for UK plc." (HS2 Ltd, 2016: 9), perhaps connoting a point on a graph of economic growth rather than a place to live. Manchester's Airport City (once better known as the rural Cheshire Parish of Ringway) is described as "a new enterprise zone [with] world -leading logistics and manufacturing facilities…a bioscience and pharmaceuticals hub" that will be linked by HS2 to "the skilled labour markets of the Midlands and the North West" (HS2 Ltd, 2016: 17). In this language, sense of place is overwritten and a town becomes not part of the landscape, but machine-like, a "manufacturing powerhouse" (HS2 Ltd, 2016: 9).

The 2017 HS2 Ltd report *Getting the Best out of Britain* represents a move to depict places in the North as distinct from one another. It steps away from treating 'the regions' as one place, but still describes places in

terms of economic benefit, with landscapes only obliquely alluded to as potential income generators through tourism. This document constructs the UK's Northwest, for example, as somewhere that can offer better quality of life, and that the railway will contribute by "making Cumbria more accessible to visitors from the South East and the Midlands … helping to fill vacancies during the quieter spring and autumn 'shoulder seasons'." (HS2 Ltd, 2017: 8). These claims are all in the context of positive impacts that will help to close 'the productivity gap', rather than having any direct benefits to place or landscape. In reality, it is likely that Cumbrian tourist destinations cannot accommodate any more visitors without increasingly negative impacts on the landscape, with overcrowding leading to problems of serious fellside erosion and traffic congestion as visitor numbers already exceed what the key destinations can support (Fix the Fells, 2019; Cumbria Tourism, 2018).

Although this report does explore specific places in more detail, the focus is on the industries that are most successful in those places, whether they be manufacturing and software in the Northeast, biosciences in the Northwest, or legal and accounting services in the major urban centres. It describes the cities of Leeds and Liverpool and demonstrates the financial benefits to these places of better connectivity to London. It makes it clear that the promoted advantages of HS2 are in 'strengthening supply chains', 'connecting UK markets', or in accessing low-cost office space in Liverpool "at around £20 per square foot compared to around £70 per square foot for equivalent property in the City of London"(HS2 Ltd, 2017: 36). Thus, the North is cast in the role of a low-cost alternative business location, subject to the hegemony of economic growth above all else. The UK media coverage has, on the whole, been anti-HS2, with the transport problems of the North of England a frequent focus (see for example Calder, 2019), but is still couched in terms of the hegemony of growth. These reports are often couched in the same terms as HS2's own promotional texts, citing economic reasons to stop HS2, such as in the Daily Mirror headline; "Forget HS2 and boost the economy in the north with new railway links" (Mudie, 2019).

Some voices from the North have lobbied in favour of HS2. Speaking in Parliament in 2019, leader of Leeds City Council, Judith Blake, described HS2 as "the opportunity to transform the prospects for the North—perhaps a once in 200-year opportunity." (Hansard HC Deb., 2019). However, in recent months there has been a growing sense that, whilst the North and Midlands urgently need investment in public transport infrastructure, HS2 may well not answer those needs. The most recent House of Lords report on HS2 reflects this, stating that "Construction on High Speed 2 should have started in the north. The decision to build High Speed 2 from the south upwards means that London, already the city expected to gain most from the project, will also receive the benefits of the new railway long before northern cities will." (House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 2019b: 19).

In this way, promotional literature seeks to make a case for HS2 by presenting places in terms of their economic value and the businesses that are located there, rather than as landscapes. Landscape is substantially erased from such documents, its presence only fleetingly acknowledged as a potential generator of further tourist income. There are, however, other publications that might be expected to focus more strongly on the holistic landscape. The *HS2 Design Vision* statement, was published in 2015 and last updated in 2017. The laudable basic principle of the approach outlined here is to deliver value for money through good design of every aspect of the

scheme, from landscapes to digital systems and branding (preface, HS2 Ltd, March 2015). One of its three core design priorities is 'Place' and the aims within this are also threefold, to; "Design places and spaces that support quality of life… celebrate the local within a coherent national narrative [and] demonstrate commitment to the natural world." (HS2 Ltd, March 2015: 8). Quality of life is measured in terms of "the wider benefits that the UK government is seeking to achieve… a bigger picture that is all about successfully regenerating areas" (HS2 Ltd, March 2015): in other words, economic growth is again the defining characteristic of a valued place.

The second of the aims for 'Place', the celebration of the local within the national, is potentially a far more appealing aspiration to the landscape designer, as, at the scale of HS2, this presents a unique and complex challenge. It entails the ambition that "Each place and space that is created as part of the system will contribute to HS2's own identity." (HS2 Ltd, March 2015: 17). Here, local landscapes are subsumed by the brand, parts of a coherent network, functioning as components of a hegemonic infrastructure. The language could be critiqued as oppressively corporate, placing as it does, the needs of the HS2 project before those of local landscapes and people. The document reinforces that uniformity will be essential in some instances, "while encouraging one-off expression based on local context where appropriate... It will therefore include many local design stories within one compelling national narrative." (HS2 Ltd, March 2015: 17). The language here makes it appear that the arbiter of appropriate one-off local expression will be HS2 Ltd, and that their priority will be to compose a national narrative, not to respect the autonomy of local residents in defining their own distinct place narratives.

2.2 Connecting and severing; humans and habitats

In contemplating the future landscapes of HS2, the *Design Vision* text asks readers to "Imagine a system of huge scale and complexity, involving new services, trains, stations, townscapes, landscapes, bridges, tunnels, communications and more" (HS2 Ltd, March 2015: 5). This list, with its strongly rhythmical description of a new complex network is composed to communicate a sense of excitement: it is full of the promise of highly engineered technical landscapes that will connect distant locations. It does not acknowledge that this might not be desired by citizens who feel deep attachment to the places where they live, nor will it benefit those who live far from high-speed stations, or who have no need of rapid, high-cost business travel. The homes and business of such residents, and the residents themselves, have, at times, been referred to in internal HS2 documents as 'receptors', as this is the technical term used in environmental impact assessment. This practice continues, but when the Commons select committee found that "…using the word "receptors" to describe family farms and family members is not helpful."(Department for Transport, 2018: 16-17, paragraphs 88-90) the DfT agreed not to use the term in future correspondence with petitioners, other than when citing its own documentation.

The severance of wildlife habitat connections is an aspect of the project that has attracted much criticism from organisations opposing HS2. The Woodland Trust, for example, is campaigning against the railway because it will destroy or damage 108 ancient woodlands along the length of the site. In 2014 The Wildlife Trusts published their report, *HS2: The case for a greener vision* in which they point out that HS2's analysis of habitat at that time "fails to consider the actual and potential loss of ecological connectivity arising from HS2" (Watkins, Hawkins and

Cormack, 2014: 8). The third and last of the *Design Vision's* aims for 'Place', to demonstrate commitment to the natural world, notes that there will be adverse environmental impacts and that design solutions will aim to minimise them. This is a basic requirement of any infrastructure project and could be seen as suggestive of a lack of ambition in the ecological aims for the scheme. These intentions are further developed in the pamphlet *More Than a Railway: HS2 and the Natural Environment*, released in 2018. This document proposes that the new railway could be an opportunity for net environmental gain, and seeks to persuade the reader that this will be the case: "we're working on a green corridor which will be home to wildlife … a network of habitats ranging from woodland and meadows to wetland and ponds" (HS2 Ltd, 2018a: 5). It promises to go beyond a 'one-size-fits all' approach and recognise the uniqueness of locations, albeit illustrated by some highly generic 3D visualisations. The essential quality of a habitat, however, is its connectivity, and the impact of a 75-metre-wide railway line is difficult to minimise, in language as well as materially. The pamphlet attempts to do so, for example by citing the "four bat houses to be built from London to the West Midlands" (HS2 Ltd, 2018a: 10) as an example of the investment into wildlife habitat by the multi-billion pound project.

The same pamphlet invokes the promise to plant more than 7 million trees and shrubs along the route, a figure which has circulated in the media since at least 2016 (see for example Hughes, 2016). Numbers are used here, in the context of description of future landscapes, as a persuasive rhetorical device. The tree-planting figure has been an easy target for criticism, because the loss of a woodland ecology, particularly ancient woodland, cannot be straightforwardly mitigated by the planting of large numbers of young trees. HS2 have continued, however, to use numbers to aid their description of benefits to the natural environment. *More than a Railway…* features a table of comparisons between the quantities of landscape elements lost, and the quantities of things with which they will be replaced, see Figure 3, below.

FIGURE 3. SUMMARY OF ECOLOGICAL LOSSES AND PROMISED GAINS (HS2 LTD, 2018A)

There are a few notable points about the ways in which this table describes landscape. It is inherently reductive, as it represents qualitative landscape in a quantitative format, but this is perhaps due to the context of the summarising pamphlet. The numbers themselves merit closer examination. In the second column, for example,

the loss of 0.3 km² of ancient woodland is implied as being mitigated by 0.275 km² of relocated ancient woodland soils. The ancient woodland is "across 32 sites", making it sound like a very small area that is already highly fragmented and therefore perhaps of low value. The choice to express the second, lower figure for the relocated soils as '275,000 m²' is a somewhat brazen attempt to make it appear to be a higher figure. The fundamental disconnection of the soils from the plant species they have sustained is glossed over, as is the fact that soils have depth, not merely surface area. In column one, affected woodlands are described as 'semi-natural' and 'non-native', implying that they are of a lower quality, whereas the replacements will be "new native woodland, featuring over 40 different species of trees" (HS2 Ltd, 2018a: 6). No mention is made of the numbers of tree, or other wildlife species, in the affected woodlands, presumably because the numbers supported by an established woodland would make the proposed 40 tree species look like a poor substitution. In column six, the "130 million tonnes" of material to be excavated during construction represents a vast amount of bedrock, soil and subsoil. That 90% of it will be re-used in HS2 earthworks is presented as an encouraging statistic. Apart from the problem of the remaining 13 million tonnes to be relocated, destination unclear, this is problematic because it glosses over the implications of the word 'earthworks'. This neutral-sounding term plays down the reality that existing landscapes will be remodelled, their land area, soils and habitats covered over by embankments made up of 117 million tonnes of this material.

Ecological connections are, of course, not the only aspect of the landscape to be affected by severance. Communities will also be divided, in both rural and urban locations. In 2019 Helen Jones, MP for Warrington North, made a speech in the House of Commons detailing the impacts of the proposals on villages in her constituency, in which she described severed routes to school, village amenities, shops, sport and recreation facilities, the church, restaurants and pubs, the park and public rights of way. She points out that Warrington "will not have a station on the line... areas that are getting a station might be able to weigh the benefits against the costs, but for areas that are not getting a station and already have an hourly service to London, as we do, the situation is much more difficult." (Hansard HC Deb., 2019). This is the paradox of an intercity railway, made more stark when the line is high-speed and the fast journey times would be impeded by station stops. Despite greater connectivity being the desired outcome for the project, the railway will sever connections along the whole of its length, cutting through walking routes and local lanes, dividing rural communities and slicing off parcels of land which will no longer be accessible, becoming 'severed land'.

Since the first command paper (Department for Transport, 2010) connectivity improvements have always been couched in terms of reduced journey times for passengers. Early route illustrations showed the railway between Euston and Lichfield as a single straight line, omitting the presence of any form of landscape (Department for Transport, 2010: 18). At this early stage it was perhaps understandable that detrimental impacts on landscape would be understood in only the vaguest of terms. The command paper describes initial ideas for where the route would lie, by using the names of towns and of existing railway lines and A-roads, but omitting names of major landscape features, such as the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Department for Transport, 2010). The command paper repeatedly refers to the proposal as being a 'line', the usual lexical choice for a railway, and one which implies something slender, perhaps superficial, without width and so causing minimal disturbance. The nature of the material railway, however, is that severance is unavoidable. 'Severed land' is

usually agricultural land that is cut off from the rest of a farm, leaving "small unusable, and sometimes inaccessible, parcels of land, which would not be either economically viable or physically possible to work" (Department for Transport, 2018, paragraph 97). These parcels will effectively be abandoned. More recently, impact on country lanes has been recognised as a landscape problem, with HS2 guidance from 2018 stating that it is important to retain the existing character of these minor rural routes where reasonably practicable "helping them to retain a similar 'feel' as other roads in the locality"(HS2 Ltd, 2018b: 4). Retention of character, however, is not the same as retention of connectivity, and there is very little that a resident can do to prevent a lane, or a piece of land, being severed once the railway's alignment is fixed.

3. Conclusions

HS2 will bring a particular type of new connection between major cities, but what appears to be increased connection at the wider landscape scale conceals a deep and multi-layered severing at the human scale. This day-to-day experience of landscape seems to be all but eradicated from the HS2 literature. For example, in the Phase 2b information paper *Mitigation of significant community effects on public open space and community facilities*, the words park, playground, village green and playing field are entirely absent. Once HS2 is built, the new landscapes along the route will become part of inhabitants' daily experience, with the power to embed and naturalise the ideology of 'rebalancing' economic growth in the UK landscape by means of a railway (Winchester, Kong and Dunn, 2003).

The role of the DfT as Promoter of HS2 means that any external, and most internal, publications have explained the proposals in such a way as to cause minimal controversy or emotional response from the public. If the tide of public opinion had turned over the winter of 2019-20 then the Prime Minister could have decided to cancel the project. The language of 'promotion', however, is at odds with the ideals of landscape justice, defined by Dalglish et al as "the principle of fair distribution of the benefits of landscape…characterised by good relationships with the landscape; and of meaningful participation…[in] decisions and actions" (Dalglish *et al.*, 2018: 519). The language of HS2 aims to distract our attention from potentially unfair distribution of such landscape benefits by focusing on promised redistribution of economic growth. It cannot honestly address good relationships with landscape, because, in reality, these will in many places be damaged or destroyed as inhabitants become alienated from newly designed, or severed, places over which they have had little or no say.

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