



Those who have little else to do but follow my jottings in a sister publication to this – *Construction National*

– will have come across a number of alternatives being proposed to the HS2 as probably more economic in the conventional sense: not to mention more environmentally friendly. The despoiling of large tracts of countryside to allow trains to shoot down to London from the North West and Midlands (and probably ONLY in that direction) at 250mph is beloved of those who wish to knock an hour or so off the journey. That appears to be speed for its own sake.

The left-of-centre think tank New Economics Foundation is proposing the alternative of developing the cities and towns in the North and Midlands as economic entities by transforming the internal transport infrastructure rather than pointing the entire country even more towards London. The proponents of the re-opening of the trans-Pennine tunnel to enable a direct line across the country from Liverpool to Hull make much the same point.

Then along comes the right-wing think tank Institute of Economic Affairs with its own report, claiming the scheme will eventually cost up to £80bn after taking into account moving the route around to avoid disgruntled Tory voters, compensating those whose houses they knock down and building some way of getting to the new line from places that are not actually on the route. Even the *Daily Mail* has slated the projected cost.

So that just leaves whom in favour? Well, the IEA report was pooh-pooh'd on BBC TV by...Alison Munroe, the chief executive of HS2 Ltd. Well, she would, wouldn't she? It was also slagged off by Rail News: well, yeah.

Seems like there is a revolt in progress. Whether it's for the right reasons is another matter.

- Actually, the Institute of Directors is in favour, provided it takes them direct to Heathrow. They are also, it seems, in favour of fracking. We know this because of the way Jayne McCubbin of BBC's *North West Tonight* programme was using the fact to harangue the hapless representative of Blackburn Diocese following its publication of a leaflet pointing out that fracking might not be the most Christian way of behaving towards the planet – or 'God's Creation'. It was quite shocking to hear her almost desperate invocation of a succession of pro-fracking viewpoints. She didn't mention the research carried out in the US and highlighted in this column on 30 July which found a variety of "stray gases", including methane, in drinking water wells near fracking sites in Pennsylvania.

- It's that time of year again, and the BBC is launching its annual sugarfest – Great British Bake-off. This year 13 amateurs, including a number of 'celebrities', will be competing to see who can produce the most calories-ridden, caries-invoking, cholesterol-raising confection. The series producers and participants seem blithely unaware of the fact that this country is in the grip of a serious obesity epidemic, which such programmes will do little to alleviate. I know it's in a good cause, but couldn't they think of something a little less irresponsible to do.

- I mentioned a previous (*correction*) column that my Christmas cactus had decided to flower. Well, for one time only, here it is posing as the Blog logo!

Chris Stokes