

Spending and investing – what about transport?

The government has been playing catch up on transport capacity. A successful growing economy since 2010 needs more road and rail capacity than we enjoy. The outgoing Labour government at the end of the last decade slashed what remained of the roads budget as part of its efforts to cut excessive borrowing, after a long period when in office it had done little by way of new road construction. The present government has committed to the very expensive HS2 rail project which will bring extra capacity on the north south route, and to cheaper capacity expansion through digital signalling. It has started to raise the amount of road investment, but it remains low by pre 1997 standards and in relation to need. There is a missing two decades of investment to make good.

Now is a good time to spend on additional road capacity. Borrowing rates are very low, and motoring contributes far more in taxes than is spent on road provision. The Transport department has announced an intention to create a local strategic network of A roads to take more through traffic locally. This will require a substantial increase in the financial provision to pay for the schemes needed. In the short term a programme of improving junctions could increase safety and reduce congestion. It is also going to take road widening and by pass provision to complete the job.

The national route network also needs extra cash. Successive governments have failed to complete the south coast highway or the A 303 to the west country. There is a shortage of capacity on the Southampton to Birmingham haul road, the A 34, and on the main routes to the east coast ports. There are similar shortcomings in the north. Some extra investment should be spent on augmenting local and national road improvement.