

HS2AA at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference - 2012

HS2 Action Alliance had a strong presence at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference. The stand was fantastically located at the epicentre of the Brighton Conference Centre, resulting in lots of interest from MPs, Councillors, members and other exhibitors - the stand was permanently busy.

Emma Crane met with Nick Clegg, discussed HS2 and gave him the leaflets which he said he would read – HS2AA will follow up. She was also able to talk to Norman Baker about HS2 and he too promised to read the literature. Deanne DuKhan met with Danny Alexander MP, Tom Farron MP, and Shirley Williams MP. Jessica Simpson met with Paul Burstow MP and Councillor Peter Jones.



The vast majority of general visitors to the stand fundamentally believed that High Speed Rail was both economically beneficial to the country as a whole, worthwhile on the environmental impact of reducing carbon emissions, and would solve railway capacity issues. HS2AA produced a suite of leaflets targeting the core arguments of the case for HS2 – on the environment, capacity, jobs and North/South divide, carbon and air, Scotland, the alternatives and of course the business case. These were described as “compelling” and “thought provoking” by many visitors, utterly destroyed the Government’s arguments and, with the exception of the die-hard supporters, resulted in visitors accepting that HS2 is a deeply flawed project. One activist told us that HS2 is the issue that the party is split on. Another said with a free vote he would vote against HS2 when it comes before parliament.

Emma Crane and Jessica Simpson attended a number of transport focussed Fringe meetings and were delighted to see Lib Dem members who had visited the stand asking questions of their MPs and Councillors directly based on the materials they had got from HS2AA. The responses from the panels revealed the fundamental lack of knowledge from most MPs and, when asked, one questioner said he was utterly dissatisfied with the answers given.

The stand also served as a backdrop to a BBC broadcast on Nick Clegg saying sorry, resulting in a prime time TV appearance. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19702391>

During Nick Clegg's main stage Q&A HS2 had a specific question:

“Q (15:32 Sunday 23 September): *Only 2% of Britain's ancient woodlands are left. Shouldn't the government block High Speed Rail?*

A (summary) Clegg says he does not know the situation in relation to ancient woodlands. But he is a passionate supporter of HS2. Britain is still relying on Victorian infrastructure. Those people were bold; they swept aside objections. Now the government needs to rewire the UK, figuratively and literally.

The UK is too divided. Economists might question the benefits. But Clegg says he does not think you can ever fully quantify the benefits.”

We hope he will be prepared to think again when he has read our leaflets. Even Nick Clegg acknowledges that economists do not accept the business case.



HS2AA will use the same format of a plasma screen for films and key messages, together with leaflets presenting the facts, at the forthcoming Tory conference at Birmingham.

And finally, Ellie made an appearance despite the appalling weather on Sunday 23rd September.



Overall verdict? Well worth it. Great opportunity to get the message to key opinion formers.