The railways have been around for a long time and today we are used to seeing modern trains traveling up and down the country. You may have seen stories on the television news, or in newspapers, about the Government planning to build a High Speed Rail link (HS2) across the country. The idea is that HS2 will link together London and Birmingham and offer an alternative to traveling by roads that have become too overcrowded.

The Government insist that it will be environmentally friendly and cut journey times. Not everyone agrees!

Some people are so worried about the cost and the effects of HS2 that they have protested outside Parliament.

People could travel about the country quickly, or at least twice as fast as the stagecoaches they were used to. They could also travel in safety, or at least their carriages couldn’t be held up by highway robbers!

Although they complained a lot in the beginning, the coming of the railways changed their lives. The people who lived at this time were Victorians. They lived during the reign of Queen Victoria.

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For the first time, passengers and goods could be transported quickly across the country. Fresh foods, such as fish and vegetables, could be transported to different markets and still arrive in good condition.

Hull was a large fishing port in the 1800s. The coming of the railway meant that tons of fresh fish could be transported in ice for many miles so that it arrived fresh. This meant fish became cheaper and more and more people could enjoy a cheap meal of fish and chips for the first time.

As more and more railway networks were opened, rural areas became easier to get to. People could save up to take their annual holidays at seaside resorts such as Brighton, Blackpool and Margate. Cheap railway fares made it possible for people to enjoy day trips and travel more widely.

The new railways meant that letters and parcels could be sent quickly around the country. Trains also brought newspapers and magazines to villages and towns. The new postal service gave people a chance to keep in touch with relatives who had emigrated abroad and the newspapers kept people informed of what was happening elsewhere.

The new railways meant that more and more goods could be transported quicker than ever before and so the demand for these goods grew. As towns grew more prosperous, more and more families poured into them looking for work.

Rows of cheaply built back-to-back terraced houses were built to house them.

This created a new demand for bricks, stone and cement which all arrived by rail.

People began to realise that the railways offered lots of new opportunities and could benefit Victorian society.

The Victorians began to accept the changes and enjoy what the railways could offer them.