

**Item 9****High Speed 2 Railway****Authors:**

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**Summary:**

The Government has announced that the preferred route of the High Speed 2 railway will pass along the Misbourne Valley between Chalfont St.Giles and Wendover, a distance of 12 miles (20 kms). The Board needs to decide upon its strategy in response to the announcement. Options include: seeking to prevent its construction; seeking amendments to the route; or seeking the most effective mitigation of the damaging impacts.

**Purpose of the report:**

To agree the Board's response to the proposal and identify a course of action.

**The Proposal**

**This is a complex proposal and this paper can only touch upon the many aspects of relevance to the Chilterns. It is essential that Board members read the summary of the DfT report (Appendix 1). To see the detailed route maps visit <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pqr/rail/pi/highspeedrail/>. Copies will be distributed separately via E mail and at the meeting.**

1. On 11<sup>th</sup> March the Government published the HS2 report, its own response to the report and a Command Paper which will be used, in due course, to gain approval for construction of the line from Parliament.
2. The initial leg of a possible national network will be between London and Birmingham with an estimated cost of up to £18 billion. It would be constructed between 2017 and 2026. The route would pass through the Chilterns AONB between Chalfont St.Giles and Wendover and then pass to the west of Aylesbury close to Hartwell House. The length of line in the Chilterns AONB will be 12 miles (21 kilometres), 12% of the total distance between London and Birmingham.
3. The HS2 report acknowledges the severe impact on the Chilterns, but nonetheless the longest route through the AONB has been chosen. (Approximately half of that length will be in a tunnel).
4. The report also identifies two alternatives (numbered 2.5 and 4). Route 2.5 would pass through the AONB from east of Beaconsfield, south of Winchmore Hill and under Hazlemere. A section of tunnel towards

Princes Risborough would be punctuated only by a long viaduct (700 metres) through the Hughenden Valley. Route 4 is close to the West Coast Main line between Hemel Hempstead and Tring. The report emphasises the clear preference for the Misbourne Valley route

5. The HS2 report claims that the London - Birmingham journey time will be reduced from 1 hour 22 minutes to 49 minutes as the high speed trains will be capable of travelling up to 250 mph. This will be the first link in what is being called a core of a national network – a “Y” shaped network to Manchester and Leeds via Sheffield. The high speed trains will then run along conventional tracks to Glasgow and Edinburgh. See the report summary for a comparison of journey times.
6. There will be a new interchange at Old Oak Common near Wormwood Scrubs linked to a new terminal at Euston, CrossRail and Heathrow (but not directly via Heathrow). There will also be new stations, Birmingham Parkway serving Birmingham airport and in the city centre (New Street does not have the capacity to be extended).
7. The proposed network will not provide through services to the continent- passengers will need to change in central London but consideration will be given to creating a fast transit link or possibly a fixed rail link between Euston and St. Pancras.
8. The estimated costs are between £16- £18 billion for the London – Birmingham route including new stations, and an additional £12-14 billion to reach Manchester and Leeds. It is not clear, but it seems unlikely, this includes the cost of constructing the additional links in London. It is assumed that most, if not all, of the funding will be provided by the government. However the report refers to the possibility of securing third party contributions, but there is no estimate of the scale of such funding - it has to be assumed it is relatively minor and the decision to go ahead will be based on a commitment of public funding only.
9. It is very unlikely that the core network, as currently identified, will not be extended in due course - as proposed it only benefits a small number of cities. There will be an expectation it will be extended to the north east, East Anglia, Wales, South West and even the south east of England. The cost of such a network must run to several hundred billion pounds. Equally it is not conceivable that the extension programme can be delayed for 20 years or more.
10. The report refers to a growing demand for inter city travel but provides no evidence to support this assertion or evidence of current demand for higher speed intercity travel (there is plenty of demand for better value for money, greater punctuality and more comfortable rolling stock). No details are given of anticipated fare levels compared to existing services. Demand has to be related to price.

11. The report does not include an environmental impact assessment but states that the carbon cost of operating high speed railways is roughly neutral. It dismisses the costs of carbon associated with the construction of the line as being negligible compared to the national carbon emissions. To date it has not been possible to find facts or figures on the environmental impact in the report. (That is not to say they are not there but staff have not had sufficient time to find them – significantly they are not given in the summary).
12. The absence of significant references to environmental considerations in the summary serves to highlight that justification for this railway is based largely on economic and political considerations, i.e., keeping up with the French and Germans. The report refers to a study which suggests that, in due course, each pound invested in the railways will generate two pounds of economic activity. The construction programme itself is expected to create up to 10,000 jobs.
13. There are notable connections with the Crossrail project in London. Currently that project is costing £2bn per annum until 2017 when HS2 is expected to start. A significant shift of finances and resources will then be made to HS2 - arguably not creating, but saving jobs.
14. The impact on existing railways will be of primary concern, notably on Chiltern Railways. It seems that the Chilterns Railways will not be competing directly as it is serving a local and regional market and its stopping trains provide an entirely different option to the fast non stop inter city service of HS2.
15. As the HS2 route crosses the Chilterns rail line twice within the Chilterns and also to the north and south, it is inevitable there will be, at times, significant disruption to local services.
16. Similarly traffic flows along the A413 and A4010 will be significantly affected. There are many minor roads and rights of way which will be severed, some possibly for a considerable time. It cannot be assumed that all public rights of way will be reinstated.

### **The Environmental Tests**

16. This is a complex proposal and the national test to determine the impact on the environment will have many attributes which should include the following:
  1. Impact on designated sites?
  2. Will HS2 result in lower national energy use?
  3. Will there be a reduction in carbon emissions?
  4. Could the benefits be achieved in other less damaging ways?

5. What will be the impact on other transport networks e.g. local rail services, bus services, cycleway, rights of way, footpaths and roads?
6. Will it reduce significantly the number of domestic air flights?
7. Will it result in a modal shift from road and commensurate carbon and energy savings?
8. Will it result in downgrading of other services (as in Kent)?
9. Can the damaging impacts on designated sites, including the Chilterns AONB, be satisfactorily mitigated?
10. Will the cumulative effects of transport networks be taken into account i.e. road and aircraft noise?
11. How will the electricity used by the trains be generated ? - the current national grid is dominated by coal and gas. In future more renewable and possibly nuclear capacity will be added, but significant investment commitments have yet to be made.

This list is by no means an exhaustive.

### **Impacts on the Chilterns**

17. There will be many impacts including:
  1. Scarring of the wider landscape.
  2. General loss of landscape features such as hedges, trees and woods
  3. Damage to specific sites and buildings- the number of buildings demolished will be relatively small but many others will be tunnelled under
  4. Disruption and severance of local roads and public rights of way (temporary and permanent).
  5. Creation of new features such as tunnels, cuttings and embankments.
  6. New engineering features such as gantries, masts, bridges, lighting, fencing and service roads.
  7. Severance of land holdings, notably farms.

8. Disturbance during construction including:
  - Heavy traffic on all roads
  - Use of heavy machinery and earth moving equipment
  - Storage of spoil
  - Work depots and yards
  - Lighting and signing
  - Disruption to traffic flows and railway services
  - Dust and mud on roads.
9. A barrier to the movement of wildlife (due to fencing).
10. Reputational damage to the Chilterns- not a place to visit. It may even affect the Chilterns as a place to live and work, especially during the construction period.
11. Disruption to local business e.g. farming operations, deliveries
18. There may be benefits and, whilst they are not immediately apparent, it is important if the railway is to be built that opportunities are identified at an early stage and built into the construction programme.
19. Following the announcement of the preferred and alternative routes it is inevitable that planning blight will follow immediately as property prices will be affected. The government recognises this effect and has begun consultation on a compensation scheme.

### **Local Response**

20. There has been considerable local opposition with local meeting being organised (a major one will take place in the Misbourne School in Great Missenden at 7.30 p.m. on 29<sup>th</sup> March). Local newspapers have carried critical articles and the Board has been inundated with concerned local people. There was a great deal of media coverage on the day (BBC TV and radio, ITV local news, The Times)
21. A Facebook web site has been set up to gather support to oppose the railway. It has already got over 2,300 members.  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=367587726768&ref=tsdy>
22. The Chef Officer and Planning Officer have already met with David Lidington, MP for Aylesbury.

### **Response of the Chilterns Conservation Board**

23. The Board has a statutory purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns. The construction of a railway for 12 miles through the AONB cannot help to achieve either. The Board has no option but to oppose the proposal no matter what the claimed

national benefits will be. The impact on the Chilterns AONB will be significant and almost entirely negative. At this stage the Board must maintain its opposition based on the principle that it is not appropriate for there to be major development in an AONB.

24. Whilst this planning principle can be overturned subject to a national interest test, as yet there is no compelling evidence that this is in the national interest as defined by a significant net benefit to the economy.
25. The Board needs to decide what it should do. Plainly it cannot act alone in challenging a project of this scale. The local authorities (South Bucks, Chilterns DC and Bucks CC) are against the scheme. The local MPs have also voiced their concerns (the Conservative Party stance is to support high speed rail but recently have recognised that it does not enjoy unqualified support). The National Trust is deeply concerned about the impact on the Chilterns landscape and some of its properties including Hartwell House near Aylesbury. The Chiltern Society and many other local organisations have already voiced their opposition.
26. Natural England has, thus far, failed to give any view and has resisted attempts by the Board to work more closely. It is not known what advice it offered to either the High Speed 2 company or the Department for Transport whilst the report was being prepared. It has not made any public announcement since the report was published. Nonetheless NE is the government's advisor on landscape and biodiversity so it is essential that there is a closer working relationship.
27. The Board has been working closely with HS2 for several months. As Board members were advised this was subject to a confidentiality agreement. On 10<sup>th</sup> March, Sir John met Lord Adonis, the Secretary of State for Transport to impress upon him our concerns. Plainly at that stage it was not possible to influence the Government's views. A request has been made to meet Theresa Villiers, the shadow Secretary of State for Transport, but at the time of writing no response had been received. On 8<sup>th</sup> February Sir John and the Chief Officer met local MPs to discuss the railway and a further meeting was held with David Lidington on 12<sup>th</sup> March.
28. An alliance of local authorities, the Conservation Board and The Chiltern Society has already been formed. This group will take a leading role and it is important that the Board plays a full part at both officer and member level. It should also be prepared to create a budget to support this work.
29. As the Board has a different remit to local authorities it is also suggested it forms its own sub group which will concentrate on the impact on the landscape and the wider environment. This group would have the immediate task of formulating a response to the publication of the report and undertaking the necessary follow up work. There will be public consultation later in the year on:

- HS2's detailed recommendations for a high speed line from London to the West Midlands.
- The Strategic case for high speed rail in the UK.
- The Government's proposed strategy for an initial core high speed rail network.

Arguably the national debate on the need for high speed rail should take place before a specific proposal is developed. Based on an assessment of letters to national newspapers and the associated on line discussion forums, there is a considerable range of opinion , with many more against or sceptical than providing unqualified support. This is at odds with editorial line of the national papers.

30. The Board has to confine its interest to the impact on the Chilterns AONB. However this will mean taking a close involvement in the national debate as development on this scale in the AONB can only be justified in the national interest. The charge of being NIMBYs can be simply countered that we are the guardians of national heritage.
31. The Board should only concern itself with the details of the design once it is clear that the railway will go ahead. In preparation for that possibility the Board must develop a detailed assessment of potential impacts and prepare options on how they might be reduced or mitigated.
32. There has already been a considerable public outcry and the Board has been contacted by local people, organisations, businesses, media etc. This has created a considerable workload. Either in its own right or in partnership with others consideration needs to be given to the possibility of employing a special officer or specialist technical advice. This will be a long running role as consultation and subsequent planning will take several years and will be detailed, complex and contentious.
33. It is likely that the ultimate approval for the project will be determined by whether it provides value for money. The environmental case is unlikely to be the determining factor. Based on published figures it will cost £514million pounds to save each minute of the journey time between London and Birmingham. That also equates to £165m per mile (this includes incorporating the cost of the new termini).

### **Next Steps**

1. Participate in local debates.
2. Prepare a detailed assessment of possible impacts and publish fact sheets for public use.

3. Lobby national politicians of all parties.
4. Work with Natural England to influence their advice to Government.
5. Undertake a detailed analysis of the economic and environmental case for the railway
6. Support public campaigns to oppose the railway.
7. Participate in a co-coordinating committee with local authorities and other significant local groups.
8. To set up a sub committee of the Board.
9. To allocate, initially, up to £5,000 to contribute to a fighting fund.

### **Recommendations**

1. **To write to the Secretary of State for Transport with an immediate response highlighting the impacts on the AONB.**
2. **To issue press releases to make sure the Board's point of view is understood.**
3. **To liaise with local authorities and others to provide local leadership.**
4. **To begin a detailed analysis of possible impacts.**
5. **To seek an early meeting with the Chairman of HS2 and relevant politicians (this will be determined by the general election).**
6. **To create an initial budget of up to £10,000 (from the for HS2 related work.**
7. **To set up a special group to lead HS2 related work**