



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

High Speed 2 **A CPRE Briefing – March 2010**

The High Speed 2 (HS2) reports published by the Government on 11 March 2010 are as weighty as they are controversial, both for rural communities the new line might pass through, and the cities it could miss out. Besides a main route between London and Birmingham, connections to Heathrow and also to the north have been outlined.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) believes the Government will need to be flexible and engage effectively with communities to minimise local impact and to reduce delay from major opposition.

Positives

- **Vision:** We welcome the vision of HS2 as a low carbon backbone of a sustainable transport system. By removing fast trains from the overcrowded lines north of London, space will be created for local passenger and freight services too. For CPRE this is as, if not more, important than the speed benefits.
- **Stations:** the upgrade of Euston, the new interchange at Old Oak Common and the new Birmingham Station at Curzon Street will integrate HS2 into local transport networks and aid regeneration. We are concerned, however, about the Birmingham Parkway station with a proposed 7,000 space multistory car park in Green Belt.
- **Re-use of road and rail corridors:** Running along existing roads and some of the disused Great Central Railway corridor will help minimise environmental impacts.
- **Engagement:** While CPRE has concerns about the impact on the Chilterns, our engagement with HS2 has shown a willingness to listen and consider ‘green bridges’, covering of cuttings and alternatives to brutal concrete bridges and viaducts.

Negatives

- **Colne Valley Park:** A huge 3.5km viaduct is planned across the first significant area of countryside to the west of London and a Site of Scientific Interest.
- **Warwickshire:** Between Brackley and Kenilworth, the route would run through open countryside. After running alongside the M42 it would then cut through more countryside before joining the West Coast Main Line at Lichfield.
- **Impact on roads and air:** if HSR is to fulfill its environmental promise, it must be backed up by action to shift existing trips off roads and planes rather than simply generating new travel. But there is no evidence of an integrated transport policy or measures to make rail more affordable compared to driving and flying.
- **Integration with HS1:** there are no proposals yet to link HS2 into HS1 and continental Europe, instead the Government proposes a further study.

Speed

‘Nature abhors the straight line’ wrote William Kent, an 18th century landscape gardener and architect who inspired Capability Brown. So fitting a straight railway into the rolling hills and patchwork fields of English countryside can be challenging, particularly as sensitive heritage and biodiversity sites will need to be avoided as well as existing settlements.

The faster the railway the more straight the line needs to be, while running trains at speeds over 300km/h (186mph), the top speed of Eurostar, means more noise. Indeed trains running at 350km/h use 50% more energy. Although HS2 compared the costs and benefits of building a 200km/h (125mph) conventional line against its very high speed proposal (400km/h - 250mph), it has not considered options in between this.

Cost to the countryside and impact on local communities

Strenuous efforts should be made during construction to minimise noise and lorry movements, for example by reusing soil locally as earth bunds to act as noise barriers. Besides short-term impacts, new HSR lines can have a number of longer term impacts.

Although the requirements of the EU Noise Directive mean that there will be strict limits on high noise levels, in tranquil areas of the countryside lower levels will still have a serious impact. Severance to wildlife and Rights of Way will need to be reduced by tunnels and bridges across the line.

Careful thought will need to be given to compensating communities for damage that cannot be mitigated. This could mean undergrounding existing electricity transmission lines on the HS2 route, and creating new local rail services and reducing noise from existing roads. Some of the spare capacity freed up on rail lines could be used to create new cross-country passenger services, such as High Wycombe-Aylesbury-Northampton.

Community engagement

With expertise in planning policy, branches in every county and a quarter of parish councils signed up as members, CPRE has a unique combination of national experience and local knowledge. It used this to help communities take the front seat in planning for HS1 in the 1990s, helping bring together different interests and changing the routing and detailed design to minimise impact on their local area.

Providing a real opportunity for local people to influence not just the route but also the specifications it is being designed to will be crucial for HS2, if it is to win community support and reduce the risk of delay from major opposition. Engagement can be a time-consuming and expensive process. Funding of third party groups to seek expert advice and involve the local community is needed to secure fairness and legitimacy.

Carbon calculations

The major problem with justifying HSR on the basis of carbon savings is that experience shows new HSR services generate new travel, such as by making long distance commuting an option. HSR may reduce flights at airports and traffic on the roads but without policies to lock in the reduction in demand, additional traffic and flights will fill the space freed up at Heathrow or on the M40.

The reports on HS2 have been published before National Policy Statements on National Networks (covering trunk road and rail), which has just been delayed to after the general election, and Aviation, due next year. So while the Government's policy remains unclear on other forms of transport, the jury may have to stay out on the potential carbon savings from HS2 and whether it should be part of a sustainable transport system. However, the High Court's decision on 26 March that the Government will have to review its aviation policy and go back to square one on the Heathrow third runway could significantly increase the benefits of HS2.

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