

High Speed 2 briefing

High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd is a company set up by the Government to analyse options for a high speed rail link from London to Birmingham and beyond. HS2 Ltd has submitted a report to the Government, and the Government has written a 'Command paper' setting out its policy on the matter. The HS2 Ltd report and the Government's Command Paper were published on 11th March and are available on the website of the Department for Transport.

The preferred route (known as 'Route 3'), recommended by HS2 Ltd and endorsed by the Government is described in the High Speed Rail Summary document as:

This route would run in tunnel from a rebuilt Euston Station, surfacing in West London to follow the route of the existing Chiltern Line, leaving London near Ruislip. The route would proceed largely in tunnel from the M25 as far as Amersham, and then continue to the west of Wendover and Aylesbury, partly in tunnel and partly following the existing A413 and Chiltern Line corridor.

HS2 Ltd identified 3 possible routes through the Chilterns AONB. Section 6.34 of the Government's Command Paper describes them:

- *A route leaving London via the existing Chiltern Line corridor to Ruislip, and then using a combination of tunnelling and the existing A413 corridor to reduce impacts on the Chiltern AONB (HS2 Ltd's 'Route 3');*
- *A route following the same corridor to Ruislip, but then passing in tunnel beneath Gerrards Cross before crossing the Chiltern AONB through a combination of tunnelling and surface routes including a 720 metre viaduct across the Hughenden Valley (HS2 Ltd's 'Route 2.5');*
- *A route leaving London via a 28-kilometre tunnel towards Kings Langley, before passing through the Chilterns AONB and close to the town of Berkhamsted (HS2 Ltd's 'Route 4').*

The 'Summary and key recommendations' in section 3.5.24 of HS2 Ltd's report says:

We considered a wide range of routes between the outskirts of London and Birmingham, covering an area broadly bounded by the M1 and M40. We paid particular attention to routes through the Chilterns. We have identified three feasible routes. Our conclusions and recommendations regarding these are:

- *We recommend route 3 – which follows the A413 corridor across the Chilterns, partly in tunnel – for inclusion in our preferred scheme. This route is somewhat better than the next best route on cost and journey time, and no worse on sustainability grounds.*
- *Route 2.5 - which follows the Chiltern corridor via Beaconsfield, with a larger proportion in tunnel - is slightly inferior overall, but there is a genuine choice to be made here.*
- *Route 4 – which follows the WCML corridor through the Chilterns – has significantly higher cost and a longer journey time than route 3, but offers the shortest route through the AONB. A direct link to Heathrow from this route is likely to be prohibitively expensive.*

The Government's Command Paper evaluates the options thus:

6.37 *The Government has carefully evaluated the choice between the A413 and Hughenden Valley routes, and considers that, as well as its cost and journey time advantages, the A413 route's local and environmental impacts are on balance lower than those of the Hughenden Valley route. The A413 route has lower impacts in respect of its potential for isolation of existing settlements and ground-borne noise. Its environmental impacts are reduced*

by following existing transport corridors, including the busy A413 itself, for well over half the distance travelled at surface level through the AONB; and by reducing visual intrusion through the use of cuttings and screening with vegetation and embankments.

6.38 *In contrast, although the Hughenden Valley route's surface sections through the Chilterns AONB are shorter than those of the A413 route, they would have other potentially significant impacts, including on townscape and landscape setting, as there is no major existing transport corridor that this route can follow to reduce its negative impacts. A major viaduct would be required to cross the Hughenden Valley itself, with significant visual, townscape and environmental implications for the surrounding area. Other impacts associated with the proposed tunnels on this route include greater energy expenditure, larger quantities of spoil, and greater potential vibration impacts, and it would also require more land take and more potential demolitions than the A413 route.*

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