

Department for **Transport**

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BY EMAIL

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Dear Sir

Thank you for your email of 23 November to the Secretary of State about proposals for high speed rail. I have been asked to reply on his behalf.

It is likely that over the next 20 to 30 years the UK demand for travel between its largest and most productive conurbations will increase significantly, in response to and supporting long-term economic growth. The Government believes high speed rail is best placed to provide significant and sustainable additional capacity to meet that demand, while also improving journey times and connectivity.

At the beginning of October the Secretary of State announced that the Government's preferred option for a high speed rail network was for a route between London and the West Midlands followed by two separate corridors. One corridor would go direct to Manchester and then connect onto the West Coast main line, and the other would go to Leeds via the East Midlands and South Yorkshire - with stations in both areas - before connecting onto the East Coast mainline south of York. A high speed rail network such as this would slash journey times between major urban centres and international gateways. It would also free up capacity to enable the continuing shift of freight from roads onto rail, reducing carbon emissions and cutting congestion.

High Speed Two (HS2) is the route recommended by HS2 Ltd (the company set up by Government to make proposals on routes and station options) between London and the West Midlands. A new high speed line could potentially treble maximum capacity on the crowded London to Birmingham rail corridor and will help to deliver economic growth and a low carbon economy. HS2 Ltd published its detailed proposals on 11 March, including an assessment of costs, benefits and sustainability impacts and these can be viewed at www.dft.gov.uk/highspeedrail.

Both the Government and HS2 Ltd take very seriously the implications for people's homes and livelihoods of the routing of the proposed high speed rail line. In developing a high speed rail route, HS2 Ltd has been very conscious of the need to minimise the local impacts while achieving the wider objectives of the high speed line. HS2 Ltd found that there were no viable routes between London and the West Midlands that did not cross the Chilterns at some point. The company's recommended route follows the A413/Chiltern Line transport corridor through part of the Chilterns. The recommended route makes

considerable use of tunnels, cuttings and existing transport corridors to minimise the environmental impacts in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

HS2 Ltd will be continuing its work to assess and better understand the impacts for different community groups, and this work will continue in preparation for the proposed consultation on the route. As part of this work HS2 Ltd has produced a report on mitigating the impacts of their recommended route north of the Chilterns through changes in the alignment, both the location of the line (horizontal alignment) and its height/depth (vertical alignment), and this was published on 8 September at www.dft.gov.uk/highspeedrail. We will also be publishing a full appraisal of sustainability, including noise and landscape impacts, as part of the public consultation.

It should be remembered that around 90% of transport carbon emissions are generated by road transport. High speed rail could have a critical role in accommodating growth in travel on the already congested west coast route and HS2 Ltd's report suggests that even allowing for this additional demand there would be no significant change to overall carbon emissions. A wider high speed network to the north of the country could also provide an alternative for many journeys which would otherwise be made by domestic aviation.

The Government recognises that blight has been generated by the publication in March of this year of HS2 Ltd's proposed line of route. The Secretary of State launched an Exceptional Hardship Scheme which is a voluntary purchase scheme designed to assist property owners whose properties have been seriously affected by HS2 Ltd's recommended route and who urgently need to sell their properties before any final decision on a high speed rail line is taken. This is likely to be in late 2011.

The EHS would not be the only opportunity property owners would have to apply to the Government to buy their house or for other assistance. After consultation, once the Government has made a final decision on its high speed rail strategy and what the route of a new line should be, then other arrangements would be put in place to assist affected property owners.

Once a route had been identified, the Secretary of State would likely issue safeguarding directions, so as to protect land required for the project from any other applications for development consent. That would mean that the blight provisions in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 would apply, enabling affected property owners to apply to the Government for it to purchase the property. As well as the statutory provisions, the Secretary of State intends to introduce additional arrangements to help people whose property would not be covered by the statutory blight regime but may nevertheless suffer a significant diminution in value as a result of proximity of the line. At this stage it is too early to predict what the terms or criteria of such additional arrangements would be.

Once the necessary powers had been granted by Parliament to build and operate the route, some properties would be subject to compulsory purchase arrangements. Compensation may also be available to those most affected by the construction and operation of the line, and further information can be obtained from the Department for Communities and Local Government at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/compulsorypurchase> (booklet 5).

The publication of HS2 Ltd's recommended route was the first action in a long process of debate and discussion and decisions on the Government's strategy for high speed rail and on the route of any new line will only be taken following a full and inclusive public consultation. The Secretary of State intends to make an announcement on the Government's preferred route before the end of the year. Following this, we will begin the public consultation in February 2011 on the strategic roll-out of a high speed rail network and on the preferred route for the first leg between London and Birmingham.

Yours sincerely,

High Speed Rail Team