



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
OXFORDSHIRE

High Speed Rail (HS2) Consultation

CPRE Oxfordshire response

In February 2011 the Department for Transport published a Consultation Summary, 'High Speed Rail: Investing in Britain's Future' and mounted a series of road shows at which the designers were available for discussion and comments were invited. The closing date for responses to the consultation is July 29th.

A number of members of the Executive Committee of the Oxfordshire Branch of CPRE oppose any high speed rail line across open country and HS2 in particular, based on the fact that it would be contrary to CPRE's commitment to protect the countryside.

The Henley and Mapledurham District of Oxfordshire CPRE have opposed HS2 without qualification.

The consultation poses 7 questions and we have provided our answers to these questions below, based on the 'Right Lines Charter for High Speed Rail' that summarises CPRE's main policy concerns.

In summary the Charter sets out four principles:

Principle 1. National Strategy

High Speed Rail proposals need to be set in the context of a long term transport strategy stating clear objectives.

Principle 2. Testing the Options

Major infrastructure proposals such as High Speed Rail, need to be 'future-proofed' by comprehensive testing against different scenarios. This will help identify solutions for genuinely furthering sustainable development.

Principle 3. Public Participation

Early public involvement in the development of major infrastructure proposals, including High Speed Rail, is essential. People need to be involved when all options are open for discussion and effective participation can take place.

Principle 4. Minimising Adverse Impacts

High Speed proposals need to be designed from the start to avoid significant adverse impacts on the natural environment, cultural heritage and local communities

(including biodiversity, landscape, tranquillity and access) during construction and operation.

We believe that many improvements can be made to the HS2 proposals as they stand, and we have submitted a separate response which deals specifically with local details and which suggests amendments to the proposal in an attempt to be helpful should the development go ahead (see: CPRE Oxfordshire's response on 'Mitigation measures and detailed design' on the CPRE 'Transport-HS2' campaign webpage).

CPRE Oxfordshire's response to the 7 questions posed in the HS2 Consultation:

1. Do you agree that there is a strong case for enhancing the capacity and performance of Britain's inter-city rail network to support economic growth over the coming decades?

Yes

2. Do you agree that a national high speed rail network from London to Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester (the Y network) would provide the best value for money solution (best balance of costs and benefits) for enhancing rail capacity and performance?

No

This asks the wrong question as the non-monetised costs and benefits are as important as the 'money solution' and considering the latter in isolation is likely to give a false answer leading to a wrong decision. The minister has already stated that the non-monetised costs and benefits underpin the strategic case.

There is a good case for a new High Speed Line between London and the Midlands, to relieve congested main lines that have very limited potential to provide train paths for additional passenger or freight services. However, until a study into the best options for upgrading the lines between the Midlands and the North is completed, which should include consideration of upgrading existing lines rather than building new ones, it would be premature to come to any conclusion about what the best option would be.

3. Do you agree with the Government's proposals for the phased roll-out of a national high speed rail network, and for links to Heathrow Airport and the High Speed 1 line to the Channel Tunnel? .

No

It is accepted that whatever solution to the rail capacity problem is finally approved, expenditure will have to be phased.

The principle of the link to HS1 is supported.

The case for a link to Heathrow has not been made and any decision on that must be premature.

4. Do you agree with the principles and specification used by HS2 Ltd to underpin its proposals for new high speed rail lines and the route selection process HS2 Ltd undertook?

No

The failure to consult on the terms of reference before this stage was reached is most regrettable.

The 400km/h design speed is unnecessarily high and there is no compelling case made for it.

The requirement for parkway stations to be included was wrong.

These principles and specifications should have been subject to public consultation and should have been tested within a wider transport strategy and appraisal process that tests proposals against a range of future scenarios. This needs to be done before any detailed routes are proposed for phase 2.

5. Do you agree that the Government's proposed route, including the approach proposed for mitigating its impacts, is the best option for a new high speed rail line between London and the West Midlands?

No

As noted in the answer above, there has been a failure to develop and test route options for High Speed Lines with different design speeds.

The approach to mitigation was flawed in that mitigation has only been considered once the route had been designed to particular specifications, rather than those specifications being influenced by the need to balance environmental and social impacts with economic benefits.

6. Do you wish to comment on the Appraisal of Sustainability of the Government's proposed route between London and the West Midlands that has been published to inform this consultation?

There has been a failure to consider alternatives properly and the AoS is particularly weak in this regard. The AoS has no information on HS2's potential impact on tranquillity, in particular, quiet areas in open country.

7. This question is about blight and compensation (Annex A): Do you agree with the options set out to assist those whose properties lose a significant amount of value as a result of any new high speed line?

We welcome the introduction for the first time of an exceptional hardship scheme and trust that this will now be extended to other major infrastructure projects as soon as blight is created and before the statutory compensation provisions come into effect.

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