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## **CPRE Oxfordshire - Updated statement on the High Speed 2 Rail proposals - July 2010**

### ***CPRE Oxfordshire response in summary***

- CPRE's primary objective is to protect the English countryside and CPRE Oxfordshire therefore has serious concerns about the environmental impacts the proposed HS2 route will have on the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of the countryside in this rural part of Oxfordshire.
- We consider the case for the HS2 project has not been made and CPRE Oxfordshire does not support the HS2 Ltd proposals as they stand.
- We recognise that the rail system is overloaded and additional capacity is required, but equally CPRE is concerned that the countryside and rural communities should receive adequate protection whenever new transport infrastructure is being planned.
- We recognise that the proposed HS2 route will also have serious local environmental impacts on several neighbouring Counties and on a number of sensitive landscapes.
- We believe high speed rail proposals must meet four key requirements:
  1. *As far as possible local environments should be protected and sensitive landscapes avoided.*
  2. *There should be investment in the existing rail network capacity to complement investment in HS2.*
  3. *HS2 should genuinely tackle climate change and contribute to a sustainable, low carbon future.*
  4. *HS2 should materially assist in achieving regional planning and regeneration aims.*
- We consider it essential to explore all options for reducing the impacts on the local environment and communities, and to identify the best possible mitigation measures.
- We shall be making strong representations on HS2, covering both strategic and more local issues. We believe that constructive dialogue with the Government and HS2 Ltd is the best way forward, to ensure that the environmental issues are given due weight.

- CPRE Oxfordshire will continue to work with local parishes and groups to present coordinated and informed arguments about this important issue. We will continue to campaign for additional rail capacity to be created in the most sustainable way, and for the countryside and rural communities to be properly safeguarded.

### ***Background to the current HS2 rail proposals***

High Speed Two Limited (HS2 Ltd) is the company set up by the Government to consider the case for new high speed rail services between London and Scotland. The High Speed Rail proposal published by the Government in March 2010 is for a new railway between London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, for trains travelling at speeds up to 400kph (250 mph). A detailed route has been published for the line between London and the West Midlands.

From these details it is clear that the proposed route would cross the eastern edge of Oxfordshire between Brackley and Buckingham (following the line of the old Great Central Railway) which would seriously affect the Parishes of Finmere, Mixbury, Newton Purcell, and Godington. Alternative routes for HS2 had been mooted, with one roughly following the M40 Motorway corridor, passing close to Bicester and Banbury, but this also created serious impacts of “islanding” and severance of farmland and communities.

The proposed route would also have serious local environmental impacts on neighbouring Counties and cause severe landscape impacts on a number of sensitive areas, including the Chilterns AONB.

Following the general election, the new coalition Government announced its support for high speed rail as part of its future programme:

“We will establish a high speed rail network as part of our programme of measures to fulfil our joint ambitions for creating a low carbon economy. Our vision is of a truly national high speed rail network for the whole of Britain. Given financial constraints, we will have to achieve this in phases”.

However, the Government has indicated that it is reviewing a number of elements of the scheme (eg connecting Heathrow to the new network) and although the ambition is still to create a national network, there is a “long process to be undertaken before final decisions are made on the route” for new high-speed rail lines.

On 11 June 2010 the new Government asked HS2 Ltd to carry out further work on a Heathrow connection, along with a report on the comparative case for different ways of connecting the West-Midlands, Manchester and Leeds. This work will inform the Government’s overall strategy and timetable for establishing a high speed rail network. It is now understood that following these revisions HS2 Ltd has been asked by the Government to plan the next formal stage of public consultation for early 2011.

### ***How CPRE Oxfordshire is responding***

At the outset, we wish to make it crystal clear that CPRE’s primary objective is to protect the countryside and CPRE Oxfordshire is seriously concerned about the environmental impacts the proposed HS2 route will have on the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of the countryside in this rural part of Oxfordshire.

We recognise that the route will pass through rural areas of the County which are noted on CPRE Tranquillity maps as some of the most tranquil, and this needs to be properly balanced against economic and engineering factors for example.

We also support the serious concerns of neighbouring counties where the environmental impacts of the route are likely to be significant.

CPRE does not oppose high speed rail in principle. For many years CPRE has advocated more investment in public transport and the rail network to reduce road-building and to achieve more sustainable transport capacity. However, there are many aspects of HS2 Ltd's proposals, as currently envisaged, which need to be challenged - environmental, economic, and strategic - and we emphasise that CPRE Oxfordshire does not support the HS2 Ltd proposals as they stand.

We recognise that the rail system is overloaded and additional capacity must be created in a sustainable way for the future to maintain adequate levels of service. But equally CPRE is concerned to safeguard the countryside and rural communities when new infrastructure is being planned.

We have therefore re-stated above our four key requirements for this project. We believe HS2 Ltd has a long way to go to demonstrate that it can meet these requirements, and that it is a "model" that best fits our national and regional transport priorities, budgets and geography. We would be very alarmed if this initial commercial proposition were pursued as it stands.

We believe there are many fundamental questions about the current concept. For example, in terms of route design, HS2's proposed speed of 250mph is significantly higher than many other high speed railways in larger countries and requires long, very straight stretches of track - which is hardly a good fit for the typical fine-grain English landscape. A lower speed of say 186 mph which is the running speed on the London to Channel Tunnel line would allow more curves and the better fitting of the line to the landscape.

Moreover, there is little or no information about how HS2 might fit into an overall "package" of regional rail capacity improvements in the coming decades, which could now be seriously affected by general austerity measures.

However, at the same time, CPRE Oxfordshire believes it is essential to try to follow a strategy of constructive engagement - following Kent's example in relation to High Speed1. If HS2 is built in some form, wherever the route eventually goes, the physical impacts of high speed trains on local environments are likely to be serious, requiring mitigation.

While the wider issues are debated, we believe it is sensible to identify the best possible mitigation measures, to limit local impacts from noise and visual intrusion, and it is essential to explore all options for reducing the impacts on the local environment and communities. Mitigation measures should be based on current best practice and lessons learned from HS1 and similar schemes, both in the UK and abroad. Given the huge costs of HS2, we believe there should be appropriate investment in environmental protection.

In terms of the recent matter of compensation and the Exceptional Hardship Scheme (EHS), as a branch we do not feel qualified to comment, but we would naturally support fair and just compensation for those who are directly affected.

Since the initial announcement, we have been actively taking up some of the key issues, for example:

- 1. Examining details of the route, to assess localised impacts more closely.*
- 2. Attending a national CPRE seminar to discuss the full implications of HS2 – looking at strategic transport and energy issues as well as detailed environmental impacts of the current route.*
- 3. Engaging in dialogue with the four local Oxfordshire Parishes affected to discuss how we might work together on this issue.*
- 4. Making contact with neighbouring CPRE branches and other bodies affected by HS2.*

With the Government now indicating that it is reviewing a number of elements of the scheme and a growing number of questions about the viability and “greenness” of the entire project, it may be a very long process before final decisions are made about the scheme and the route.

We will continue to make strong representations on the HS2 Ltd proposals and the issues we have identified, covering both the strategic issues and the more local impacts. Rail engineering issues should not dominate the debate and we will ensure that environmental issues are given due weight.

Many rural communities are affected by this complex issue and we believe dialogue and joint working is an effective approach.

We will therefore continue to work with local groups to present coordinated and informed arguments about this important issue. We will continue to campaign for additional rail capacity to be created in the most sustainable way and for our precious countryside, and the rural communities who live there, to be properly safeguarded.

## **NOTES**

1. CPRE Oxfordshire promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural Oxfordshire by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. We are part of the national CPRE charity. For more information see: [www.cpreoxon.org.uk](http://www.cpreoxon.org.uk)

2. In January 2009, a new company was formed by the government, High Speed 2, to consider the case for new high speed rail services from London to Scotland. For the latest information see the HS2 website: <http://www.hs2.org.uk>

3. Other relevant links:

Chiltern Society: <http://www.chilternsociety.org.uk/hs2/>

Neighbouring CPRE county branches:

CPRE Buckinghamshire: <http://www.cprebucks.org.uk/>

CPRE Northants: <http://www.cprenorthants.org/>

CPRE Warwickshire: <http://www.cprewarwickshire.org.uk/>

## **For Further Information**

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