

Freepost RTEL-YAZX-HAZT
Phase Two Route Consultation
P O Box 1152
Harrow, HA1 9LH

Response to HS2 Phase Two Route Consultation

Dear Sirs

Re: Q4 – Do you agree or disagree with the Government’s proposed route between West Midlands and Leeds, as described in Chapter 8? This includes the proposed route alignment, the location of tunnels, ventilation shafts, cuttings, viaducts and depots as well as how the high speed line will connect to the East Coast main line.

The proposed route for the Eastern leg between the West Midlands and Leeds, specifically the proposed route from Sheffield, Meadowhall Station to the East Coast Main Line (ECML) via Garforth (HSL 17) and the spur into Leeds City Centre which will cross the Aire and Calder Navigation at Woodlesford (HSL 21), is completely unacceptable, a view held not only by local residents but also by many local businesses, Leeds City Council (supported by all 99 Councillors), all local Councillors and the local MP.

The effect on residents is an existing and continuing blight on the market value of properties, such that they may even be unsellable. There are over 400 houses which will be in close proximity to the proposed route, within 300 metres of the same (Swillington Lane, The Maltings, Pottery Lane, The Locks, New Farmers Hill, Fleet Lane and Clumpcliffe). Property sales in these areas have fallen through and people are also experiencing difficulties obtaining mortgages.

The blight to property values does not just affect properties within the near vicinity of the proposed route, it has an impact further afield and will ultimately result in a depressed property market in Woodlesford and surrounding areas. Ultimately the area will simply become a thoroughfare and undesirable. This is a crying shame, particularly following huge investment over the past 10 years in new housing, improvements to Woodlesford train station, new build primary schools at both Oulton and Swillington, an extension of Woodlesford Primary School, and significant new local amenities. Woodlesford, Oulton and Swillington should be encouraged to expand and flourish, with the excellent rail link into Leeds (just 8 minutes). An ideal area in reality for HS2 commuters to access High Speed Rail, instead the area is to be decimated.

The effect of the route will be to damage and close local businesses, in particular Swillington Organic Farm and Swillington Park Fishing. Both are thriving businesses which will be completely destroyed by HS2 causing jobs and a valuable resource for the community that provides education and training to be lost. The effect on the environment will be catastrophic, not least in terms of the impact on woodlands (including some ancient), rare birds and rare plants including destruction of a registered Site of Special Scientific Interest and Site of Ecological/Geological Importance. The Aire Valley will be devastated.

The proposed route will ‘skirt’ Woodlesford and continue through Swillington on viaducts at a height of 25 metres, drastically changing the Aire Valley landscape forever. The proposal also provides for a junction which will mean that there will be three viaducts at different heights on the landscape within less than 100 metres of numerous residential properties, and as close as 45m to some. The viaducts are proposed due to the route passing over the flood plain at Woodlesford. The construction will therefore be a difficult process which will be exacerbated by the limited access to the side of the river and the canal. It is impossible to imagine that vehicles the size of which will be needed to construct such monstrous viaducts will be able to access the site without additional roads being built.

Not only do the proposed lines pass over flood plains but they will be built on former open cast mines and on land affected by subsidence. Residents in the near vicinity of the canal and river are likely to be exposed to a significant increased risk of flooding due to the pumping of non-permeable concrete into the flood plain during construction. The construction itself will necessitate the closure of roads such as Aberford Road, Methley Lane and Bullerthorpe Lane which will cause gridlock in the area for between 5 – 10 years (with no alternate river or canal crossings in area), the effect being that local people will struggle to access Leeds. Minor roadworks on Aberford Road have caused traffic queues so severe as to affect junction 30 of the M62, so the closure of these roads will have an impact not just on local residents but will impact severely on a major motorway. The significant infrastructure, as highlighted in the Sustainability Statement (paragraphs 2.6.3 to 2.6.6), which will be required to construct the viaducts is totally unsuitable for this locality, not least due to the very limited space and accessibility to the proposed site.

The alternative route as proposed by Alec Shelbrooke MP, parts of which have already been considered by HS2 such as connecting to the ECML via Castleford, would mean less environmental damage, less blight to residential properties, less impact on the local property market and the desirability of the LS26 area. The alternative route follows existing transport corridors such as motorways and the railway through Normanton and is capable of being tunnelled to mitigate residential impact.

The alternative route proposed means less blight, is shorter than the proposed route, and is quicker. It is therefore likely to be cheaper, as shorter, and there would be no need for the viaducts. The alternative route for the main line also enables connection to the freight depot at Normanton, should HS2 ever be considered for freight. The only reason that this route was not chosen by HS2 Ltd is that it was considered to be marginally more expensive (5.9.40, Options for Phase 2 of the High Speed

Rail Network, HS2 Ltd, March 2012). However, as HS2 Ltd has not carried out any thorough ground investigations along the Clumpcliffe, Woodlesford and Swillington sections of the initial preferred route and has not considered the difficulties with access to the site, coupled with building on a flood plain, former open cast mines and land with a history of subsidence, the construction costs of the preferred route are likely to be considerably higher than currently estimated.

There are a number of route solutions which could either predominantly follow existing transport corridors or tunnel a more direct route, all of which must be considered by HS2 Ltd. Any reroute solution away from the Aire Valley is likely to be cheaper, as shorter, and result in less blight. All herein are real potential alternatives that must be examined and fully assessed to identify the best alternative to minimise the blight in our area. HS2 Ltd must consider all possible alternatives to identify the best reroute solution.

Re: Q7 – Please let us know your comments on the Appraisal of Sustainability (as reported in the Sustainability Statement) of the Government’s proposed Phase two Route, including the alternatives to the proposed route.

The Sustainability Statement provides that a Grade II listed road bridge over the Aire and Calder Navigation at Swillington would be demolished, and for the potential diversion of the river and canal at two places in Woodlesford. Both of these, together with the adverse impact on other listed buildings in the area will be avoided by following the alternative route.

The viaducts which are described by HS2 Ltd as ‘a prominent structure which will affect the landscape, character of the Valley and give rise to visual and noise impact on residents at Clumpcliffe, Woodlesford and Swillington, as well as to recreational users of the Valley (including the Rothwell Country Park) and the Aire and Calder Navigation’, can be avoided if an alternative route is chosen. The Aire Valley has been painstakingly revitalised from its status as a centre for mining, to an area of natural beauty. It has been described as a ‘green lung’, with an array of flora and fauna breathing life into this once (but no longer) industrialised corridor running into Leeds.

If the proposed route goes ahead this will be completely destroyed and turned into a concrete corridor with vegetation, ancient woodlands and wildlife stripped away. An alternative route would do less harm to the environment. The noise and vibration levels which will impact the area will be alleviated by following an alternative route. If the proposed route goes ahead the noise levels experienced by residents in Woodlesford, Clumpcliffe, Oulton and Swillington will be exacerbated by the trains running past on a 25 metre high viaduct. Noise disturbance will also be experienced at night due to the movement of rolling stock for maintenance purposes.

Taking into account the open landscape of the Aire Valley the visual impact will be significant and unreasonable. This will be experienced not just by residents in Woodlesford and Swillington but by recreational users of the navigation, users of the Trans Pennine Trail and Rothwell Country Park.

The current proposed route is wholly unacceptable to residents and is not supported by Leeds City Council, the alternative route proposed would have far less adverse impact on residents, businesses and the environment and therefore this and other alternatives must be considered by HS2 Ltd as viable solutions to bringing HS2 to Leeds. Leeds City Council, the Chamber of Commerce and Metro, the West Yorkshire Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) and West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) all support a reroute away from the Aire Valley.

Additional Comments:

Yours faithfully

Signed: _____
Dated: _____
Name: _____

Address: