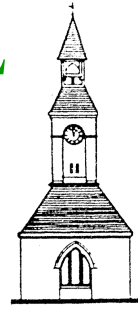


WENDOVER PARISH COUNCIL

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Clerk to the Council:
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8th July 2011

High Speed Rail Consultation
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Copies to:
Rt Hon David Liddington, MP
Buckinghamshire County Council
Aylesbury Vale District Council

Re: High Speed Rail Consultation

Wendover is an ancient market town with a population in excess of 8,000. The parish covers an area of 24 square kilometres. The Governments Preferred route for HS2 bisects the parish on a North West/ South East axis.

The thirteen elected members of Wendover Parish Council (WPC) are unanimous in bitterly opposing the route proposals, which are visually destructive, acoustically unacceptable and enormously damaging to the town's important role as a tourist centre, providing an established gateway to access the Chilterns AONB. Many of the 33 miles of public "Rights of Way" within the parish will be obliterated or severed by these proposals. Irreparable damage will be inflicted, impacting on both the residents of and visitors to this area.

The Parish Council believes that in a densely populated country like England, it is in the National interest to avoid adverse impacts on the landscape and settled communities. This appears to be the view of the Government which has pledged to reverse centuries of destruction of wild life and landscape in a recently released White Paper on the Natural Environment.

Accordingly, the residents of Wendover object in the strongest terms to being described as NIMBY's by the Secretary of State for Transport. If the Government appears unwilling to protect the legally designated Chilterns AONB, then it behoves the area's inhabitants to defend the

AONB to their utmost capability, for themselves, the nation, the environment and our heritage.

WPC are concerned that extensive public consultation has not been achieved off the line of the route. With the consequence, that informed public consultation has not taken place throughout the country, despite the widespread fiscal and environmental implications for the country, and the population as a whole.

The Parish Council is of the view that the Government's seeming obsession with Ultra High Speed travel is inappropriate in a country whose topography is fundamentally unsuited to it. Our conurbations, with their pattern of dispersed dwellings, are of insufficient distance apart to yield the true potential of high speed travel.

Finally WPC does not understand how in these times of public prudence, the Government can contemplate expenditure of unforeseeable magnitude, when the benefits are so ill defined.

Yours faithfully,

Clerk Wendover Parish Council

Consultation response from Wendover Parish Council

1. This question is about the strategy and wider context (Chapter 1 of the main consultation document):

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?

No.

There is no evidence that a proper strategic review of the country's needs has been conducted. To expect that a select enhancing of intercity capacity and performance will deliver economic growth cannot be described as representing a strong case since:

- Wendover Parish Council believes that any proposals for Ultra High Speed rail in this country should form part of a nationwide communication and transport strategy in all its forms. We see no evidence that this has been undertaken.
- We are of the view that hugely damaging major infrastructure proposals like HS2 should not be made without all the alternative options being thoroughly considered. From the information presented, we do not believe that such a consideration has been made by Government.
- The transformative effects claimed by the Government are more likely to favour London and the South East than the North, since the South East is by far the strongest sector, and will gain the most from improved connectivity.
- 70% of the sustainable jobs, which it is claimed will result, are predicted to be in re-location employment in retailing around the London terminus. This is not regeneration rather it is redistribution.
- The UK already has a fast frequent intercity service, bettering the journey times between the capital and the country's five largest cities - compared to anywhere else in Western Europe where high speed rail already operates.
- This country's major population centres are too close together to benefit from high speed rail. Also the dispersed nature of our settlements requires multi nodal joining opportunities, which high speed rail as proposed cannot provide.
- There is no evidence that rail demand will grow sufficiently, or sufficiently quickly, to make expanding capacity a priority.
- High Speed rail investment will starve the classic rail network of investment, to benefit the few at the expense of the rest of the rail travelling public.
- Capacity issues on WCML can be solved more cheaply, as and when they might arise.
- Better investments such as high speed Broadband are more likely to stimulate economic growth, in all areas of the UK.
- In the interests of sustainability, the Government should be discouraging travel, not seeking to expand it.

- At a time when the country's National Debt is measured in trillions of pounds, it is demonstrably wrong to increase borrowing to fund such a weak contentious project.

2. This question is about the case for high speed rail (Chapter 2 of the main consultation document):

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.

High speed rail does not represent value for money because:

- The projected cost of £30+ billion (likely to be a significant underestimate) plus a £17 billion annual operating subsidy, is only justified by encouraging additional travel which does not accord with existing Government policy to reduce carbon production. Furthermore, the subsidy would principally benefit affluent business travellers, who least need it.
- Improving intra-conurbation and intra-regional connections would be likely to deliver regional growth far better than faster connections to London.
- The business case is flawed. No sound evidence has been presented for investing such a huge sum of money. Over 40% of the claimed benefits are derived from journey time savings being equated to productivity benefits. Rapidly developing communications technology makes nonsense of these claims, since it allows travellers to work whilst on a train. The cost benefit ratio is already below the Treasury's own target for major infrastructure projects.
- The Government's case predicts that rail demand will grow by unrealistic amounts. Without such demand HS2 would be under-utilised as has proved to be the case with HS1. The lesson on overestimating demand appears not to have been learnt!
- Capacity issues on WCML can be more effectively addressed by much lower cost options such as Rail Package 2, which can also be delivered incrementally as demand develops. Other planned developments, such as Chiltern Railway's Evergreen Project, have been ignored.
- Existing rail services will worsen by the Government's own admission. This can be seen in practice in areas along the HS1 corridor, where passengers now face a more difficult and lengthy journey than before the high speed line was introduced.
- Trains and scheduling are as yet unproven at the speeds and frequency proposed.
- The plan asks for a decision on the whole route but does not give any detail nor the impact of the route North of Birmingham.

- A £30+ billion showcase transport investment such as HS2 should contribute to the UK's target of reducing carbon emissions by 80% by 2050, but it does not!

3. This question is about how to deliver the Government's proposed network (Chapter 3 of the main consultation document):

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.

The proposed roll-out cannot be justified. There are already good high speed rail links between Birmingham and London. If there are any benefits, they can only be realised if the line succeeds in progressing much further north.

- HS2 rolling stock will have insufficient passenger capacity to cope with demand if they have to complete their journey on the classic railway network. The 550 seat classic compatible trains have less seating than the trains they will replace, but will need to carry more passengers due to HS2 induced demand.
- The Heathrow and HS1 direct services make no economic sense. There is insufficient demand to support the cost of these links.
- HS2 prevents acute crowding problems from being addressed now e.g. Milton Keynes/ Northampton/ Euston commuter services, since it cuts short the period for which timely improvements can deliver benefits.
- The construction phase will cause major structural damage to local roads, traffic congestion and delay, noise and pollution for years.

4. This question is about the specification for the line between London and the West Midlands (Chapter 4 of the main consultation document):

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 principles adopted by HS2 Ltd are flawed with the emphasis on speed and time saving at the expense of all aspects of the environment.

- The route has ignored the Chilterns AONB, in absolute contravention of the principles protecting such areas of designated landscape.
- HS2 is ultra high speed, faster than any other rail service in operation in the world. Adopting lesser maximum speeds (around 200mph) would allow the line more latitude to bend and avoid sensitive locations.

- The route does not follow existing major transport corridors, as good planning dictates.
- It will be very power hungry, at a time when the country's electrical generation capacity is coming under considerable strain. Power consumption and noise increase disproportionately with speed.
- Ultra high speed exacerbates noise pollution and wear to wheels and rails. It is untried technology.
- High speed rail travel has higher construction and operating costs and much larger adverse environmental impacts, but its proponents use the spurious value of small increments of time saved to justify it.
- Route selection has ignored engineering consultants Arup, who in an advisory capacity suggested alternative proposals that could be delivered using present transport corridors. Thereby, minimising environmental degradation and disruption as well as reducing costs by linking to existing rail infrastructure.

5. This question is about the route for the line between London and the West Midlands

(Chapter 5 and Annex B of the main consultation document):

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.

The mitigation has failed to address sufficiently the issues and impacts and represents poor value for money. The environmental impacts should be correctly assessed before attempting to determine the appropriate mitigation.

- The decision to undertake detailed environmental assessments after the route has been chosen is perverse and misguided. It raises serious concerns about the validity of the consultation process, which seems as if it might have been predetermined.
- There has been no serious attempt to minimise impacts on people or communities. Indeed on the edge of Aylesbury, at Hartwell House the reverse has been proposed.
- How many other AONB's and quality landscapes north of Birmingham, are to be so abused, if the line's ultimate destinations are to be achieved?
- HS2 Ltd has failed to provide believable data on noise and other adverse impacts which the population can understand, or have any confidence in.
- Reducing the maximum design speed would allow more route flexibility.
- Alternatively adopting tilting technology, and banking of the track, would also allow the line to avoid more sensitive areas.
- Construction will blight the countryside in an AONB for years.
- Property blight will run in to decades.

- The impact on Wendover and other communities will be devastating. The line will pass within 150 m of the centre of an ancient Market Town whose buildings are either listed or in a Conservation area.
- Wendover Parish Council believes that the minimum mitigation acceptable to its community would be to run the line in a tunnel past our ancient, picturesque and attractive town. In dismissing such an option as too costly the Government appears to have failed to properly assess:
 - The feasibility and costs of moving the high voltage grid pylons.
 - How to overcome the problems of maintaining vehicle use out of Wendover along the Ellesborough Road, since the proposed diversion would result in intolerable traffic flows along an already congested South Street.
 - The savings that would accrue from avoiding the construction of a lengthy viaduct across the valley floor at Wendover Dean.
 - The savings from avoiding demolition, noise and devaluation compensation claims from Wendover households.

More tunnelling is the very least and only fair mitigation that should be offered to reduce the visual and noise impacts in this most sensitive gateway between Aylesbury Vale and the Chilterns.

6. This question is about the Appraisal of Sustainability (Chapter 5 of the main consultation document):

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?

Yes.

The Appraisal of Sustainability is misleading and factually inaccurate. It misleads on carbon. Far from being carbon neutral HS2 will add to carbon emissions, because:

- Landing and take-off slots would not remain vacant as is assumed, but would be re-allocated, probably to long haul flights.
- It under-estimates carbon emissions from electricity generation by using average, rather than daytime generation characteristics.

The Appraisal is also unsatisfactory and misleading on noise because:

- Noise contours have not been provided, making it impossible to assess the likely impact on our community.
- Noise is assessed against inappropriate standards, seriously underestimating the number of homes and areas affected.

- At Ultra High Speed, aerodynamic noise from the pantographs becomes a major source of noise, against which conventional noise barriers are largely ineffective.

No assessment has been made of the potential impact on the regions critical aquifers.

7. This question is about blight and compensation (Annex A of the main consultation document):

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?

Wendover Parish Council is concerned that Blight, in the wider sense, has afflicted property values along Route 3 since 11/03/10 and that the market is disorientated as a result.

Given the outcome of this Consultation is not anticipated before the end of 2011 or beyond, and will have its own influence 'for better or for worse,' the project will not be ratified/modified/discarded until the passage of the Hybrid Bill, some three years hence.

Within this time interval, a minority of properties may be acquired 'as being upon the designated route' or within the narrow (and already discredited) Emergency Hardship Scheme known as EHS. Those examples apart, properties perceived to be 'too close for comfort' have no recourse or remedy. Sale of a property, if achievable at all, is likely to be at a discount.

It is therefore clear that owners are effectively denied any normal freedom of movement, other than upon penal terms.

This is an intolerable restraint which demands a fair and effective remedy. It calls for entirely new measures. Such measures must be founded on the principle that owners must emerge in no worse a position than if the scheme of measures had not existed, plus a percentage to reflect costs and disturbance.

Annexe A points out that the Government 'does not wish to be saddled with such acquisitions as may result.' This is a problem of its own making and, in short, it must pick up the bill, as for the fanciful scheme as a whole.

This Annexe also makes loose reference to 'discretionary support' but in so doing wholly ignores the timescale of HS2, when asserting that the proper degree of compensation is assessable only when the trains start running, i.e. more than a decade hence.

The foregoing is against the intimidating proposition that compensation at large would only be capable of realistic assessment and not therefore be forthcoming until trains start running, which will be more than a decade hence!) Whilst this may be arguable in a purely technical sense it is wholly inconsistent with the assertion (p 17) that fair compensation will be paid.

Wendover Parish Council believes the issue must be confronted ahead of the scheme, rather than in retrospect.

Annexe A advances two possible propositions for further consideration:
The Bond-based Scheme

At an unspecified point in the programme for HS2, property owners may 'apply' for a guarantee that at '*a certain*' (*but unspecified*) *stage in the project*, the subject property could be bought by the government at *its unaffected market value*.

Such a guarantee would run with the property and therefore be transferable in the event of intervening changes of ownership. This proposition may have some merit but only if such a guarantee becomes available in clear and unequivocal terms *soon*. It does nothing to alleviate matters if delayed.

In any event, its presence on the property's title may well be perceived as a blemish, rather than an asset, and pose difficulties in mortgage facilities.

Compensation Bond Scheme

An alternative whereby property owners would be offered a guarantee *that if significant loss in value were suffered as a result of the scheme, compensation would be offered after the line opened*. An innovative approach but lacking merit as a consequence of the time scale.

HS2 and its consequences prospectively span 15 years;
During that prolonged period, decisions have to be taken by owners and their families.

The sheer timescale of HS2 must therefore be reconciled, so that freedom of movement is restored.

It is not acceptable for Government to side step these issues, by offering feeble guarantees amounting to compensation on deferred terms.

No monetary sum, however generous, can compensate for the indefinable impact on individuals and communities who place great value on the quality of their surroundings and the place where they live.