

Networks Group

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11th July 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

RESPONSE TO DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT: HS2 STAGE ONE

Railfuture is a national voluntary organisation structured in England as twelve regional branches and two national branches for Scotland and Wales. We are Britain's leading independent rail lobby organization with a large number of affiliated Rail User Groups. Being funded entirely from membership subscriptions and donations, Railfuture enjoys non-partisan status and has no connections with political parties, trade unions or commercial interests. Railfuture is pro-rail but not anti-car or aviation.

Railfuture strongly supports the concept of increased High Speed Rail projects for the UK, and accepts that HS2 should be the next project to connect London and the South East with the West and East Midlands and major conurbations further north.

In submitting comments on the Draft Environmental Statement on Stage One of HS2, we would register our disappointment that the Government has apparently rejected other alternative route suggestions (for example via the M1 corridor) without convincing explanation.

However, we are here offering comments relevant to the final route selected through the Chilterns, as shown in your diagrams. These comments are primarily general, rather than detailed comments on the impact of each section of the route.

We strongly support the basic project concept that providing additional railway route capacity is probably one of the best methods to achieve a modal shift from more polluting transport of passengers and goods by road, in passenger/km and freight tonnage/km, and also from aviation, if operated at high speed above 250 kmh. However if lesser levels of property demolition, lessened intrusion into areas of SSI, and reduced construction costs can be achieved by accepting an alignment suitable for a lower maximum operational speed than the designated 360-400 kmh then we feel this is a compromise worth pursuing.

We believe a reduced construction footprint can be achieved at the proposed Euston Station site, with a design for less platforms than are planned, and possibly of a less generous width than proposed in the plans. If a tighter turn-round plan can also be achieved for the maximum proposed train services, together with the re-routing of some London Midland services from Tring and Milton Keynes on to Crossrail (via Acton and Old Oak Common), and the diversion of London Overground Watford services to run to Stratford or West Croydon instead (via a reopened Primrose Hill station), then this would reduce the number of additional platforms required and avoid, or at least reduce, the need for demolition of residential property to the west of Euston Station. This, we are sure you know, is a major concern for

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Camden Council and the residents who must be found alternative accommodation, and this is a not insubstantial cost to be borne by the project. We note the proposals for a 'Euston Cross' station and believe that this would contribute to new domestic cross-London journey opportunities, which would benefit the environment by encouraging modal shift.

We are of the view that additional tunnelling, to remove the sight or sound of the high-speed trains, is an excessive feature of the project, and is based on objections from future line side residents impressed by over-stated fears of the visual and aural impact of high-speed train services. Experience on HS1, and in France, Belgium and Germany shows that once in regular operation, the trains have little if any problem blending into the local scene, any more than railways did 150 years ago when first constructed. We urge re-examination of these tunnels. Their removal from the plans can reduce the cost of the project, and could theoretically, provide notional funding for railway improvements elsewhere, of comparable benefit to the environment and help to reduce carbon emissions with further modal transfer. We accept that this may be a tortuous and indirect conclusion, but in our opinion, worthy of consideration.

A feature almost always overlooked by new high-speed rail projects everywhere is the design of noise barriers. Where constructed of concrete they are almost without exception scarred by extensive graffiti where close to urban residential areas, often before the new route is even open to traffic! This is a considerable negative blight for passengers; in addition the barriers themselves impinge on the ability to observe scenery for long stretches of line, itself an attraction in achieving modal shift especially when paying high fares. We therefore urge minimal use of such noise barriers, and where deemed essential they utilise coatings of graffiti resistant material if technically possible, or substituting alternative dense woodland or shrubbery, or thick corrugated wooden barriers, with no potential use for graffiti artists.

The proposed single-track link between HS2 and HS1 in North London is clearly of totally inadequate capacity, and therefore has a designed inability to provide future extensive services from cities on HS2 to Kent and continental Europe. This is an 'environmental' consideration, as the link ultimately fails to meet potential demand or to achieve a significant modal shift. We urge positive examination of other solutions especially the 'Euston Cross' scheme to improve environmental, modal and commercial benefit.

Finally, station locations on the route should be city centre rather than parkway.

We trust that these comments are useful in environmental assessment of the project.

Yours faithfully,

McDonald

Ian McDonald
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Head of Networks Group