

Central Chilterns HS2 Community Forum

Design issues

*As presented
11-July-2012*

The Chilterns AONB is an area of natural beauty and tranquillity. This should be preserved at all costs. AONBs have statutory protection and this Government's policy tells us AONBs are "national treasures". Given this the AONB requires the highest level of mitigation that can be achieved in route design.

It is clear that the most effective and preferred form of mitigation is a fully bored tunnel throughout the Chilterns AONB. If this was not to be achieved the follow comments address the surface route through the Chilterns (as of 10th January 2012).

Following the consultation, design changes announced (10th January 2012) result in adverse impacts on the AONB covered by this forum. The height of the line in the 3km cutting between South Heath and Wendover Dean Viaduct has been raised by some 7m. The depth of the green tunnel has also been reduced. The consequence of this is potentially far greater noise and visual impacts.

The following design changes would help to protect AONB land and communities:

- The route in the AONB must be designed to the highest international standards - best in class. This applies to all aspects but most especially to noise reduction.
- Lower route alignment – make it as deep as possible. Return to at least the previous depth
- Design an Optimum Environmental Line Speed for the AONB. This will reduce noise impacts on AONB land as well as buildings. It will also permit alteration in route alignment helping to reduce impacts on environmental features. A paper is being produced on this and will be sent to you in due course.
- Train separation at 3 minutes intervals. Have you any evidence from test trials on the safety of this proposal?
- More than 70% of HS2 trains are to be bespoke classic compatible. When will these be designed? When will pass-by noise levels from these trains be made available?
- Freight- The line will be designed for freight but HS2 Ltd has said no freight will travel on the line at night. Please explain.
- Natural Environment/Biodiversity. The design must take this into account and the AONB must be preserved at all costs!

HS2 Ltd can guarantee as much as they like but that does not mean it is set in stone. Comment please.

11th July 2012

Further detailed questions are listed on the following pages.

1. National Treasure

The Government – in its 2011 Natural Environment White Paper – says that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are “national treasures”. Please explain how your proposals are commensurate with this status.¹

2. Route Alignment in the AONB

Following the consultation, the vertical alignment of the route between South Heath and Wendover town has been raised considerably. For example, the 3km cutting between South Heath and Wendover Dean Viaduct has been made shallower by some 7m increasing HS2's impacts on the AONB. It will result in an important landscape feature – the historic sunken Leather Lane - needing to be dug up for 600 metres, diverted and placed on a raised bridge. It will also result in noise bunds needing to be built which will alter the AONB landform. There are concerns over the potential inefficiency of bunds for noise attenuation.

Will you consider:

- a) Lengthening the bored tunnel in the AONB?
- b) Designing an Optimum Environmental Line Speed in the AONB to reduce noise and environmental impacts?
- c) Lowering the alignment in the AONB?

3. Further Concerns on Tranquillity in the AONB

Tranquillity - including peace and quiet - is an important characteristic of AONBs.²

You have provided limited information on the noise impacts on buildings.

- a) What arrangements are being proposed to maintain the high levels of tranquillity of AONB land as well as buildings?
- b) In the AONB will design, materials, applicability and implementation of noise mitigation be of world best standard?

4. Quality of Infrastructure in the AONB

In the AONB will design, materials, applicability and implementation of all HS2 infrastructure be of:

- a) World best standard
- b) As sympathetic as possible in appearance to the natural beauty of the AONB?

5. Bespoke Classic Compatible Fleet

More than 70% of HS2 trains are to be classic-compatible.³ These will be able to run onto the West Coast Main Line, unlike the captive fleet which will be restricted to HS2 infrastructure.

- a) When is the classic compatible rolling stock to be designed?
- b) HS2 Ltd's noise information has been produced from existing high speed trains. When is noise data from the bespoke classic compatible rolling stock to be made available?
- c) Will this include information on noise frequencies from these trains?

¹ Natural Environment White Paper - The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature Paragraph 4.35.

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

² Chilterns Conservation Board Management Plans: Understanding and Enjoyment

<http://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/management-plan.html>

³ High Speed Rail London to the West Midlands and Beyond: A Report to Government by High Speed Two Ltd. page 169.

6. Landscape and Biodiversity-rich Features Lost in the AONB

There are grave concerns about the lack of assessment of the loss of landscape features and features rich in biodiversity in the AONB that would arise should the scheme go ahead. This will potentially result from:

- a) The wide corridor needed to build the HS2 route causing destruction of AONB landscape features and loss of biodiversity.
- b) HGVs accessing the route via rural lanes bounded by such features.

What is the total extent of the land in the AONB expected to be impacted by these means?

7. AONB Viewpoints

There are grave concerns over the considerable noise and visual impacts on AONB viewpoints. This is because:

- a) There will be no soft ground attenuation from the uninterrupted line from the route to the viewpoints.
- b) And because HS2's infrastructure and rolling stock will be difficult to conceal from viewpoints.

What estimates have you made of:

- The numbers of rights of way on viewpoints.
- The areas of land open to the public on viewpoints.

where the public's enjoyment will be affected?

Are there any plans to try to ameliorate these serious impacts?

8. Claims on Habitat Creation

There are serious concerns over claims on habitat creation within the new railway corridor.⁴ Concerns centre on creating and maintaining the habitat and its being a thoroughfare for invasion by non-native species.

- a) What are your plans for creating and maintaining the HS2 railway corridor habitat?
- b) How will invasion by non-native species to ancient woodland and other valuable habitats be prevented?⁵

9. Rights of Way

- a) Rights of way in the AONB will be affected by HS2's noise and visual impacts. What are your plans to enable public enjoyment of rights of way to be preserved during operation – for those both directly and indirectly impacted?
- b) We understand rights of way may be assessed by HS2 counting numbers of users. If this is the case, on what basis is the assessment being made?

10. Government Commitment to Sustainable Access of AONBs

The Government is committed in its 2011 Natural Environment White Paper to encouraging use of walking, cycling and public transport for accessing the natural beauty of AONBs.⁶

- a) HS2 will impact on the public's enjoyment of numerous rights of way in the AONB including those of national and regional importance. Affected rights of way include those which are indirectly as well as directly impacted.

⁴ HS2 Fact sheet: Wildlife and Habitats http://hs2ltd.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/wildlife-habitats_0.pdf

⁵ Woodland Trust Neighbours from hell research http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/campaigning/our-campaigns/neighbour-hell/Pages/neighbours-hell-summary.aspx#.T_V-pZF_uyQ

⁶ Natural Environment White Paper - The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature Paragraph 4.35 <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

- b) HS2 will impact on the public's enjoyment of rural lanes used for cycling. Great Missenden is a centre for this growing sport and leisure activity.
- c) HS2 will impact on one of three areas in the Chilterns AONB identified as being well served by both public transport and cycle routes, and offering visitor attractions.⁷

The incongruous juxtaposition of HS2 against the AONB calls into question the future natural beauty of the area.

Given the above, the value of the Chilterns AONB - with its high quality landscape and accessibility of the type the Government is committed to - is seriously diminished. This is in an AONB just 3 miles from Greater London.

Please comment on this.

11. Government Commitment to Ancient Woodland

The Government tells us in its Natural Environment White Paper 2011⁸ it is committed to conserving ancient woodland. In addition the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework places particular emphasis on wildlife conservation in AONBs.⁹

Have you any design plans for:

- a) Reducing land-take from the ancient woodland HS2 is proposed to cut through?
- b) Preventing invasion of ancient woodland by non-native species along the HS2 corridor?¹⁰

12. Reducing Damage to Grim's Ditch

The Government states in its 2012 National Planning Policy Framework that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.¹¹ The route cuts through Grim's Ditch.

Have you any design plans for reducing land-take from this scheduled monument?

⁷ £1 million to Boost Cycling Tourism <http://www.chilternsaonb.org/news/90/19/1-million-boost-to-cycling-tourism.html>

⁸ Natural Environment White Paper - The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature Paragraphs 2.53
<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

⁹ National Planning Policy Framework 2012: Paragraph 115.
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2116950.pdf>

¹⁰ Woodland Trust Neighbours From Hell Research http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/campaigning/our-campaigns/neighbour-hell/Pages/neighbours-hell-summary.aspx#.T_V-pZF_uyQ

¹¹ National Planning Policy Framework: Paragraph 132.
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2116950.pdf>