



PRESS RELEASE

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HIGH SPEED RAIL Grand projet with the devil in the detail

Government plans for a high speed rail network across England risk being decided without understanding the local impact on townscape, heritage, open space and footpaths which should shape the design speed and route from the outset. This is the message from Civic Voice¹ following debate among dozens of local voluntary civic societies along the possible route between London and Birmingham.

In a briefing – *HS2 – is it making civic sense?* – published today (Thursday) Civic Voice is asking the Government to address the local impacts of the development in choosing where and how fast trains should be travelling and not leave them till after all the major decisions have been made. A copy of the briefing is below.

Tony Burton, Civic Voice's Director, said "Decisions over a major new high speed rail route should not be made without a full audit of the cumulative impact on undesignated townscape, landscape, heritage, wildlife, buildings and the rights of way network.

"The Government has promised to put more power into the hands of local communities who feel threatened by major infrastructure and remote decision making. Civic Voice believes key decisions – such as the design speed of the line – should reflect the sensitivity of the frequently intimate landscapes and townscapes through which it passes."

Civic Voice is also urging investment in high speed rail to support urban regeneration, shift travel patterns from road and air to rail and provide direct links through to the continent.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Civic Voice works to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. We speak up for civic societies and local communities across England. We promote civic pride. We are the new national charity for the civic movement and have a strong local presence. We believe everyone has the right to live somewhere they can be proud of. We know how people feel about places because we feel the same way. Civic societies are the most numerous participants in the planning system. Since its launch in April 2010 Civic Voice has been joined by over 250 civic societies with more than 65,000 members. Over 35 civic societies are involved in the debate over the high speed rail route between London and Birmingham. Further information is available at www.civicvoice.org.uk including how to join Civic Voice (£10 individuals) and contact details for local civic societies. More information on Civic Voice's campaigns is available on our website here www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns

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HS2 – is it making civic sense?

The Government's proposals for a new high speed rail link between London and Birmingham, and beyond, have profound implications for the communities and places along its route. Civic Voice has brought local voluntary civic societies together to discuss whether they make sense. This briefing summarises their views.

We recognise the benefits that can be provided by strategic investment in rail services. The particular benefits of high speed rail need to be further demonstrated by the proponents and underpinned by more robust evidence of demand. We believe any proposals will need to demonstrate they can achieve all of the following:

- support urban regeneration over greenfield development
- integrate with transport policy to support investment in other rail services, increase rail freight and shift trips from air and road to rail
- support moves to a low carbon economy
- maximum protection for the local environment and heritage.

We look for a more bespoke and flexible approach which moves beyond assumptions about applying international standards and speeds to reflect the sensitive English landscape and townscape through which the line passes.

We look for an approach which achieves more local as well as national benefits.

We would welcome a broad approach to mitigation being developed at the earliest stage, working with the affected communities to address both the direct and indirect impacts.

To achieve these outcomes we believe:

- the design speed of the line should reflect the sensitivity of the frequently intimate landscapes and townscapes through which it passes, allowing for a more sensitive and curved route and design with significantly reduced energy consumption and only a minor impact on journey times
- a full audit of the cumulative impacts should be undertaken on undesignated townscape, landscape, heritage, wildlife and buildings and on the rights of way network should be undertaken - this should shape the route assessment and inform early discussion on mitigation
- there should be a design brief for the route which reflects local distinctiveness
- stations should be located to support urban renewal and not on greenfield sites
- there should be an interchange with Crossrail and direct links with HS1 at St Pancras for through services to the continent
- binding commitments are needed that HS2 will not be developed at the expense of investment elsewhere in the rail network.

The Government is keen to ensure local communities take a more active role in shaping their local environment. Large scale infrastructure projects can feel very threatening and we believe informed local community input should be supported by public funds so that it can be organised and provided in as effective a manner as possible.

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