



HS2

A response by Civic Voice to the Department for Transport July 2011

1. Civic Voice is the new national charity for the civic movement. We champion and support a network of hundreds of volunteer-led and community based civic societies and other groups across England who work to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive and to promote civic pride. We have been joined by over 275 civic societies with c71,000 individual members in our first year. Civic society volunteers are the most numerous participants in the planning system and take a close interest in transport and development issues. This submission is informed by their practical experience and local outlook. We provide brief responses to the specific consultation questions at the end of this submission.

2. 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. They concern dozens of civic societies and have been a stimulus for community action. Major infrastructure projects of this kind can be intimidating and the procedures for participating can be daunting for the individuals and communities most affected and it is all the more important that their views are effectively addressed. Civic Voice has brought local voluntary civic societies together to discuss the HS2 proposals and hosted visits for civic volunteers, HS2 staff and others to view the experience of routing HS1 through Kent.

3. In preparing this submission we have also undertaken an online survey of civic societies and others with an interest in the proposals. This received 184 responses from different parts of the country (38% not being directly affected by the proposals) and the results are presented in Annex A. In summary it shows:

- ☛ One third believe the route is acceptable or can be made so by addressing local impacts and this falls to one sixth for those living in an area directly affected
- ☛ Three in five don't believe there is a need for any more high speed rail rising to three in four for those who live in an area directly affected
- ☛ Cost and impact on the landscape are the overwhelming reasons why people are concerned by the proposals and much more important than noise even for those directly affected by the route (although there are strong objections on noise grounds in some locations)
- ☛ Only one in four people believe the proposals will benefit their area.

4. The survey results flag up a number of potential important benefits from well executed investment in high speed rail. These focus on the economic and transport advantages and include:

- ☛ capacity to absorb future increases in travel in environmentally responsible ways
- ☛ economic investment in less prosperous parts of the country
- ☛ extra capacity on existing rail services
- ☛ a more resilient transport infrastructure in the face of future resource constraints
- ☛ wider access to international high speed train links
- ☛ reduced domestic flights.

5. Conversely, there are strongly expressed objections which focus on its negative impact on landscape, heritage & wildlife and the quality of life of those along the route. This includes:

- loss of nationally important ancient woodland (e.g. Potter Row, Bucks)
- serious urbanisation of fragile Green Belt (e.g. Leamington Spa, Warwickshire)
- widespread damage to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- local disruption of school bus routes (e.g. Quainton, Bucks)
- overwhelming small villages (e.g. Burton Green, Warwickshire)
- disturbance to valued tranquillity of areas which experience little road noise at the moment (e.g. Chetwode, Bucks);
- demolition of important buildings (e.g. Regents Park housing estate, London)
- fragmentation of farmland (e.g. between A413 and Leather Lane, Bucks)
- damage to conservation areas (e.g. Old Amersham, Bucks)
- disruption to the quality of life in large urban areas (e.g. Perivale, London)
- dislocation of the rights of way network in the Chilterns and beyond
- visual impact of viaducts (e.g. Colne Valley, Great Missenden), embankments (e.g. between Aylesbury and Princes Risborough) and ventilation shafts (e.g. Swiss Cottage & Primrose Hill, London)
- reinforcing London and the South East as a location for investment and thereby heightening regional disparities.

There is a widespread belief that these impacts cannot be adequately mitigated. There is also a view that the investment could be better used to improve existing transport infrastructure and risks instead being an opportunity cost which detracts from investment in other public transport.

6. Civic Voice recognises the benefits that can be provided by strategic investment in rail services but any proposals need to be underpinned by a robust business case and to demonstrate they can:

- support urban regeneration over greenfield development
- integrate with transport policy to support investment in other rail services, increase rail freight, shift trips from air & road to rail and not divert investment from these priorities
- support moves to a low carbon economy
- provide maximum protection for the local environment and heritage and maximise opportunities for enhancement.

7. Civic Voice is a signatory along with a wide range of voluntary transport, environmental and conservation groups to the *Right Lines* charter (enclosed). This reflects our view that there may be a case for high speed rail but the current proposals require significant improvements in terms of their integration with other aspects of transport and environmental policy, routing and design, and the process of public engagement to be acceptable.

8. We believe it is paramount that any proposals for high speed rail engage people at the earliest possible stage when genuine options are on the table and choices and assumptions can be tested. This is also a requirement of the Aarhus Convention. We have been disappointed by the limited nature of the current process of public consultation on HS2 which falls well short of both what is required and what is expected of a Government that places such an emphasis on localism. We recognise that there will be circumstances where the national interest is served by the development of major infrastructure. In developing such proposals, however, it is essential that people are engaged meaningfully in strategic as well as local issues. We also recognise the concern over blight which may result from debate over a variety of potential routes but this should not be allowed to stymie effective public engagement and a much less risk averse and transparent approach should be adopted.

9. We strongly encourage a much more participative and engaging approach to discussions over any proposals. This should apply to the current route between London and Birmingham as well as to any proposals north of Birmingham. It should combine consideration of both strategic and local issues in the range of engagement techniques adopted and take place at a point where the public's contribution can make a meaningful difference. It should also make public

funds available to support community engagement as part of the process. Anything other than a more participative and engaging approach will not only run counter to both public expectations of meaningful engagement and political commitments to localism but also risk causing further delay and controversy later on in the process.

10. We have particular concerns that the route has been developed without a full understanding of the cumulative impacts on undesignated townscape, landscape, heritage, wildlife, tranquillity, valued buildings and the rights of way network. These should shape route assessment and not be mitigated once a route has been selected.

11. We also believe a more bespoke and flexible approach which reflects the sensitive English landscape and townscape through which any new high speed line would need to pass should be adopted. This should avoid in particular any rigid assumptions about design speed and take a strategic approach to mitigation and overall design from the start. It should also be based on a design brief for the route which reflects local distinctiveness and ensures design considerations are on an equal footing with engineering considerations (including the design speed of the line) in development of the proposals.

12. In the event that HS2's proposals proceed we would encourage:

- a more pro-active approach to enhancements, including creating new rights of way networks, opening up new green space, compelling design of new structures and providing a long term endowment to manage and care for the local environment in perpetuity - to date our experience is that HS2 has not yet even considered some of the opportunities for positive enhancement which were taken forward by HS1 20 years ago
- station locations which support urban renewal and avoid "parkway" stations on greenfield sites, such as outside Birmingham.

13. In conclusion, we do not believe the current proposals for HS2 are sound given their overall impact and the weak consultation process. We recognise the benefits that can be provided by investment in better rail services and encourage an approach to future development which engages communities much more effectively and addresses local impacts and design issues at the earliest stages of assessment. Wherever major investment takes place we believe it should take a positive approach to providing significant environmental and other public benefits along the route and avoid station locations which will encourage greenfield development.

Consultation questions

1. Strategic context – We support the case for investment in the inter-city rail network, for social and environmental as well as economic reasons

2. Case for high speed rail – We believe investment in high speed rail has a role to play in an improved transport infrastructure providing it meets the approach set out in the Right Lines charter

3. Phased roll out – We do not support the current proposals for a phased roll out and encourage the Government to adopt a much more participative and engaging approach where the public's contribution can make a meaningful difference and where public funds are made available to support community involvement. We support the need to integrate proposal with the existing HS1 line to the Channel Tunnel

4. Route specification between London and the West Midlands – We do not support the approach taken by HS2 to route selection. This failed adequately to engage the public or address the cumulative impacts on undesignated townscape, landscape, heritage, wildlife, tranquillity, valued buildings and the rights of way network in a manner which shaped the initial route assessment. We are also concerned by the lack of a design brief for the route which reflects local distinctiveness and ensures design considerations are on an equal footing with engineering considerations in development of the proposals

5. Route between London and the West Midlands – We believe the route proposed is not the best option for a new high speed rail line as it has not been properly informed

6. Appraisal of sustainability – We believe the appraisal does not effectively addresses the cumulative impacts on undesignated townscape, landscape, heritage, wildlife, tranquillity, valued buildings and the rights of way network or the opportunities for positive enhancement, including creating new rights of way networks, opening up new green space, compelling design of new structures and providing a long term endowment to manage and care for the local environment in perpetuity

7. Compensation and blight – We are disappointed by the delay in the promised review of land compensation for acquisition and urge that this be resolved in time to influence the HS2 proposals.

HS2 – a civic survey

This Annex presents the results of an online survey undertaken by Civic Voice during June and July 2011 of civic societies and others interested in HS2.

What do you think about the current HS2 proposals?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strong support	25.0%	45
Support if the local impact can be reduced	6.7%	12
Needs to be on a very different route	8.3%	15
Don't think we need any more high speed rail	60.0%	108
<i>answered question</i>		180
<i>skipped question</i>		4

Do you think HS2's proposals can be made acceptable by reducing their local impact?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	30.2%	54
No	69.8%	125
<i>answered question</i>		179
<i>skipped question</i>		5

Do you live in an area directly affected by HS2's proposals?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes - between London and Birmingham	56.6%	103
Yes - north of Birmingham	5.5%	10
No	37.9%	69
<i>answered question</i>		182
<i>skipped question</i>		2

In your opinion what is the single most serious negative impact from HS2's proposals?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Cost	59.2%	87
Landscape	18.4%	27
Encourages urban sprawl	6.1%	9
Increases carbon emissions	5.4%	8
Impacts on heritage	4.8%	7
Noise	5.4%	8
Townscape	0.7%	1
Other (please specify)		42
<i>answered question</i>		147
<i>skipped question</i>		37

Do you think HS2 will bring any benefits to your area?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	25.5%	41
No	74.5%	120
<i>answered question</i>		161
<i>skipped question</i>		23