

HS2 LONDON-WEST MIDLANDS Design Refinement Consultation (DRC) Buckinghamshire Councils' response

General Comments

This consultation seeks views on the proposals for 24 refinements to the published HS2 route between London and the West Midlands, which the Secretary of State for Transport intends to incorporate into the design of the route. This is a separate consultation from that being conducted on the draft Environmental Statement (ES) and Draft Code of Construction Practice (CoCP).

Notwithstanding the above statement (which is paraphrased from the consultation documentation) the proposals relevant to Buckinghamshire (5. Heathrow junctions, 6. Colne Valley viaduct, 7. Maintenance Loop near Stoke Mandeville, 8. Calvert Infrastructure Maintenance Depot) also appear in the draft Environmental Statement, forming part of the latest HS2 proposals. As with much of the HS2 consultation process the documents seem more about consultees providing further information rather than actually seeking views or comments. To be relevant, the consultation on the 24 design refinements should have been undertaken prior to the consultation on the draft Environmental Statement.

Enforcing the point above the DRC reads as a work in progress and seems to put reliance on the final formal Environmental Statement to answer all the outstanding issues/questions on the route.

Question 5 Heathrow junctions

Given that the route of a Heathrow Spur has been deferred pending the Davies report into airport expansion, it would be premature to make provision in phase 1 for what might (or might not) be the subsequent connections to a Heathrow spur. If they were included in Phase 1 and then later on, following the Davies report, it was decided that the Heathrow link should take another route that could not be served by the junction that had been included in phase 1, HS2 would (a) have potentially blighted properties which might have been affected by the junction that had been included in phase 1, and (b) would not reduce disruption to HS2 trains as they would still have to build another junction somewhere else.

Buckinghamshire Councils do not support the proposal to make provision so that a future link to Heathrow can be connected to Phase 1. As per appendix 11 prepared and submitted as part of our response to the 2011 consultation, we do not believe that the Government has provided quantitative evidence to support its claim that there is a case for the link to Heathrow. Analysis of the potential market for direct services to Heathrow shows that these will be heavily loss making before any account is taken of infrastructure costs.

Operation of services to Heathrow would make the fragile reliability of HS2 significantly worse. The link would have no benefit in terms of carbon emissions, as it will free up slots for more long haul flights, with higher emissions. Operation of Heathrow services will have a major opportunity cost for the project as result of reduced capacity at Euston.

Question 6 Colne Valley viaduct

Most of the Colne Valley viaduct is in the London Borough of Hillingdon. Buckinghamshire Councils would support the proposal to move the proposed alignment of the viaduct by up to 60 metres to the north as it is a little further away from residential properties near Durdent Court.

Buckinghamshire Councils remain concerned that the proposed new alignment will impact on the Marina (in Hillingdon but used by Buckinghamshire residents) and the Water Ski Club.

Question 7 Maintenance loop near Stoke Mandeville

Whilst noting the necessity for the maintenance loops Buckinghamshire Councils object on the basis of the paucity of information on the actual proposals, the lack of justification for their location and the failure to address in any way whatsoever the acknowledged and identified impacts on the surrounding population and landscape. In addition the Buckinghamshire Councils are strongly concerned over the consultation process and the fact that the decision to locate the loops here has already been made by reference to the inclusion of the refinements in the draft Environmental Statement consultation. We note the comment in Community Forum Area Report 11 paragraph 2.6.37 – “Option B (Stoke Mandeville) was considered the best overall outcome and for these reasons it was adopted in the Proposed Scheme.” This comment runs rather contrary to the consultation on Route Refinements.

Of specific concern are the references to four alternatives and the acknowledgement that all have problems but DfT is still minded to locate the loop at Stoke Mandeville. The draft ES consultation actually includes more information than the DRC documents however, does little to support the overall conclusion; it actually identifies even greater impacts on the locality.

It is very difficult to really appreciate what it is and the overall impacts; level, embankments with railway tracks on top, lighting proposals, need for staff accommodation/facilities, requirement for good road access, HGV traffic, estimate of how long the loop will be in active use, etc. The Buckinghamshire Councils understand the need for maintenance loops but there is little to no reasoning, assessment of impacts or mitigation proposals. This emphasises the need for more information and explanation to understand the scheme. One 1:50000 scale OS Map showing the location and a cursory explanation is not sufficient.

It would have been helpful to have a photomontage of the loop to help envisage its size, doubling of track width, parking etc so that stakeholders could ascertain a clearer idea of what the overall impacts might be. This should be included in the formal ES.

The Consultation references other complementary schemes such as a bypass for Stoke Mandeville; if this is required as part of the HS2 proposal then it needs to be added as a route refinement and considered accordingly. Other changes to the highway network are included in the scheme but not this highway proposal.

Question 8 Calvert Infrastructure Maintenance Depot (IMD)

The Buckinghamshire Councils have the same strong concerns and objections on the principles and the relevance of the Consultation as detailed above on the Stoke Mandeville Refinements. We note the comments in Community Area Forum Report 13 in paragraph 2.2.6 page 16 about the proposed route refinement being included in the proposed scheme and considered in the draft ES.

There is nothing in the Design Refinement consultation which changes the objections raised previously on the Infrastructure Maintenance Depot. In fact the refinements would increase the significant detrimental impacts on the locality. The consultation document (paragraph 8.3.1) states that a new chord to access the IMD will have no impact but this is not supported in the draft ES which notes that the new chord will require the movement of the East West Rail (EWR) connecting curve with the necessary demolition of a Grade II listed building.

There is now a greater area of land take and this questions the relationship with safeguarding proposals and comments made previously by the Buckinghamshire Councils.

The existing road network in this area is inappropriate for existing traffic and would be unable to sustain the increased levels of additional HGV traffic identified by HS2 Ltd.

We would stress the need for minimising the effects of light pollution that will be emitted from the IMD, in an area that enjoys a current minimum of light pollution.

We understand that the published noise figures do not include maintenance trains during the night or IMD operations. We expect to see the number of night maintenance train movements in the formal ES.

It is still very unclear how HS2 fits in with the EWR proposals which will be operating by the time HS2 construction begins. The DRC document does not appear to fully acknowledge the strategic significance of EWR. It uses the term 'Bicester to Bletchley line' and 'Aylesbury link' rather than referencing them as an integrated EWR route that is;

- Included in the National Infrastructure Plan
- Confirmed as a 'must do' committed rail project in the July 2012 High Level Output Specification (HLOS) for EWR service to be operational by December 2017.