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From the Secretary of State

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High Speed Rail

Thank you for your letter of 27 April about a number of high speed rail issues raised by your constituents. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

As you know, the Government's consultation on a new national high speed rail network has commenced and will run until 29 July 2011. The consultation document and supporting materials can be accessed on the consultation website <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk>. Perhaps I might take each of the issues you raised in turn.

First, on the effects of planning and building a new high speed line, I appreciate the concerns that are felt by some businesses, including farms, in your constituency. You mention the effect on businesses of the building of HS1. Both the Government and HS2 Ltd take very seriously the implications for people's homes and livelihoods of the routing and construction of the proposed high speed rail line. In determining its recommended options HS2 Ltd have sought to minimise such impacts. HS2 Ltd is committed to working closely with local authorities and communities to draw up a comprehensive and detailed package of measures to address local impacts of construction, including remedial work and restoration following the completion of construction works.

A Code of Construction Practice is also being developed to minimise impacts during the construction period. It would define the principles of approach and conduct, and the detailed measures that contractors would be required to comply with.

You specifically mention the interaction with Planning Policy Statement 7, which is rooted in providing sustainable rural communities and enterprise while preserving, and where possible enhancing, the historic and architectural value of our countryside. I can assure you that we would, of course, ensure that we comply with any assessments that are required by law, should a decision be made to progress with the scheme.

The consultation document, *High Speed Rail: Investing in Britain's Future*, sets out details of the statutory provisions on blight and compensation that would apply for any new high speed line, and a range of options for possible additional discretionary arrangements to help those whose properties would not be compulsorily purchased in order to build a new line, but who may still experience a significant loss in the value of their property as a result of it.

The latest information on the business case for a London to West Midlands high speed route is contained in the document *Economic Case for HS2: The Y Network and London – West Midlands* which we have published as part of the consultation documentation. HS2 Ltd carried out further work in the light of the most recent economic forecasts and the benefit cost ratio (BCR) for the Y network is estimated to be 2.6 including Wider Economic Impacts (such as better linkages between firms and the additional value to consumers of more goods and services). The BCR for the London to West Midlands route with a link to HS1 is 2.0 including Wider Economic Impacts.

You asked for further information on why a high speed rail route via the M1 or M40 has not been recommended. The consultation document *High Speed Rail: Investing in Britain's Future* (Annex B) contains details of the alternatives that were considered including routes that follow the motorway corridors. The main considerations are the potential environmental impacts (in relation to the M40 option), the substantial tunnelling to avoid major population centres (in relation to the M1 option) and the fact that any new high speed line would have to deviate significantly in places to negotiate the various motorway interchange areas and to keep the relatively straight alignment which high speed rail requires.

In terms of the properties affected by the building of a London to West Midlands line, the Appraisal of Sustainability (AoS) contains an estimate of the number of properties that may need to be compulsory purchased if, following consultation, the Government takes the decision to proceed. The main property impacts are on the Regent's Park Estate in Euston and in the

Washwood Heath area of Birmingham. Elsewhere property demolitions, although significant to those people directly affected, would be reasonably low in number given the scale of the scheme. The AoS non-technical summary and main documents are available on the consultation website.

You asked about route 2.5 of HS2 Ltd's March 2010 report. As you know we are consulting on the Government's preferred route for a line between London and the West Midlands which is broadly the Route 3 corridor described in the March 2010 report with additional mitigation and alignment changes which have been designed following my visit to the line of route last Autumn. If, following consultation, the Government decided fundamentally against this route whilst continuing to agree with the principal of high speed rail, any other route would need to be subject to a future public consultation.

Turning to the letter from the Wendover HS2 Action Group. Many of their concerns are addressed in our recently published consultation document *High Speed Rail: Investing in Britain's Future*. This emphasises that a 21st century economy needs 21st century infrastructure which is why we are prioritising projects such as high speed rail. Our plans form a key part of the National Infrastructure Plan – which sets out the Government's strategy to deliver the infrastructure our economy needs to compete in the modern world, and specifically note the importance of transformational, large scale projects which are part of a clear, long term strategy.

With regard to the Chilterns, it is important to be clear that HS2 would be designed to minimise impacts on local landscape. We have ensured that the area would be crossed predominantly in tunnels and deep cutting or alongside the existing A413 main road. We do believe that, with careful design and ongoing refinement, the impacts of new high speed rail infrastructure can be kept to an acceptable level. However, we will continue to make every effort to ensure mitigation opportunities are identified.

You asked about some issues around the process of consultation itself. The consultation is open in total for five months, considerably longer than the Cabinet Office recommended 12 weeks, ensuring people have enough time to understand the Government's proposals and submit a response. We have taken the restricted local election period into account in the planning of the consultation. Whilst there were no public events during the restricted period it has been possible to answer individual questions that members of the public raised during that time.

In terms of making the consultation available to affected households without internet access, people can call 0300 321 1010 to receive a paper copy free of charge. The consultation document and supporting material can also be viewed at central libraries along the London to West Midlands line of route. I

personally wrote to the occupiers of 172,000 properties along the London to West Midlands corridor with details on how to respond. Those unable to attend our roadshows or access the internet can also reply by post to the following address: Freepost RSLX-UCGZ-UKSS, High Speed Rail Consultation, PO Box 59528, London, SE21 9AX.

I will write to you separately about your letter of 4 January on behalf of your constituents about blight.



PHILIP HAMMOND