



The countryside charity
Staffordshire

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Charity number 219443

High Speed Two Phase 2a: Consultation under clause 60 of the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill as amended in the House of Lords

Response submitted by CPRE Staffordshire, the countryside charity working locally and nationally to protect and enhance a beautiful, thriving countryside for everyone to value and enjoy.

CPRE Staffordshire has previously opposed HS2 on the grounds of cost, speed, the lack of integrated transport, comparability with other countries, and its adverse impacts on the landscape, countryside and natural environment. Whilst we broadly welcome greater investment in public transport rather than road building, we remain of the opinion that the proposed benefits of HS2 are outweighed by the damage it will cause to the countryside and the lasting negative impact on communities living along the route. However, our response to this consultation is in recognition that Phase 2a has received royal assent.

The national CPRE charity has said that “the debate surrounding HS2 on the pros and cons will no doubt continue, but what is important now is for the government to ensure a ‘best in the class’ approach to avoiding, mitigating or compensating for the negative impacts on our countryside and communities. That means the highest quality design delivered in a way that respects landscapes and habitats, as well as reducing its carbon footprint.”

Our comments are on the impact of the HS2 Phase 2A works on the natural environment of the county of Staffordshire. Our county has a considerable range of geology and therefore scenery, both upland and lowland. We particularly value the tranquillity and seclusion of many of our rural areas. CPRE has in the past mapped the tranquil areas in Staffordshire and it is upon these areas of the highest ranking of tranquillity that so much of HS2 impinges, which is at odds with our vision of a beautiful and thriving countryside. In aligning HS2 through the ‘tranquil’ areas, there seems to be displayed a lack of concern for its inhabitants as regards environmental disturbance, severance and demolition.

High embankments for the railway 45 to 50 ft high plus power pylons will ruin landscape vistas. Canals are a major feature of Staffordshire’s rural attractiveness. They contribute to our rural economy through tourism and are also historic assets. HS2’s route will affect these canals. In some places the choice of alignment of the route will require enormous and alien earthworks. We doubt whether effective mitigation is feasible. Because of the forceful impact of these earthworks, we will need major mitigation on a very wide and imaginative scale.

The description in the Consultation Paper of the places in Staffordshire through which the route will go are set out in paras 1.7 to 1.16. They demonstrate the nature of what will be lost in the way of woodland, including ancient woodland, heritage assets affected, environmental sites including SSSIs that are very close to the route, among other things. There is a diversity of views

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about the project, but it is CPRE Staffordshire's duty to reflect the views of our members.

Question A: Please let us know your comments on the impact of road traffic as a result of the HS2 Phase 2a works.

At this stage, it is difficult to comment in specific detail. The construction process - both for HS2 itself and associated activities such as quarrying to supply it with sand and gravel - will inevitably generate a considerable increase in road traffic and the number of HGVs on rural roads. This must be carefully managed to minimise disruption to local residents. The safety of cyclists and other vulnerable road users must also be considered.

[Comment applies to the Phase 2a route through Staffordshire].

Question B

Please let us know your comments on the impact of the HS2 Phase 2a works on the natural environment, including but not limited to the impact on ancient woodland.

The removal of ancient woodland will inevitably have a substantial negative impact on the natural environment. Ancient woodland and the biodiversity this habitat supports cannot simply be replaced by planting saplings and translocating soil.

We ask that you ensure that all licences from Natural England are in place and that comprehensive ecological surveys are carried out by qualified professionals before starting any enabling or construction work. In terms of mitigation, replacement saplings should be planted on ecologically suitable sites and given suitable aftercare. On Phase 1, HS2 did not apply for licences to legally disturb bats or destroy their roosts on a number of ancient woodlands; we urge that you ensure this does not happen on Phase 2. We suggest that you work with the Badger Trust and the Staffordshire Badger Group to minimise impacts on badgers.

The use of security lights on compounds at night should be minimised to avoid creating more light pollution and disturbance for insects, bats and other nocturnal wildlife. We ask that you cooperate with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, who may wish to carry out their own surveys of the sites, and notify them in advance of any work being carried out.

We ask to participate in any future local discussions at an early stage if possible. We are aware that the Integrated Rail Plan is due to be published next month, which may affect matters.

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Question C: Please let us know your comments on whether there are sufficient transport provisions for the purposes of passengers connecting to HS2 Phase 2a, and to address changes to general passenger movements caused by the HS2 Phase 2a works.

We do not feel we currently have sufficient information to enable us to respond to this question.

Question D: Please let us know your comments on whether the construction of new railway stations and improvements to railway stations, including any associated reopening of lines, is necessary in relation to your response to question C.

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