High Speed Rail Phase 2a: February 2021 Consultation – Guidance note

Context

Stone Railhead Crisis Group (SRCG) has been investigating the detailed proposals of HS2 Phase 2a since autumn 2016.

Initially its focus was on the proposals for the Stone Railhead and Infrastructure Maintenance Base - Rail (IMB-R), which is located next to the M6 motorway just to the west of Stone in CA3: Stone and Swynnerton Community Area, but in recent times its technical assessments have been more far-reaching and its team have acquired a strong working knowledge of the proposals along the entire Phase 2a route.

SRCG's technical team, comprising people with a combination of engineering, environmental, transport planning and railway expertise, have given evidence on behalf of three local parish councils on four occasions during the passage of the Phase 2a Hybrid Bill though parliament.

The information given here is intended to guide local people on the relevant issues covered by the consultation questions, providing background to inform their own responses.

Question A

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

Along the whole Phase 2a route

Along the 58km length of Phase 2a, HS2 Ltd will create 45 road construction compounds, which will be used as bases for its construction workforce and 12 transfer nodes that will be used for the import and export of bulk earthworks materials.

The satellite compounds, and especially the transfer nodes, will be accessed by large numbers of heavy good vehicles throughout the Phase 2a construction period over a minimum period of 4½ years.

Although HS2 Ltd has provided some information about the number of HGVs it expects it will need to serve each construction site, it has been unwilling to explain how it has estimated the number of HGV movements or provide a breakdown of its calculations and assumptions.

HS2 Ltd has also claimed that it has reduced the number of HGV movements on public roads along the Phase 2a route by extracting sand and gravel from six borrow pits adjacent to its railway before backfilling with unsuitable excavation waste. It has said this is possible because these materials can be moved by dump trucks along internal haul roads constructed alongside the railway corridor.

Our analysis reveals that the company has grossly exaggerated its ability to move materials along its haul roads during the construction period. This is because it has not taken account of the constraints caused by a series of major obstacles, e.g. the River Trent and M6 motorway, which it will not be able to cross until the end of the construction period.

Because of this and errors in its calculations, SRCG believes that HS2 Ltd has underestimated the number of HGV movements on local roads by at least 720,000, with the consequential additional

impacts in terms of noise/air pollution, public safety and traffic congestion and the resultant harm to the people of Staffordshire, South Cheshire and North Shropshire. However, even if we take HS2's own calculations at face value, the negative impact on local roads will be huge.

The main roads and junctions that will be impacted by HS2 Phase 2a construction traffic are as follows:

- **CA1 Fradley to Colton**: A51 (Lichfield to Wolseley Bridge), A515 (near Kings Bromley) and A513 (east of Rugeley).
- **CA2 Colwich to Yarlet**: A51 (Wolseley Bridge to Stone), A518 (southwest of Weston), A513 (north of Stafford), A34 (Yarlet to M6 Junction 14).
- **CA3 Stone and Swynnerton**: A34 (Yarlet to Yarnfield Lane via Stone), B5026 Eccleshall Road), (A51 near Swynnerton), A519 (Clifford's Wood junction with A51 and Hanchurch), A500 near M6 Junction 15 and the entire Hanchurch interchange including A5182 to Acton.
- **CA4 Whitmore Heath to Madeley**: A53 (between junction with A518) and A51 junction at Blackbrook), A51 (Blackbrook to Woore), A525 (Woore to Madeley).
- **CA5 South Cheshire**: A500 (M6 Junction 16 to Nantwich), A51 (Nantwich to Woore).

In addition, to the main roads listed above, numerous 'B' and 'C' class routes, together with unclassified roads, many of which are totally unsuited to large construction traffic, will be impacted in each community area.

CA3 Stone and Swynnerton

The Stone and Swynnerton community area will be particularly impacted by HS2 construction traffic because it is where the Stone Railhead/IMB-R will be situated.

The Stone Railhead, which will subsequently become a permanent Infrastructure Maintenance Base, is a massive industrial facility that will extend approximately 3km (2 miles) parallel to the M6 motorway just to the west of Stone. It also cuts across the busy B5026 (Eccleshall Road) and the locally important Yarnfield Lane.

Since Stone Railhead will be built on excavation fill standing up to 11m high in the Filly Brook floodplain comprising waterlogged soft/weak underlying geology, HS2 Ltd will need to remove large quantities of excavation waste for off-site disposal and import replacement rock in an attempt to provide a stable foundation to its rail depot.

During its 5-year long construction period the site will be served by multiple construction compounds; a worker accommodation facility for 240 people; a concrete batching plant and, most significantly, the Yarnfield North Embankment Transfer Node, which HS2 Ltd expects to be able to cope with up to 2329 HGV movements per day.

With the need for HGVs to enter and leave the site at a rate of up to one every 30 seconds, HS2 Ltd's proposals for this transfer node are totally unrealistic and unachievable.

HS2 Ltd has also assumed that it can use the existing M6 overbridge at Yarnfield lane as an internal haul road to connect to the northbound carriageway of the motorway, but its proposals are engineeringly impracticable and potentially unsafe to users of the M6.

Its reliance for access on a stretch of the M6, which is notorious for congestion and temporary closure, further increases the risks of project delay. Consequently, in order to offset this risk, it is very likely that HS2 Ltd's contractors will seek extensions to the proposed 10-hour working day and this will mean overnight and extended weekend working.

In addition to the impacts on the main routes through Stone and Swynnerton, which will cause congestion and delay with the resultant negative economic consequences, HS2 Ltd's proposals for some minor roads will have a devastating impact on local communities.

One example relates to the residents of Walton in Stone who live on, or close to, Pirehill Lane, which HS2 Ltd has earmarked as an HGV route to its Yarlet Embankment Satellite Compound. Not only is the company proposing up to 53 HGV movements/day through the residential areas of Pirehill Lane, but it also proposes to use the narrow unsurfaced track that continues beyond the housing estate for more than one kilometre to the south.

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.

Along the whole Phase 2a route

High-Speed railways such as HS2 Phase 2a need to run in straight lines, with minimal change of grade, and therefore cannot readily avoid sensitive landscapes or habitats, such as ancient woodland.

HS2 Ltd's proposals to mitigate the impacts on the natural environment therefore generally take the form of providing compensation. In terms of ancient woodland, this mainly takes to form of planting areas of new trees, but such measures are considered by most environmentalists to be totally inadequate and therefore unacceptable.

CA3 Stone and Swynnerton

SRCG has focussed on the engineering feasibility and construction traffic impacts of HS2 Ltd's proposals.

Consequently, we are not offering technical guidance in relation to Question B but instead recommend local people seek advice from more specialist environmental groups, such as the Woodland Trust and the Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts.

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.

Along the whole Phase 2a route

The answer to the question is an **emphatic no** for the reasons set out below.

Phase 2a runs for a distance of approximately 58km from the end of Phase One at Fradley, near Lichfield, to Basford just south of Crewe.

Approximately 90% of the route is located within Staffordshire, with the remainder at the northern end situated in South Cheshire.

There are no HS2 stations located in Staffordshire, although HS2 Ltd is proposing an hourly service from London that will be shared between Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent. This service will be provided by what is known as a *'classic compatible'* train, i.e. one that is designed to run on the HS2 tracks as well as the existing classic railway network.

The proposed Stafford and Stoke on Trent train will leave Phase One of HS2 and join the West Coast Mainline (WCML) via a section of new railway located between Lichfield and Rugeley, known as the *'Handsacre link'*. It will then travel north via the WCML to stop at Stafford, before using the Norton Bridge to Stone railway to connect to the Manchester line at Stone. It will then stop at Stoke-on-Trent before terminating at Macclesfield.

This hourly HS2 classic compatible service will replace the existing separate hourly London Pendolino express services to/from Stafford that currently serves Liverpool Lime Street, and the twice hourly service to Stoke-on-Trent that terminates at Manchester Piccadilly.

The existing Pendolino train services to Stoke-on-Trent will not continue once the western leg of HS2 fully opens because Manchester Piccadilly will be served by two or three direct HS2 trains per hour from London. Similarly, the existing Liverpool Lime Street Pendolino services will be replaced by HS2 classic compatible trains that will leave Phase 2a in South Cheshire and stop at Crewe instead of Stafford.

Given these proposals, the opening of HS2 will result in a very a significant downgrading of the inter-city train services currently enjoyed by Staffordshire.

To make matters worse, the currently proposed classic compatible service to Macclesfield was planned when HS2 Ltd believed that it could run 18 trains per hour (tph) in and out of London Euston. However, signalling constraints mean that the capacity at London Euston has now been reduced to just 14tph.

London Euston also represents a major risk to the HS2 project. The station expansion has already been delayed by several years and this has been removed from Phase One of HS2. This means that Old Oak Common, located on the north west outskirts of the capital, will initially be used as the London terminus. However, as a terminus it only has a capacity of 10tph.

In addition, after already spending over £100 million on the station design, the Government has recently ordered a redesign of the London Euston proposals and this has resulted in a reduction in the number of platforms from eleven to ten. With the station and the section of line to Old Oak Common costing an estimated £8 billion, and the Crossrail 2 project now shelved, there have also been calls for this element of the project to be abandoned. With the Crossrail One project (currently under construction) also connecting to Old Oak Common, and now due to open in 2022) there have been calls for it to become the permanent London terminus instead of Euston.

Because of these adverse developments, and the dubious economic case for running an inter-city service to Macclesfield instead of Manchester, it is unlikely that HS2 classic compatible trains to Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent will be viable. There is therefore a significant risk that this service will be dropped from the HS2 schedules, perhaps even before it starts operating.

Consequently, despite suffering years of disruption and economic hardship from the construction of Phase 2a, Staffordshire will potentially have no HS2 service itself and worse still will lose its existing intercity connections to London, as well as Liverpool and Manchester.

In these circumstances, the only way to connect to HS2 will involve using local train services to either link to the HS2 classic compatible service at Crewe or the main HS2 service at Birmingham. However, both of these options are inferior to the existing arrangements and will be more convoluted and much slower than the 77-minute and 85-minute journey times to London that are currently available from Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent respectively.

Travelling to London via Crewe would also involve first going in the wrong direction and with the WCML services from Stoke and Stafford connected to Birmingham New Street Station rather than the HS2 hub at Curzon Street, time would be spent travelling (on foot, by taxi or bus or in future by tram) between the Birmingham stations.

CA3 Stone and Swynnerton

The Stone and Swynnerton community area would experience additional problems because HS2 Ltd's proposals will reduce capacity on the existing Norton Bridge to Stone Railway, thereby giving it the unenviable distinction of becoming the only existing railway in the UK to have its capacity reduced by HS2.

The 6km long Norton Bridge to Stone Railway is currently used by three passenger trains per hour (i.e. two Cross Country services and one NorthWest Trains service) in each direction and the HS2 classic compatible service to Macclesfield would add a fourth in each direction. This factor will therefore remove any opportunity to provide new services along this line and reinstate the local services between Stoke and Stafford that used to stop at Wedgwood and Barlaston stations, which in recent years have been replaced by bus substitution services.

More significantly, the positioning of the Stone IMB-R halfway along the Norton Bridge to Stone Railway means that the line would have to be used to supply maintenance materials to HS2. With eight passenger trains per hour operating on the line throughout the day, HS2 Ltd has admitted the Stone IMB-R would need to be supplied at night for its entire life, with all of the negative environmental (e.g. noise, and light pollution) effects that will cause, none of which have been assessed in its Environmental Statements.

Question D

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

Along the whole Phase 2a route

The answer to this question is an **emphatic yes** for the reasons set out below.

SRCG has long proposed that the Phase 2a Railhead/IMB-R at Stone be relocated to Aldersey's Rough, which is situated next to the former Newcastle/Stoke to Market Drayton Railway.

If this proposal were adopted it would provide a far better rail connection between the Stoke conurbation and Crewe than is currently available via the existing Kidsgrove line from Stoke Station. This is because, when combined with the planned station and line improvements at Crewe, it would enable future through services to Liverpool, Chester & North Wales, and the North West towns (e.g. Warrington and Preston) located on the main WCML to Scotland. It would also facilitate a direct train service to Manchester Airport, thereby avoiding the current need to change at Crewe or Stockport.

Although still formally classed as operational, the former Newcastle/Stoke to Market Drayton Railway was last used in 1998 to transport coal from Silverdale Colliery to the WCML at Madeley Chord junction.

The railway was closed to passenger services by the Beeching cuts of the mid-1960s, with the branch connection from Stoke Station to the Newcastle-under-Lyme station on King Street via the Hartshill Tunnel severed in 1965.

SRCG's proposals involve the construction of a new junction between the Newcastle/Stoke line and the WCML at Madeley Chord and the reopening of stations at Madeley, Keele, Silverdale and Newcastle.

The proposal could also be implemented in stages, as required, with the HS2 project funding the first stage and the new junction with the WCML at Madeley:

1. Madeley Chord to Aldersey's Rough (2km) to serve HS2 Phase 2a.
2. Aldersey's Rough to Silverdale (4km), where the track bed remains in situ.
3. Silverdale to Newcastle (4km), where the route is preserved as a footpath.
4. Newcastle to Stoke (2km), where the Hartshill tunnel will need to be reopened/re-excavated.

Once the connection is made between Newcastle and Stoke, there is the potential for local services to cross the city from east to west. This could stimulate the introduction of the new services between the East Midlands (e.g. Derby and Nottingham) and the North West via Stoke. The long-held aspiration to

reopen the Leek line would also be boosted and mineral freight from the quarries in the Staffordshire Moorlands and Derbyshire Peak District could transfer from road to rail transportation.

In addition to the connectivity benefits of the proposals, the reopening of the Newcastle/Stoke to Market Drayton Railway would provide a major economic boost to the region and especially the town centre of Newcastle, which is the most populated town in the UK without its own railway station.

Another major beneficiary from the reopening of the line and the station at Keele, would be Keele University and its growing Business and Innovation Park.

This proposal would truly support the Government's levelling up agenda, in contrast to HS2 Ltd's plans which currently massively disadvantage Staffordshire.

CA3 Stone and Swynnerton

The relocation of the Stone Railhead/IMB-R to Aldersey's Rough would also help offset the capacity reductions that HS2 will cause to the Norton Bridge to Stone Railway, especially if the HS2 Macclesfield service is cancelled, as seems likely.

The associated freeing up of capacity that HS2 will create on the main WCML line north of Stafford and the Manchester line between Stone and Stoke-on-Trent would also create the opportunity to reinstate train services to existing stations along the route and promote green travel opportunities via the construction of new stations at development areas, such as at Trentham and Meaford, which are located alongside the existing railway network.

Stone Railhead Crisis Group
February 2021