



**HS2 PHASE 2b: CREWE TO MANCHESTER AND WEST MIDLANDS TO LEEDS
NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE COMMISSION CONSULTATION ON RAIL NEEDS
ASSESSMENT FOR THE MIDLANDS AND THE NORTH**

Representations of Pickmere Parish Council

May 2020

1 Pickmere Parish Council has considered the evolving proposals for HS2b since the inception of the project. It has consistently objected to the principle of the proposal as well as to many of its design features. Its fundamental objection to the project has been on the basis that the economic case for the project, and in particular the benefits it would bring to the North West region as well as to this part of Cheshire, has never been satisfactorily justified, particularly in relation to the damage to the environment and the communities of the region that the project will bring.

2 This objection has over time been strengthened as it has become increasingly clear that:

- The implementation costs of developing HS2a were substantially underestimated, leading to significant over-expenditure. This has reduced the finance available for implementation of Phase 2b, which brings with it the risk of exacerbating the damaging effects of 2b on the environment and communities of the NW region, as economies have to be made in the provision of mitigation works.
- The gravity of the ground condition issues that arise in Cheshire have to date been insufficiently evaluated; it is believed that as investigations continue it will be realised that the costs of physical implementation of the project in the affected areas will have substantially to increase.
- It appears clear that Government's consideration of the project so far has failed to take account of its carbon emissions and climate impact. If they were to be properly accounted for they are likely both to reduce the potential economic benefits of the project (by requiring reductions in the capacity of the proposed network) whilst increasing further the costs of the project (by for instance taking greater account of its environmental impacts).

3 Further, it has been apparent at every stage of the long-running consultation process for HS2b that HS2 has consistently failed in its duty to provide sufficient and clear information on its proposals, and to demonstrate how it has taken the comments, objections and suggestions of local organisations and communities into account in developing the proposals.

4 Without prejudice to its objections to the project taken as a whole, the Parish Council has strongly objected at every stage to a number of the detailed elements of the proposed scheme as it passes near to and through the parish, including seriously detrimental impacts on the local environment due to:

- the wildly excessive engineering solutions that have been proposed to solve local road-re-routing issues etc;
- the impact of heavy construction traffic on this rural parish throughout the long construction period – noise, disturbance, traffic danger and pollution;
- proposals that have been hinted at but never detailed, for the ‘improvement,’ i.e. widening, of local country lanes to accommodate the substantial construction traffic that will seek to use the parish’s small-scale road network, much of which is subject to a 7.5 tonne limit.

5 In relation to the current consultation, the Parish Council has the following comments.

6 It first notes that the Oakervee review concluded that HS2b needs to be considered as part of an integrated rail plan for the North and Midlands which also includes NPR, Midlands Rail Hub, and other major Network Rail schemes to ensure that these are scoped, designed, delivered, and can be operated as an integrated network, with the opportunity being available to challenge design and costs on phase 2b including standards, running speed, and responsibility for delivery. The Government agrees on the need for integration of the various projects whilst driving down unnecessary costs and over-specification.

7 In this context this Parish Council first endorses the comments of High Legh Parish Council, a neighbouring parish which is directly affected by the recently introduced passive provision for the Manchester to Liverpool and Liverpool to London junctions, ostensibly as part of the integration of HS2b with Northern Powerhouse Rail. It appears that these recent additions to the HS2b proposals for High Legh reflect a sudden and superficial reaction to the realisation that integration with NPR is going to be a requirement. This apparently desktop measure will lead to a route that is not one of the number of optional routes that TfN/NPR have considered and it seems certain that the route HS2 are proposing would make this stretch of the NPR line prohibitively expensive, and difficult to plan and to build. TfN’s objective of connecting Liverpool, Manchester and Manchester Airport can be met without use of the HS2 network, and any merger of the two projects should set out clearly the benefits to both projects of doing so.

8 Further, the HS2 proposals foresee the Liverpool route taking up much of the high-quality Green Belt land in north-west Cheshire East and devastating populated areas toward Warrington and Liverpool. These linkages could be achieved in a far more cost-effective, efficient and environmentally sensitive way by utilising existing rail routes, and upgrading existing infrastructure, thereby rendering the High Legh junctions superfluous.

9 At the least, these options should be fully evaluated and the current HS2 proposals should be completely disregarded until a much more comprehensive assessment of the needs of NPR is carried out.

10 In relation to the Call for Evidence questions, this Parish Council has the following comments.

1/2/3 Which potential investments should be in scope of the NIC’s assessment of the needs of the Midlands and the North? Which set of investments should take priority?

11 The Parish Council does not comment on the needs of the Midlands. However, it believes that the fundamental need for the North – both North West and North East regions – is to solve the east-west inter-connectivity inadequacies that have existed for centuries. In terms of this region, solving those problems should be uppermost, and the potential benefits of HS2 should have a second priority.

12 The Council believes that a better and more economically justifiable and viable solution would be one focussed on achieving a satisfactory NPR network, with linkages to HS2b being those which suit NPR requirements at least as well as they suit HS2b, and that HS2b should become a lower-specified project, seeking lower design speeds for instance than the current project, such that it is able to adopt greater flexibility in routeing, track layout and gradients, thereby permitting reductions in the detrimental impacts it has on the environment and communities through which it passes. Indeed there are strong arguments that a new HS2b line from Crewe northward should not be pursued at all, but that existing infrastructure should be upgraded to secure the essential capacity objectives.

5/6/7 What impact would those investments have on greenhouse gas emissions – especially in relation to the Paris Agreement and net-zero considerations? Other potential effects of the investments identified? Impacts on quality of life?

13 The current HS2b project is based around seeking a certain passenger capacity and providing an ultra-high specification in relation to train speed. However, whilst the passenger capacity assumptions which form the basis of the project have never been accepted by this Council (and the Council is conscious that various scheme changes as a result of environmental assessment and other past representations have actually resulted in the likelihood that the passenger capacity of the scheme has been reduced thereby further impacting on its overall viability) the current Coronavirus crisis is resulting in a very wide-ranging change in attitudes toward home-working and the need for face to face business meetings. The Council considers that this will impact how business is carried on after the crisis has passed and will consequently further reduce the demand for ultra-high speed capacity between this region and London.

14 The current HS2b proposals are based around an objective of securing ultra-high speeds. This means that the route is very much constrained by the requirement to maximise straights and minimise curves and gradients. This clearly impacts substantially on routeing and land take. Further there is evidence that as train speeds increase, they become less and less efficient in terms of energy and resource use and impact more and more on the environment.

15 In the context of seeking to minimise greenhouse gas emissions, and compliance with the Paris Agreement, a far more appropriate strategic response would be to develop a rail network into and across the North which seeks to maximise passenger rail use on a comprehensive basis, including for commuting into the larger urban centres, for cross-region movements (sadly very much restricted by the paucity of efficient rail connections at the moment), and for strategic connections to the Midlands and London. A network which gives priority to NPR and with secondary consideration being given to a newer, less radical and less environmentally damaging HS2b would, it is believed, serve the region better in terms of economic efficiency, environmental acceptability, and the general living conditions of the Region's residents, inter alia reducing pressure on the region's congested and heavily polluting road networks. Such a lower specification (but comprehensive) approach is even more necessary in the context of the capital project funding situation that the country will face as it emerges from the current Coronavirus crisis.

11 Impact on international connectivity across the Midlands and North.

16 Manchester Airport is the 3rd largest airport in the UK and the only one of the 5 biggest UK airports that is not based in London. However, its potential is constrained by the inadequate nature of rail links across the Northern region as a whole, which lead to greater road traffic demands, in turn impacting on environmental conditions, carbon emissions, etc. across the region, as well as the need for the Airport to continually expand its car parking provision. Whilst, as a result of the current

pandemic and the growing priority given to carbon emission considerations, it might be predicted that air traffic will be badly impacted for years to come, nevertheless it would make considerable sense for the rail linkages to the Airport from across the region as a whole to be considerably improved. This can not only bring considerable environmental benefits but also enhance the economic prospects of the Region as a whole.

Conclusions

17 In conclusion, this Council believes that recognition of the economic needs of the North, as compared to those of the metropolis, has been very slow in coming. The Northern Powerhouse concept is welcomed but still needs to be brought to reality, in part through improvements to the region's infrastructure. HS2b will not address this objective. More important to the region is to solve its historical infrastructural deficiencies – in particular the inadequacy of its east-west transport links. The most crucial task in both regional economic and environmental contexts, and indeed in terms of national environmental targets, is to produce a step-change in the region's public transport linkages. For those reasons it is considered that NPR should be fully a part of evaluation of the region's infrastructure needs, and that in this context it should take a higher priority than HS2b.