

High Speed 2

National Protection for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Chilterns Conservation Board was set up by Parliament in 2004 to look after the nationally protected Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It has statutory purposes to:

1. Conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB
2. To promote understanding and enjoyment of the Chilterns.



The construction of any high speed railway through the Chiltern is not compatible with these aims. Therefore the Conservation Board opposes all three proposed routes.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are given the highest level of protection in national planning policies to ensure they are not damaged by inappropriate development. There is a presumption against damaging development of any kind.

These policies (Planning Policy Statement 7 paragraph 22) can only be overridden if it is in the national interest and the proposed development cannot go elsewhere.

The Chilterns Conservation Board does not believe the case for HS2 provides proven national environmental and economic benefits.

The claim for HS2 is that high speed rail will deliver £2 of benefits for £1 of expenditure. This return is based on a notional value of benefit of £8 per passenger using HS2 providing a total notional benefit of £29 billion over a period of 60 years. However, the costs of £17bn do not include any of the economic dis-benefits to those affected nor any value at all to the damage to the environment.

“The evidence we have seen suggests, overall, Wider Economic Impacts are likely to be a relatively small part of the business case for HS2 at a national level...”

“However at a local level the impacts could be much more significant.” (HS2 report - section 4.2.20)

For those who think this will end internal domestic flights the HS2 report is clear:

“The total market for accessing Heathrow from the West Midlands, North West, North and Scotland is currently around 3.7 millions trips. Our modelling suggests relatively little of this would shift to HS2.” (HS2 report Section 3.3.10)

If you thought that short haul flights to Europe would end:

“Under any scenario the number of international passengers on HS2 is likely to be fairly limited.”
(HS2 report Section 3.8.12).

The additional costs of building a loop to Heathrow, and a link between HS2 and HS1, could be as much as £10bn.

The national benefits, if any, would be limited to only those cities directly served by HS2. However, for some, journeys will get worse.

“Over certain WCML route sections there would be some time lost against today’s services.” (HS2 report Section 3.10.20)

“While the majority of transport users would benefit from the introduction of HS2, some passengers could experience longer or less frequent services... “ (HS2 report Section 3.2.11)

Will it lead to massive economic regeneration?

“We have also considered the impacts of changes in spatial patterns of economic activity that might result from HS2.”

“.. what evidence exists, suggests that this is largely a relocation of existing firms rather than creation of new firms – which suggests the impact on national productivity is likely to be limited.”
(HS2 Report Section 4.2.19)

How will the environment benefit?

At best the saving in carbon emissions will be 4.6 m tonnes over 60 years, but this will only be possible when the network reaches Scotland and significant numbers of passenger switch from planes to trains.

Even this figure is based on simplistic assumptions and a failure to adequately calculate the amount of carbon emitted during construction and released from destroyed soils, woods and other vegetation.

“Whether the introduction of HS2 leads to an overall increase or decrease in emissions is almost entirely dependent on the impact of changes in demand on aviation emissions. There is considerable uncertainty around this and actual changes in emissions will depend on how airlines respond to reduced demand.” (HS2 report Section 4.3.32)

For the vast cost there are ways of saving this very modest level of carbon (only 76,000 tonnes per annum over 60 years).

The politicians making the decisions need to know that the public do not accept there will be national economic and environmental benefits which justify irreversibly damaging the Chilterns. The priority should be to invest in IT and those transport improvements which benefit most people for most of the time which don’t damage the environment.

Chilterns Conservation Board

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