

High Speed 2

In 2009 the Government published a report *Britain's Transport Infrastructure: High Speed Two*, and established a company, High Speed Two (HS2) Limited, to consider a new line between London and the West Midlands as the first phase of a high speed rail network in Britain. They also looked at broad corridors for a subsequent extension of the high speed network to serve Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, the North East, and Scotland, and with linking HS2 with the existing high speed line (HS1) to mainland Europe.

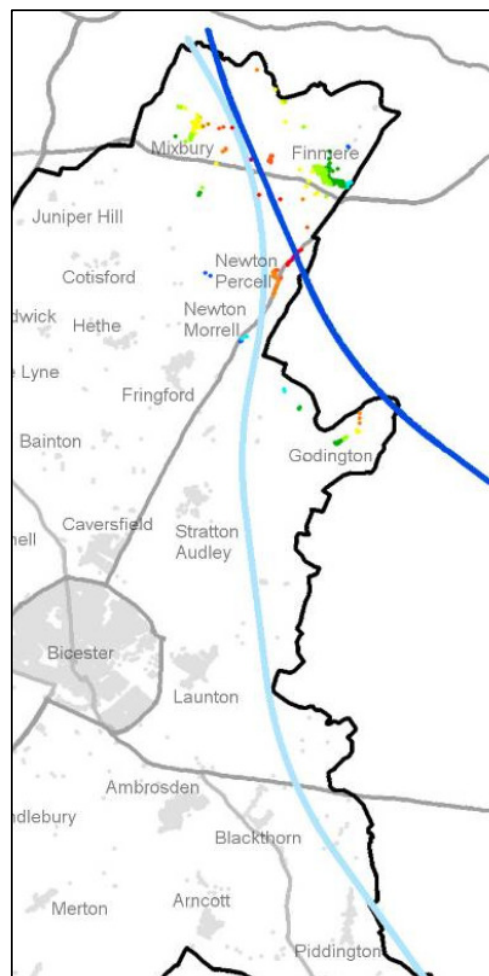
HS2 Limited presented their findings to the Secretary of State for Transport in December 2009, and in March 2010, the Secretary of State published a Command Paper *High Speed Rail*, including a preferred route for the high speed line between London and the West Midlands. The route was 'optimised' during 2010, and in Oxfordshire it was moved away from the village of Mixbury and placed in a cutting to reduce its impact.

The preferred route enters the county to the north of Godington on a 650m long viaduct, about 3½ metres above ground level. If the old Great Central Railway embankment is retained it will shield the village of Godington. The route then leaves the county before re-entering just to the east of Newton Purcell in a cutting between 3-5 metres deep following the old embankment which appears to be removed. The A4421 is diverted over the new railway and the tracks enter a deeper cutting past Fimmere Quarry and under the A421.

The line then deviates north eastwards from the old Great Central Railway in a deep cutting up to 9m deep. To the north-east of Mixbury the line comes out of the cutting and passes over a 35m long viaduct over a floodplain before re-entering a 7m deep cutting. It then rises onto an embankment and over a 10m high viaduct over the River Great Ouse to leave the county.

The map (right) shows HS2 Limited's preferred route of HS2 in dark blue, and their 'next best route' in light blue. The proposed route passes through 3.4 miles of Oxfordshire, considerably less than the 11.7 miles that would be affected had the 'next best route' been selected. The County Council has quantified the number of affected properties. A total of 375 properties will be affected by the proposed route (falling within 2000 metres each side of the line) whilst the 'next best route' would have affected 1,926 properties.

The County Council has a strong preference for the chosen route as it is shorter and will have less environmental impact on the county. An alternative route suggested by the Shadow Transport Secretary in October 2011 to serve



Heathrow directly (rather than by an interchange station) would have meant HS2 following the light blue route line alongside the Chiltern Main Line. **The County Council would strongly oppose any proposal to alter the route as that would blight more areas of the county and would worsen the impact of the line on our local communities.**

Although there are few, if any, direct benefits from HS2 passing through the county, there are some indirect benefits. The Old Oak Common interchange station, outside London Paddington, will be served by HS2, Crossrail and existing long distance and Outer Thames Valley suburban services on the Great Western Main Line. In future it will be possible to travel from Oxfordshire to mainland Europe with just a single change of train at this station. Improving international access is good for business development and economic growth.

HS2 will also help to create much needed capacity on the existing rail network if long-distance intercity journeys are transferred to HS2 (assuming there is no fare premium). In turn this will allow an even greater shift of freight from road to rail, as capacity will be made available on the West Coast Main Line. With the completion of the East-West Rail project, this could remove a significant number of lorry movements from the M40 and A34. This released capacity will also facilitate additional passenger trains serving the growth areas of Milton Keynes and Northampton.

A public consultation in early-2011 generated 55,000 responses and led to refinements to the route, although none in Oxfordshire. There is a 50% increase in tunnels (22.5 miles), and 56½ of the 140 miles will now be in cuttings. Just over 1½ miles of the railway will now be visible in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

In January 2012, the Government announced its intention to proceed with plans to build a high speed rail line between London and the West Midlands, and on to Manchester and Leeds. A Hybrid Bill will now be introduced to Parliament by the end of 2013 to obtain the powers to construct and operate the high speed line.

The County Council is currently an associate, non-funding, member of 51M – a group of 18 councils that have come together to oppose HS2 on the basis that they have concerns over the evidence and business case. However, the County Council will not be involved in any decisions or legal action that may be taken by 51M following this Government announcement. The County Council will expect the funding for HS2, thought to be around £17 billion for the initial route between London and Birmingham, to be over and above the funding needed in the short to medium term on other prioritised transport schemes that are necessary for economic development and prosperity in Oxfordshire and the South East.

Inevitably there will be considerable disruption during construction of the line with a need for extensive groundwork to excavate and build the cuttings, embankments and tunnels. However, the information provided by HS2 Limited so far lacks clarity and it is not possible to fully appreciate the impact on specific areas.

The County Council will work with HS2 Limited to ensure the impact of the new rail line, during its construction and in use, is minimised and in particular, the highway diversions at Newton Purcell and protection of the Public Rights of Way, including footpaths and bridleways.

Future Engagement

HS2 Limited has proposed a number of mechanisms for local engagement:

- **Community forums:** These will allow representatives from the community to work with HS2 Limited to identify the most significant impacts in their area and advise on the mitigation measures acceptable to them. Membership could include parish and district councils, individual residents, local action groups, businesses, farmers and landowners. The scope will include:
 - informing the local community about HS2 proposals and consultations;
 - highlighting local priorities for mitigating the environmental impacts of the route; and
 - discussing potential mitigation options put forward by the planning forum, such as landscaping and screening the railway, managing noise and the reinstatement of highways.

The County Council is suggesting two groups in Oxfordshire: Godington & Newton Purcell and Finmere & Mixbury.

- **Planning forums:** These will be the main focus of engagement with the highway and planning authorities (i.e. the County and District Councils), meeting every two months complemented with bi-lateral discussions on specific issues. It is intended they will discuss design issues, planning and construction issues, environmental impacts and mitigation principles:
 - Design development, including highway diversion;
 - Location specific constraints, design and impacts, including construction;
 - Spatial planning considerations;
 - Rights of Way – temporary closure, diversion and reinstatement; and
 - Environmental Impact Assessment – method, progress and reporting.

The County Council would participate in the Oxfordshire & Northamptonshire Forum that has been proposed by HS2 Limited, and will ensure officers are able to fully participate in the meetings.

- **Environment forum:** This will comprise national representatives of environmental consultancies and government departments, and will help to develop environmental policy for the development stage of HS2.

Although not in the county, the Infrastructure Maintenance Depot at Claydon (Bucks) will be a generator of traffic on rural country roads. **The County Council will work with HS2 Limited to identify preferred access routes that minimise traffic passing through our villages.**

Subject to approval from Cabinet, this draft text will be inserted into the Rail Strategy for Oxfordshire Draft for Consultation, Page 79.