



Transport Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 3266 Email: transcom@parliament.uk

Andrew Stephenson MP
Minister of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Rd
London
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20 May 2020

Dear Andrew,

High Speed Two (HS2) next steps

Thank you for appearing at our evidence session about HS2 on 24 April and for your subsequent letter dated 4 May. I am writing on behalf of the Committee to respond to the commitments you made during the session and set out some further questions we have about the project.

The Committee will maintain scrutiny of the HS2 project, with a rolling programme of oral evidence sessions over the course of this Parliament, including sessions outside Westminster. We look forward to the Department's close co-operation in this work going forward.

Transparency

Transparency about the progress of the HS2 project is essential to ensure proper accountability and robust decision-making. We were pleased to hear that "being transparent to Parliament is going to be a cornerstone" of your tenure as the new dedicated HS2 minister (Q62). As the largest ever project on the Government's Major Projects Portfolio, it is only right that parliamentarians are regularly informed of the project's progress and have the information they need to properly hold Government to account for its delivery. Parliament must not be left in the dark about delays and cost overruns, as it has been in recent years. Regular, robust and open information to Parliament is important for building trust in this project. We would be grateful if you could please share your current plans for the six-monthly reports to Parliament with us (Q90), so that we can help inform their content.

Governance and culture of HS2 Ltd

When giving the green light for HS2 to proceed, the Prime Minister was clear that the decision came with a commitment to fundamentally change the way that HS2 Ltd is managed. We note that representatives from the Department and HM Treasury will be appointed to HS2 Ltd's Board. However, we would be grateful if you could set out further details on proposed changes to:

- improve the performance and oversight of HS2 Ltd; and
- transfer responsibility for Euston station and Phase 2b to other delivery bodies.



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Speed and frequency of HS2 services

You told us that, although the Government has not yet officially responded to the Oakervee Review, you are sceptical about the case for reducing the number of trains per hour down (tph) from 18 to 14, in line with the Review's recommendation (Q75). The Review expressed concern about whether HS2 could reliably run 18tph because this is a higher frequency than currently delivered on high speed lines anywhere in the world. Oakervee also said that running such high speed and high frequency services made the infrastructure costs 10% higher than if HS2 had been designed at a more "internationally comparable standard." We would, therefore, welcome clarity on:

- why the Government believes it is necessary for HS2 to run at such a high speed and frequency, given the additional cost involved; and
- what further steps the Government and HS2 Ltd are taking, or will need to take, to gain assurance that it will be possible to reliably run 18tph on the line, once the full Y-shaped network is complete.

Euston station and Old Oak Common

The Oakervee Review advised that terminating at Euston station, rather than Old Oak Common, is important for realising the benefits of HS2. Mark Thurston told the Public Accounts Committee that HS2 Ltd is waiting on a decision from Government about whether or not to proceed with the current design for Euston station. We would like to know whether the Government plans to go-ahead with the current design and, if not, the process and timescale for redesigning Euston station.

Minimising the loss of biodiversity

You outlined in your letter of 4 May the steps that are being taken to minimise the loss of biodiversity, as a result of the construction of HS2. We are pleased to hear that those working on HS2 will, where possible, avoid clearing habitats during bird nesting season, in line with best practice within the industry. However, it is regrettable that delays to the project have meant that areas of ancient woodland are now being cleared in spring when birds are nesting. We would, therefore, be grateful if you could:

- confirm the number of work sites where habitat clearance is currently scheduled to take place during nesting season; and
- share an example of the Working Methods Statements you referred to in your letter on 4 May, which set how the clearance of habitats will take place.

We would be grateful for a response to this information by **Tuesday 9 June**.



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Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw Merriman'.

Huw Merriman MP
Chair of the Transport Committee