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Rt Hon Iain Stewart MP

Chair, Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

13 December 2022

Dear Chair,

I would like to thank members of the Transport Select Committee for inviting me to give evidence on 2 November 2022 at the session on HS2 chaired by Ben Bradshaw MP.

I welcomed the opportunity to provide an update to the Committee on the progress being made across the HS2 programme. Major civil engineering works are well underway across the project, with £23 billion contracted into the supply chain and over 350 active sites between the West Midlands and London supporting almost 30,000 jobs. More than 2,500 businesses have carried out work on HS2 to date, of which 97% are UK-based and over 60% are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), delivering benefits before a single train has started running.

During the evidence session, I committed to following up on several matters raised by members of the Committee. This letter contains the additional information that was requested as well as some other points I thought it would be useful to clarify.

Wood supply

Your colleague, Mr Karl McCartney, asked whether environmental sustainability has been taken into account in HS2's wood supply chain (Q31). I can confirm that HS2 Ltd requires all contractors to ensure that all timber products purchased are supplied with a BREEAM recognised responsible sourcing scheme, certified by a third party. HS2 Ltd uses the most globally recognised responsible sourcing schemes – the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). In the last financial year, 100% of all timber products, purchased for either temporary or permanent use, were responsibly sourced.

Biodiversity

The metrics used by HS2 to calculate biodiversity no net loss and net gain were discussed at various points during the evidence session. I am aware that Clive Maxwell, Director General at the Department for Transport, also wrote to the Committee on 11 November on this point.

To date, HS2 Ltd has utilised an adapted version of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) biodiversity offsetting metric. This adaption was undertaken to make the metric more relevant to the linear nature and scale of the HS2 scheme and was undertaken in consultation with Natural England and Defra. It should be noted that the use of a biodiversity metric is not a requirement of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that is needed to support the deposit of a hybrid Bill. As confirmed to the Committee by Natural England during the evidence panel, there is no statutory requirement for HS2 to undertake an assessment of biodiversity performance utilising Defra or other biodiversity accounting metrics.

HS2 has made a commitment to go beyond the environmental mitigations set out in the hybrid Bill through political commitments for no net loss in biodiversity on Phase One and Phase 2a, and an aim to deliver a 10% net gain in biodiversity, excluding for irreplaceable habitats, on Phase 2b (Western Leg). HS2 Ltd's policy position is confirmed in our [Environmental Sustainability Vision \(January 2022\)](#). This outlines the position of aiming to deliver a 10% net gain in biodiversity for Phase 2b (Western Leg) and describes HS2 Ltd's ambition to move beyond no net loss for Phase One and Phase 2a.

With regard to suggestions made during the earlier evidence panel that there is a shortfall in biodiversity mitigation, we are confident that any ecological impacts are being addressed comprehensively through our extensive environmental protection and habitat creation work across each phase of the programme.

Ancient Woodland

I'd like to clarify the latest statistics regarding HS2's impact on ancient woodland. The number of ancient woodlands forecast to be directly impacted across Phase One, Phase 2a and Phase 2b (Western Leg) is outlined below. As the design of each phase continues to evolve, we will look to further reduce these numbers. For example since the Bill deposit, we have reduced the impact on Phase One ancient woodland by almost 30% – from circa 30ha to 20.6ha. This reduction is predominately as a result of design refinement. All HS2 reporting relating to ancient woodlands can be found online [here](#).

- 54 ancient woodlands are currently forecast to be directly impacted.
- 36.1 hectares of a total area of 269.4 hectares of ancient woodland is currently forecast to be felled.
- 87% of the total area of the 54 ancient woodlands forecast to be directly impacted will remain untouched.
- 229 hectares of new planting is currently proposed as compensation (this figure includes ancient woodland soil receptor sites).

In my response to Q60 from Mr Chris Loder, I touched on the amount of ancient woodland that has been created or restored on the programme to date. As part of compensation measures for the Phase One impacts on ancient woodland, we have moved over 15ha of ancient woodland soils that would otherwise be lost into our ecological mitigation sites, and we have also planted 64ha of new native woodlands.

In addition, projects funded by the Phase One Woodland Fund have created a further 123ha of new native woodland and have restored 71ha of existing ancient woodland in poor condition. These new and restored woodlands will create a network of bigger, better-connected, climate resilience woodlands across the landscape.

Sapling failure

During the first panel session, Mr Greg Smith asked witnesses whether the summer heatwave this year affected the saplings on the route (Q70). Over 845,000 trees have now been planted on Phase One of HS2 and, whilst it is too early to determine the full impact of the heatwave, HS2 has a process in place in the event of failed saplings. We remain committed to successfully planting seven million shrubs and trees across Phase One, replacing those that are lost due to extreme weather conditions.

HS2 Ltd expects failure rates of new tree and shrub planting to be within the industry best practice guidance range of 5-15%. This target may vary during a prolonged period of drought when newly planted saplings are vulnerable. The Forestry Commission have therefore advised that the success of tree planted areas should be assessed after five years from initial planting. It should be noted that watering trees across the scale and distance of HS2 planting would not have been an appropriate or environmentally sustainable use of water resources during the recent drought period. Replacing failed plants is considered a much more cost-effective solution and a far more ethical use of water resources during dry summer conditions.

Efficiency programme

In my response to Mr Greg Smith's question regarding efficiency measures (Q5), I committed to providing further detail on our Efficiency Challenge Programme (ECP) to the Committee.

The ECP was set up to drive value for money across the whole HS2 programme by identifying and delivering cost savings. The ECP has an ongoing pipeline of special projects and areas of focus, which includes assessing productivity improvements to reduce cost and waste (such as earthworks), leveraging new technologies, reducing duplication, and applying key learnings from one phase of the project to others. The ECP also includes a horizon scanning process to continue to identify new opportunities for saving in the short, medium and longer term.

It might be also of interest to the Committee to note that, as reported in the Government's most recent report to Parliament, £800 million of net savings and efficiencies have been identified within Phase One to date. These principally consist of savings across the main works civils portfolio and savings in the acquisition and resale of land and property.

Vehicle movements

I also committed to providing further detail on the amount of vehicle movements of spoil and construction materials in response to a question from Mr Jack Brereton (Q25).

To date, all vehicle movement numbers have been compliant with Environmental Minimum Requirements (EMR) and are monitored against this. We have also used fewer routes than expected overall. A breakdown of vehicle movement numbers (a movement of construction traffic on the highway) by contractor to date can be found on the next page.

Table 1: A breakdown of vehicle movement numbers (a movement of construction traffic on the highway) by contractor to date

Contractor	BBV	ALIGN	BBVSJV	EKFB	MD	SCS	Total
2020	20,877	28,113	1,483	2,554	N/A	30,689	83,716
2021	44,580	95,568	24,527	46,886	8,284	125,646	345,491
2022*	281,561	87,911	28,149	132,484	13,825	110,522	654,452

**up to 15 November 2022*

Across the HS2 programme we are devising ways to reduce the number of vehicle movements in order to reduce carbon emissions and alleviate congestion on local roads. We recently launched a 1.7 mile-long conveyor network in West London to move excavated spoil from three London sites to our Logistics Hub at Willesden Euro Terminal. The conveyor network is expected to carry over five million tonnes of spoil, removing one million lorry movements from roads in West London.

Constituency casework

During the evidence session, Mr Greg Smith raised several constituency-related matters. I have asked my colleagues working on the route through Buckinghamshire to write directly to Mr Smith to provide updates on the issues raised, which they would also be happy to discuss further at their next meeting with Mr Smith.

I hope the information provided in this letter proves useful to the Committee in its continued work on HS2. If you or members of the Committee have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Thurston

Chief Executive Officer,
High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd