



Department for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP

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Iain Stewart MP
Chair, Transport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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16 May 2024

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your letter of 10 April seeking further clarifications on Handsacre Junction following my initial reply of 11 March 2024.

Firstly, it is important to be clear that the interventions now proposed at Handsacre do more than maintaining the slow-line connection and therefore direct comparisons cannot be made to the previous designs. Network North recognised the need for interventions in this area, as outlined in the command paper of 4 October 2023, funded within the savings from the cancellation of HS2's later phases. The most recent analysis considered whether a move to a fast-line connection or other interventions in the area would deliver the desired outcomes of improved capacity and timetable efficiency, as well as offering best value for money. This work, led by Network Rail working with HS2 Ltd and West Coast Partnership Development, concluded that a slow-line connection with additional interventions in other areas would deliver the best value for money, would maintain the HS2 schedule (as they would be deliverable with current legislative powers), and would be less disruptive to current passengers than alternatives.

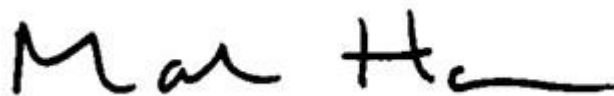
You asked why the analysis conducted recently came to a different conclusion about the merit of a fast-line connection than those reached to support the original plans. A high-level appraisal of the costs and benefits of a fast-line connection were completed as part of the work to consider options to enhance Handsacre, considering the use of the funds provided as part of the Network North announcement. The conclusion of this work recommended an enhanced slow-line connection in this area of the West Coast Main Line as it is significantly lower cost for little benefit forgone. In isolation, a fast-line connection does have marginal operational benefits compared to connecting to the slow lines and therefore was included in the original HS2 Phase 1 design.

However, the analysis recently undertaken demonstrated that, under the revised scheme, Handsacre is not the capacity constraint and, at this time, better value capacity and reliability gains could be achieved through a combination of retaining the slow-line connection at Handsacre and investing in improvements in other sections of the West Coast Main Line.

You asked about the effect of proceeding with a slow-line connection at Handsacre on the current paths on the West Coast Main Line, the resilience of this part of the network, and the functionality of Rugeley Trent Valley Station. The analysis we have undertaken has shown that there is no difference to the number of train paths at Handsacre from the package of works we are considering (including retaining a slow-line connection) compared to moving to a fast-line connection today. With the HS2 connection at Handsacre, the future train service will move some passenger services onto the HS2 network between Handsacre and Euston to deliver more reliable and quicker journeys. It will be resilient given the specification of the new infrastructure and we expect this connection at Handsacre to have no impact on the functionality of Rugeley Trent Valley Station.

You asked about studies to support the decision to switch to a slow-line connection when Phase 2a delivery was accelerated. HS2 Ltd undertook analysis on the change to a slow-line connection at that time. The issue that drove that decision was the aim of reducing disruption to the West Coast Main Line which was lessened through the slow-line connection. While the junction will now see higher usage than previously planned under the full HS2 scheme following the cancellation of Phase 2, we still assess that the slow-line connection with the additional works would deliver the required capacity in an optimised way, provide better value for money and incur less disruption to the West Coast Main Line.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Harper', with a stylized, cursive script.

The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT