

## **Written evidence submitted by Wendover Parish Council**

### **(1) About the Wendover Tunnel Proposal**

A new proposal for a Tunnel at Wendover has been developed that would simplify, significantly reduce the construction and operational costs, and mitigate the damaging environmental impact of the HS2 Phase One line of route at Wendover.

At a time when the rising costs, environmental impact, deliverability and long-term objectives of HS2 are under scrutiny (because of the current COVID-19 Pandemic), its key advantages include:

- 1. Provides significant savings of between £322 million and £325 million** with considerable additional savings compared to the current HS2 scheme.
- 2. Saves £750 million on a whole life basis** including long-term maintenance costs compared to current scheme.
- 3. Reduces the construction programme time by up to 2 years** compared to the proposed route.
- 4. Protects Wendover and the Chilterns AONB** from visual, noise and environmental damage caused by the current complex above surface HS2 scheme; and
- 5. Prevents severe and costly restrictions on future A413 road development** caused by the impact of proposed HS2 viaducts on a vital transport route at Wendover.

This simple design-ready solution at 4.2km in length could be delivered without the need to amend existing legislation and would de-risk the Wendover section of HS2. It is similar in many ways to the North Downs mined tunnel at Bluebell Hill that was constructed to mitigate the environmental impact of HS1 as it passed through Kent and the High Weald AONB, also the mined tunnels through Castle Hill on the approach to the Channel Tunnel both of which pass through virtually the identical ground conditions seen at Wendover. Both schemes were constructed on time and budget. It is fully supported locally and has cross-party support from Parliamentarians (including those representing Chilterns AONB constituencies) and from local authorities including Buckinghamshire County Council.

There are significant issues with the current scheme at Wendover and new Transport and Works Act Order powers are available and in use for tunnel projects across the HS2 Phase One route. This new situation provides a window of opportunity for the Department, HS2 Ltd, Wendover, and the Chilterns AONB to benefit from an independent assessment of the construction, whole life costs and practicality of the Tunnel proposal at Wendover v HS2 Ltd.'s proposed scheme.

Such an independent assessment would support the Department for Transport's position that full and complete answers have been provided to all the questions posed about the Wendover Tunnel. However, several key questions remain unanswered, and we believe that an urgent independent review would rightly demonstrate that the Tunnel proposal is a viable alternative that would simplify,

de-risk and “green” the HS2 Phase One route and deliver significant long-term, whole life cost savings and environmental benefits compared to HS2 Ltd.’s complex and above surface scheme.

An infographic of the Tunnel proposal v HS2 Ltd current design is attached for your information (please see slide 3 for the direct comparison).

## **(2) Key points and suggested questions for the recall session**

### **(2.1) Failure to examine all possible efficiency savings on HS2 Phase One**

**Neither HS2 Ltd nor the Department for Transport have sought a formal assessment of the Wendover Tunnel option on the Wendover section of the HS2 Phase One route from contractors EK/EKFB:**

- Why were EK/EKFB restricted in identifying efficiencies at Wendover? Was it because of a specific direction from the Minister at the time to not consider the Wendover Tunnel option?
- Reducing the efficiency saving opportunities for contractors cannot deliver the best value for money outcome for the Government or the UK’s taxpayers.
- Did the Minister issue a specific instruction to EK/EKFB instructing them to not consider the Tunnel option at Wendover?
- Was a decision made to restrict EK/EKFB’s design scope to the surface scheme solely as it passed Wendover on HS2 Phase One; and if so (1) on what date the decision was taken, (2) who took the decision, and (3) whether Wendover is the only location on HS2 Phase One that EK/EKFB were prevented from seeking cost savings and engineering efficiencies?
- Did the Department require HS2 Ltd to produce a rigorous assessment of costs in relation to alternative proposals for a tunnel at Wendover on HS2 Phase One?
- What is the Department’s latest estimate of the costs and construction time of the current consented scheme at Wendover on HS2 Phase One?
- Is the Wendover experience and failure to consider a major saving properly, an indicator of a more general, route wide problem regarding identifying efficiencies?

### **(2.2) Using Transport and Works Act Order powers to construct the Wendover Tunnel.**

**The Department for Transport have stated that the Mined Tunnel at Wendover would require “new legal powers” and would “impact on the Phase One project as a whole”:**

- However, the recent example of the Transport and Works Act Order procedure being used for a similar efficiency saving tunnel at Bromford also on the HS2 Phase One route indicates that is not correct.
- Contractors at Bromford rightly identified a tunnel option as being more efficient and less expensive than the current consented scheme. However, contractors at Bromford were not working under a specific Ministerial direction that prevented them from considering a tunnel option.
- Furthermore, it is now apparent that there are significant design issues with the current consented scheme at Wendover that could further delay the HS2 Phase One construction timetable.

### **(2.3) Failure to provide supporting evidence and methodology.**

**The Department for Transport have stated that proposals for a Tunnel at Wendover put forward by mbpc Ltd and OTB Engineering both utilised open-faced mining as their construction methodology, which HS2 Ltd, EK/EKFB engineers and officials have repeatedly stated is not a viable or safe method of construction in the conditions at Wendover:**

- However, the Department has failed to provide any evidence or methodology in support of their position.
- Can the Department provide evidence that EK/EKFB and Department for Transport officials have repeatedly stated that open face mining is not a viable or safe method of construction in the conditions at Wendover?

**(2.4) Continued lack of openness and transparency.**

**The Department claims that they have provided full and complete answers to the questions posed on the Wendover Tunnel and that the response to the Parish Council's FOI request in 2020 "reflects the reality of the situation":**

- The Department's position is not supported by their continued failure to share (1) copies of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) report into HS2 Ltd.'s consideration of the Short Mined-Tunnel proposal and the "independent" external consultant review into the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal undertaken by KPMG that were both completed in 2018, and (2) the methodologies and costings that formed the basis of the Departments decision to instruct EKFB to not consider the Tunnel proposal.
- Will the Department ensure that the independent reports are made available without further delay to enable a transparent and informed discussion on the construction, costs and practicality of the Tunnel proposal v the current consented scheme at Wendover?
- Will the Department agree to an urgent independent assessment of the construction, whole life costs and practicality of the Tunnel proposal at Wendover v HS2 Ltd.'s proposed scheme during the next 6-month review period?

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