

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF HS2 ON THE PROPOSED ROUTE

The proposed HS2 route through the Chilterns would have a devastating impact on a landscape of national importance. 400kph trains require a very straight route and low gradients. The environment is being sacrificed in pursuit of this extreme speed, even though alternatives are available. The public will be unable to make an informed assessment of the environmental impacts of HS2 as the full Environmental Impact Assessment will not be available at the time of the public consultation.

- The Chiltern Hills are classified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), defined as a precious landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in **The National Interest** to preserve them
- The Chilterns form a major recreational area for South East England in general and London in particular as well as attracting visitors from abroad
- AONBs have statutory protection to secure their **permanent protection** from development that would damage their special qualities
- There are 38 AONBs in England and Wales created by legislation. If Government permits irreversible damage to the Chilterns, what are the chances for the future of other AONBs?

There are four aspects to the Environmental Impact of HS2: **carbon emissions, noise pollution, the structural landscape, and biodiversity and the ecosystem.**

Carbon emissions

- The Government claims that HS2 is a key part of the low-carbon economy, yet HS2 Ltd conclude that 'HS2 would not be a major factor in managing carbon in the transport sector', affecting UK transport emissions by between -0.3% to +0.3% over 60 years
- HS2 Ltd's figures do not take into account the impact of construction of the line (embedded carbon), which would add significantly to the UK's carbon emissions

Noise pollution

- high noise levels would be inflicted on residents during construction, which could last 7 years
- estimated noise level for 350kph trains is 95 decibels at 25 metres; figures for 400kph trains are unavailable
- attempted noise mitigation would result in unsightly walls and barriers
- even with mitigation, nearly 10,000 households between London and Birmingham would face noticeable noise increases (21,000 households if noise is unmitigated)

The structural landscape

- The Chilterns contains two important ancient National Trails, The Ridgeway and the Icknield Way, both of which would be damaged by HS2
- in Buckinghamshire alone, 79 rights of way would be directly severed by HS2; this includes 67 footpaths
- Green Belt land would be destroyed (HS2 would cut through 25km of Green Belt in Buckinghamshire alone)
- the siting of viaducts along the route would have a deleterious effect on protected landscapes
- at least 400 properties between London and Birmingham would be demolished, including 220 social housing flats at Euston and student accommodation for Birmingham City University at Curzon Gate
- demolished buildings would also include at least nine Grade II listed buildings
- the settings of a number of important buildings and their grounds would be spoilt, e.g. Hartwell House and Shardeloes, both Grade I listed

Biodiversity and the ecosystem

- the distinctive nature of the Chilterns is due to chalkland geology
- habitats range from chalk grassland to the most extensive beech woodland plus globally rare chalk streams
- destruction of such areas would have an adverse effect on local habitats and consequently the wider ecosystem
- as well as the 22 metre-wide track-bed, a 'managed vegetation' zone of ca. 25 metres would be required on each side of the track to prevent leaves being blown onto the line, meaning the felling of countless trees (any tree preservation orders would be overruled)
- rare species of organisms are threatened e.g. *Gentianella ciliata* which occurs on one chalk hill near Wendover; also various orchid species are at risk, e.g. *Orchis militaris*, *Orchis simia*
- ancient woodlands, local nature reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest are at risk
- in Buckinghamshire alone, there are 59 different protected species within a 1 km buffer of the line
- the Ian Rennie Memorial Woodland at Wendover would be destroyed
- HS2 would cut across 23km of highly-productive Grade 2 farmland
- almost 2 million cubic metres of waste would arise from tunnel excavation
- tunnelling over or through the Chilterns aquifers and areas with vulnerable groundwater would present major risks of pollution, and could cause long-term damage to London's water supply

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