

Ms Sarah Raffety

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20 APRIL 2010

Dear Ms Raffety,

Thank you for your e-mail of 24 March to the Secretary of State for Transport, about the proposals for high speed rail in the UK and environmental concerns. I have been asked to reply.

High Speed Two is the route recommended by HS2 Ltd for a high speed railway line between London and the West Midlands. HS2 Ltd's report, published alongside the Government's Command Paper on 11 March, makes recommendations on routes and station options for high speed rail as well as assessment of costs, benefits and sustainability impacts.

In response to HS2 Ltd's work, the Command Paper set out proposals that Britain should develop an initial core high speed network to link London to Birmingham, Manchester, the East Midlands, Sheffield and Leeds and be capable of carrying trains at up to 250 miles per hour. HS2 Ltd is working on detailed route options for the lines from the West Midlands to Manchester and Leeds.

This Y shaped network of around 335 miles would bring the West Midlands within about half an hour of London and deliver journey times of around 75 minutes from Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester to the capital. HS2 Ltd's work has shown that as a first step a high speed line from London to Birmingham would offer high value for money as the foundation for such a network, delivering more than £2 of benefits for every £1 spent. There would be connections onto existing tracks, including the West and East Coast Main Lines so that high speed trains can run from the outset to other cities including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle and Liverpool.

The Department for Transport does not currently hold an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for any part of the recommended high speed rail route. An EIA must be produced in respect of any project to which the EU's Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (85/337/EEC, as amended) applies, which includes the construction of new railways. However, there is an exemption under Article 1.5 of the Directive for any project which is adopted by a specific act of national legislation; this is

because “the objectives of this Directive, including that of supplying information, are achieved through the legislative process.”

Although no decision has been made regarding any new high speed line, should the Government decide following public consultation to take forward a high speed rail project, it is proposed that the necessary powers would be sought via a hybrid bill, which would meet the requirements of the Directive as set out above. It would be at this stage that an Environmental Impact Assessment, or its equivalent, for any new high speed line would be produced. In the case of the Crossrail Act 2008, for instance, permission for the development was made dependent on the production of the relevant environmental assessments.

However, as set out in the recent Command Paper – *High Speed Rail - a full Appraisal of Sustainability* will be published in the autumn, in order to inform public consultation on HS2 Ltd’s recommended route. This will set out the environmental and local impacts of that route, and will include the results of the additional work on mitigating local and environmental impacts that the Secretary of State has asked HS2 Ltd to carry out.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Shepherd  
Rail & National Networks Ministerial Liaison Team