

Wendover Parish Council
Informal Submission to the Independent Review of HS2
September 2019
Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel Proposal

(1) Introduction

Wendover Parish Council welcomes the announcement on 21st August 2019 of an independent-led government review of HS2 that will consider “whether and how we proceed” with HS2 ahead of the ‘Notice to Proceed’ decision for Phase 1 (London-West Midlands) due by the end of 2019.

It is essential that the Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel proposal is included in the reviewing and testing of all the existing evidence in order to allow the government to make properly-informed decisions on the future of Phases 1 and 2 of the project, including the estimated cost and schedule position.

Wendover Parish Council has always had serious doubts that previous reviews fully considered the Short-Mined Tunnel proposal. No evidence has ever been produced to dispel our misgivings. Indicators in Ministerial Statements have through inaccuracies, fuelled these misgivings.

(2) Rising costs of HS2

There is now widespread concern about the rising costs of HS2 and the real threat that the project will fail to provide good value for money. Indeed, on 20th June 2019, a House of Commons Library briefing note, *High Speed 2: the business case, costs and spending*, confirmed that HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport were aware that costs would be £9 billion more (£65 billion) than public estimates, although this information was not made publicly available. In addition, The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee concluded in its report, *Rethinking High Speed 2* (published on 16 May 2019) that, “costs do not appear to be under control” and that HS2 needed a “rethink”.

Furthermore, in a Written Statement on HS2 on 3 September 2019, the new Secretary of State for Transport, Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP explained that Allan Cook (Chairman of HS2) in his advice on the cost and deliverability of the scheme, did not believe that the current scheme design could be delivered within the budget of £55.7 billion, set at 2015 prices. Instead he estimated that the current scheme required a total budget, including contingency, in the range of £72 to £78 billion, at 2015 prices. The Secretary of State also provided an update in current prices and commented, “adjusting by construction cost inflation, the range set out in Mr. Cook’s report was equivalent to £81 to £88 billion in 2019 prices, against a budget equivalent to £62.4 billion”.

(3) Failure of HS2 management and stakeholder engagement in the Chilterns

HS2’s community engagement strategy in the Chilterns has been shambolic and the organisation has failed to maintain mutually effective and beneficial dialogue with key stakeholders. Important deadlines have been missed including failure to meet their own complaints procedure objectives. HS2 Ltd.’s staff are giving and receiving confusing messages, seem to be poorly led, and talented people are leaving the project. In our direct experience HS2 Ltd have failed to deliver their communications and engagement obligations.

Furthermore, issues regarding land access and procurement remain and the peripheral offerings made during the Phase One Hybrid Bill Petitioning Stage including the cycleway network, the training college, the high standard of environmental safeguarding, all are pale imitations of what was promised.

(4) Learning lessons from HS1: North Downs Mined Tunnel

The successful delivery of HS1 between London and the Kent coast included the development of the North Downs mined tunnel at Bluebell Hill to mitigate the impact of the line of route as it passed through Kent and the High Weald AONB.

The HS1 North Downs mined tunnel is comparable in many ways to the tunnel required to reduce the impact of HS2 at Wendover as it is very similar in terms of size, geometry, use, geology and construction method to that proposed by Wendover Parish Council and the Wendover Society.

The main difference between the Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel and the North Downs mined tunnel, apart from the increased size to take account of the faster line speed, will be a central partition wall, which will isolate passing trains to prevent excessive overpressure and will assist in controlling ventilation as well as providing

safe routes for emergency access and evacuation. However, the basic form and method of construction used for the North Downs mined tunnel could be readily adapted for Wendover where the geology is broadly similar.

(5) Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel solution

Following the example of the North Downs mined tunnel, the construction of a 4.2km long single bore mined tunnel with centrally located shaft and approach cuttings at Wendover is entirely feasible within the constraints of the land area designated by HS2 for the construction of their published route. A twin-bore mined tunnel with centrally located shaft and approach cuttings at Wendover is also feasible. Furthermore, the mined tunnel and shaft can be constructed without the need for “additional provisions” in the *High-Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Act*.

Proven mined tunnel construction techniques reduce the time of construction by driving several faces simultaneously. The materials, plant and equipment required for mined tunneling are available in the UK construction industry or can be readily sourced in Europe, thereby simplifying preparation and construction with minimal capital expenditure with no requirement for major bespoke items such as tunnel boring machines. Indeed, two recent independent expert reports demonstrate that at a time when the cost of HS2 is under severe pressure, the Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel solution is **Simpler, Cheaper and Quicker** than current HS2 Ltd proposals:

(1) OTB Engineering report on a Mined Tunnel Alternative solution at Wendover (2019), concludes that the proposal is compliant and eminently practicable; and

(2) Michael Byng, construction economist and quantity surveyor’s costing report (2018), complements the engineering proposal and details the substantial savings that are possible.

(6) Key advantages

This simple design-ready solution could be delivered without the need to amend existing legislation and would de-risk the Wendover section of the HS2 phase one route. Its key advantages include:

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

Local landowners have also confirmed that they would make land readily available to HS2 Ltd for the tunnel portals and the ventilation shaft at a nominal cost.

(7) Local and national support

This innovative Short-Mined Tunnel proposal 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. Selected key Parliamentary supporters include:

David Lidington MP (Conservative, Aylesbury)
Rachael Maskell MP (Labour, York Central and Shadow Minister for Rail)
Chris Evans MP (Labour, Islwyn and member of the Public Accounts Committee)
Dame Cheryl Gillan MP (Conservative, Chesham and Amersham)
Dominic Grieve QC MP (Conservative, Beaconsfield)
Lord Astor (Conservative)
Ian Liddell-Grainger MP (Conservative, Bridgwater and West Somerset)
Baroness Young of Old Scone (Labour)
Andrew Bridgen MP (Conservative, North West Leicestershire)

(8) Conclusion

Wendover Parish Council is fully supportive of the Independent Review of HS2 and confident that it will correctly identify and highlight the Wendover Short-Mined Tunnel proposal as an innovative solution that would help to ensure that HS2’s construction and “whole life” costs and budget are right and that it is deliverable.