



Briefing note for Transport Select Committee Members

Evidence session with Andrew Stephenson MP (Minister of State for Transport with responsibility for HS2)

Wednesday 6th January 2021, 930am

Wendover Tunnel Solution

(1) Simplifying HS2 Phase One and reducing its cost and environmental impact

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

At a time when the rising costs, environmental impact, deliverability and long-term post pandemic objectives of HS2 are under scrutiny, two independent expert reports demonstrate that the Wendover Tunnel solution is **simpler, cheaper, greener and quicker** than the current HS2 scheme:

- (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)**, details the substantial savings that are possible.

This simple design-ready solution at 4.2km in length could be constructed by using the Transport and Works Act Order (TWAo) procedure that HS2 Ltd are currently using to construct the Bromford Tunnel on HS2 Phase One. 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. In addition, the tunnels for the Channel Tunnel approach through Castle Hill near Folkestone passed through virtually the identical geology and groundwater regime as seen at Wendover without incident and were completed to time and budget.

The numerous complex construction methods including viaducts, cuttings, embankments, cut & cover tunnelling and interfaces between them present in the current HS2 scheme at Wendover make it extremely risky in terms of delay and cost escalation. **By simplifying the scheme to just one method of construction with hugely reduced surface impact such risks would be largely eliminated.**

Indeed, HS2 Ltd are proposing to use mined tunnels to construct the approaches to Euston Station, where the risks are far greater; and elsewhere on the project at Chilterns Tunnels, Bromford Tunnels (under TWAo procedure), London Tunnels, and Northolt Tunnels.

(2) Key advantages

This simple design ready solution could be easily constructed by using the TWAo procedure. Its key advantages include:

1. **Provides significant savings** of between £322 million and £325 million.
2. **Saves £750 million** on a whole life basis including long-term maintenance costs.
3. **Reduces the construction programme** time by up to 2 years.



4. **Protects 8000 homes in Wendover and the Chilterns AONB** from visual, noise and environmental damage caused by the current complex above surface HS2 scheme; and
5. **Can be easily constructed** by using the TWAO procedure

(3) Using the Transport and Works Act Order procedure on HS2 Phase One

It has now become evident the HS2 Ltd intends to use the TWAO procedure on HS2 Phase One. Indeed, a TWAO will be used at Bromford, Warwickshire to extend a tunnel there, removing the need for a viaduct:

This is precisely the same procedure that is required for the Wendover Tunnel proposal and there are substantial parallels between the Bromford tunnel extension and the Wendover Tunnel proposal. Both schemes simplify overly complex sections of the line and are easily achievable with routine modifications of the Phase One Act. Indeed, a tunnel at Wendover would ensure that HS2 Phase One is simpler, faster, cheaper and greener than the current complex, high-risk and expensive above surface proposal. **The Committee should ask for a detailed legal explanation from the HS2 Minister setting out why TWAO procedure could not be used to allow a tunnel at Wendover.**

(4) Lack of engagement, openness and transparency from the Department for Transport and HS2 Ltd

Government Ministers and HS2 Ltd are seeking to actively close the debate down on this viable option:

(4.1) **The Department for Transport** has confirmed that the current OTB Engineering proposal for a Tunnel at Wendover was not considered by either the House of Commons or House of Lords during the Committee Stage of the Phase One Hybrid Bill and has refused repeated requests to release copies of two independent reviews into the Tunnel solution (carried out for the Department in 2018).

(4.2) **HS2 Ltd** has consistently avoided a discussion about the benefits of the Wendover Tunnel solution and has consistently refused to provide the evidence to back up its stance – be it technical data on the method of construction, or accurate costings, nor has the contractor been permitted to carry out such a calculation despite many requests. Consequently, it has been – and remains – impossible to establish which alternative is more cost-effective. **The Committee should ask HS2 Ltd to share all technical data and costings relating to the Wendover Tunnel solution with Wendover Parish Council.**

(5) Urgent need for independent value for money assessment

What is needed as a matter of urgency is an audit of the cost comparisons and the Government must ensure that the same methodology is used for both proposals so that an accurate position can be obtained as quickly as possible. This is the only way that a value for money assessment can be achieved, as both the Tunnel solution and consented scheme must be estimated using the same methodology. **The Committee should seek assurances from the HS2 Minister that an independent value for money assessment will be progressed during Q1 2021.**

HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport have failed to provide appropriate mitigation to minimise noise pollution and disturbance in the Wendover area caused by HS2 Phase One construction and operation. Time is running out for Wendover, the HS2 project, UK taxpayers and the environment to benefit from the Tunnel solution that would simplify, de-risk and “green” HS2 Phase One and deliver significant long-term, whole life cost savings, noise and environmental benefits.

We enclose an infographic of the Wendover tunnel solution v HS2 Ltd current design for your information (please see slide 3 for the direct comparison).

For further information please contact Murray Stewart (Stewartpublicaffairs@gmail.com)