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High Speed Rail: London to Birmingham

The Government has published proposals for high speed rail in Britain, with a detailed recommended route option for the first part between London and Birmingham.

High Speed Rail, published 11 March 2010 gives details of the recommended route option and outlines next steps. This leaflet gives some key facts and answers to frequently asked questions on the proposals.

We will undertake a full public consultation in Autumn 2010 on the recommended route option and on high speed rail beyond the West Midlands to the north of England and Scotland. Subject to this consultation, the timeline from there could look like the one below.

March 2010 – Government published proposals for high speed rail and issued Exceptional Hardship Scheme consultation

Before Autumn 2010 – further engagement work and consultation preparation

Autumn 2010 – formal public consultation

2011 – Government decides whether to proceed and proposed route for London to Birmingham

2011-2013 – further detailed design and assessment of the route

2013 – further public consultation

2014 – Hybrid Bill laid in House of Commons

2019 – construction could start

2026 – line between London and Birmingham could open

Key facts

- Journey time from London to Birmingham City Centre cut by over 30mins to 49 minutes.
- High speed trains run on to existing West Coast Mainline to serve Manchester and Scotland quicker.
- Trains running at up to 360kph (225 mph).
- Ability to run up to 14 trains per hour initially.
- 400m long European trains with capacity of up to 1100 seats.
- Potential to create 10,000 jobs.
- Line between London and Birmingham could open for business in late 2026.
- Total infrastructure cost of £15.8 to £17.4bn.
- Wide ranging benefits from faster journeys and freeing up capacity on the West Coast Mainline.

More information can be found on www.dft.gov.uk/highspeedrail

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need a high speed rail line?

Without this line, by 2033 the average long distance West Coast Mainline train would be 80% full – meaning very severe overcrowding at peak times. Apart from delivering much faster journeys, HS2 would release capacity on the West Coast Mainline, enhancing commuter, suburban and freight services.

Where exactly does the route go?

HS2 Ltd's recommended route is on the map on the back. High speed trains would go from London Euston, through a Crossrail Interchange station at Old Oak Common in West London, to an interchange station near Birmingham Airport and the NEC, and on to a new Birmingham station.

It is important to note that the Government has not committed to building any route yet. No final decision will be taken on the route before members of the public have had a chance to offer their views in a formal public consultation, starting this Autumn.

Why this route?

HS2 Ltd undertook extensive work to examine all the available routes any new line could take. This route was recommended by HS2 Ltd as it offered the best solution based on a number of different criteria - including cost, benefits and fulfilment of design aims, as well as the mitigation of environmental impacts.

Will it just go from London to Birmingham?

The Government asked HS2 Ltd to focus on London to Birmingham, but also to consider the case for rail services further north. Their report indicated that there is a strong case for carrying out more in depth work on routes both to Manchester and Leeds. Government has now commissioned that further work.

Where can I find out what this means for me?

See www.dft.gov.uk/highspeedrail for the Government paper, full HS2 report, maps and additional information. These documents are also available at central libraries.

Will I be affected by noise/construction/etc?

More detailed work is required to identify exactly which properties might be affected.

There would be impacts during construction of the line. We will be undertaking further analysis into these and how to minimise them.

Further information on noise from the railway and ways to keep it to a minimum will be available by the time of the formal public consultation in the Autumn.

Will my house be knocked down?

There is no getting around the fact that if the line goes ahead, we would have to knock down some buildings. The preferred route option seeks to minimise this as much as possible, for example tunnelling where appropriate. This is all several years off though. Again, it is only a recommended route at this stage.

When will I know for sure?

After the formal public consultation, if the Government decides to go forward, it will ask for more detailed design work to be carried out before a route is decided upon and a draft hybrid bill laid in Parliament.

What happens if my house will need to be to be knocked down?

Under existing law, residential owner occupiers directly affected by confirmed plans would have access in due course to statutory blight provisions. These will come into force at such time as Safeguarding Directions are issued in respect of any route, most likely following decisions after the Autumn consultation.

What if I am trying to sell my house now?

The Government recognises that these plans will cause uncertainty and perhaps difficulty for those people most affected, including home sellers. That is why we intend to introduce what is known as an Exceptional Hardship Scheme so that home owners with a pressing need to sell can apply to the Government to purchase their property at the full market rate. Government has issued a consultation on this Scheme and it can be found at www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open.

When will construction start?

Construction will not start until 2019 at the earliest.

What does this mean for my existing rail service?

We will work to ensure that disruption on other lines caused by construction of the high speed line is kept to a minimum.

What happens next?

The government will carry out a full public consultation starting in Autumn 2010. The consultation will cover the detailed route from London to the West Midlands, the strategic case for high speed rail in the UK and the Government's strategy for a core high speed rail network.

How can I comment / influence what is going on?

We encourage everyone with an interest to send their views during the consultation period. We will hold consultation events in the local areas most affected by the route and stations.

Why do I have to wait until Autumn?

It will take a bit more time to look further at how the potential impacts on the local environment and communities can be reduced.

What happens between now and the consultation?

The Government will work alongside HS2 Ltd to continue the engagement work that they have already started with key stakeholders. Continuing this engagement does not preclude the need for formal public consultation, but simply ensures that it is as effective as possible.

Engagement at this stage will help to ensure that any particular local, regional or cultural sensitivities are fully factored into consultation plans and that the formal consultation process enables all interested parties to register their views. This engagement will also involve representative groups with strong potential interests in the proposals and their impacts. Advice from these groups will be important in ensuring that communications activities are conducted in the most effective way possible.