



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Thursday 9th March 2017

Dear Secretary of State

**HIGH SPEED TO PHASE 2B: CREWE TO MANCHESTER; WEST MIDLANDS TO LEEDS ROUTE
REFINEMENT CONSULTATION 2016**

We, as a group of MPs representing Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham, would like to make clear our opposition to the proposals for the M18 HS2 route. It is our view that a station at Sheffield Meadowhall, as originally proposed, far better serves the region as a whole and we fully endorse the submissions from Doncaster and Rotherham Councils.

In summary, the Meadowhall route provides faster journey times, better prospects for regeneration and jobs, and more capacity, at very similar cost. We believe the case for this route is clear and decisive. The reality is that the M18 route is a badly thought out, ill-judged compromise option which nobody outside HS2 truly supports.

In Sir David Higgins' report *Rebalancing Britain* he starts by asking these questions: "Why is it worth the effort, not to mention the cost? What is the problem that it is the answer to? What is the core purpose you are trying to achieve? "

These are important questions. As Sir David Higgins said HS2 should not just be about 'fast trains' but an infrastructure project that can reduce inequality, connect communities and grow local economies. The vision of HS2 has always been not only to increase capacity but to bring regions closer to global markets and allow the north to share in the prosperity that is predominantly concentrated in the south.

It should jump start local economies, grow the 'northern powerhouse' and ensure that the benefits are not only felt by metropolitan cities but by the wider city regions as well. This is why we as MPs have supported the principle of HS2. But we are also clear that the project should at all times serve to maximise the benefits that HS2 can bring to the region.

There are five arguments that HS2 is making in recommending this new route. However our view is that far from justifying the new route these five criteria in fact point us back to Meadowhall.

The first is around what it calls the "conflicting demands of the region". When Meadowhall was chosen as the preferred route it was because of its excellent connections with the rest of the region.

As Sir David Higgins himself said in October 2014 about the option of a spur terminating at Sheffield Midland, precisely the option now being recommended:

"While this provided limited benefits for the city centre market, it did not provide the connections and journey times necessary to serve the wider Sheffield city region effectively, particularly Rotherham and Barnsley."

He went on to dismiss all the alternatives to Meadowhall: "I do not believe these alternatives could deliver the same improvements in journey time and capacity as Phase Two, nor would they deliver



an equitable approach across the North or meet the vision of a truly high speed network for the country.”

It was true then and it is true now. This view is backed up by a study conducted by Mott McDonald for Doncaster Council, which has concluded that in comparison with the new M18 route, the Meadowhall option would lead to 45% more jobs being created and a greater economic benefit of up to 75% for the whole region.

In addition the M18 route offers fewer, smaller trains and slower journey times on a non-HS2 track. The M18 spur option currently has no commitment for trains going north to Leeds and no connection to Birmingham based on HS2’s base case.

These significant economic disadvantages for South Yorkshire from the M18 route compared to the Meadowhall route are not, in our view, removed by a parkway station. An afterthought parkway station will provide a maximum of one or two trains an hour, not five. It would be likely to have all the same connection problems as the city centre option, and it would also raise infrastructure challenges.

The second argument that HS2 has made is on city centre connectivity and the ambitions of Transport for the North which they believe are better served on the new route than with Meadowhall. They advise that this has been the driving force for the change from Meadowhall to Sheffield Midland.

However Transport for the North have made clear that they do not have a preference for either route. The M18 option currently gives no certainty of a link between Sheffield and Leeds, which would serve the ambitions of TfN, and in any case, it does not justify the change in route.

The TfN ambition of a 30 minute journey time between Leeds and Sheffield can be met with the Meadowhall option, estimated by HS2 at 27 minutes via an interchange at Sheffield Meadowhall¹, little different from the forecast city centre journey time with the M18 option. It is also guaranteed through the HS2 programme with up to 5 trains an hour.

A greater problem is that of the future capacity of Sheffield Midland. While HS2 appear to be confident that the station is able to accommodate two HS2 trains in to the station from the South there is no clarity regarding trains going North. Indeed, the constraints of the station for HS2 trains going North was one of the reasons Sir David Higgins gave in his report of July 2016 of why the station would not be suitable to accommodate the main HS2 line.

A third argument that HS2 makes is about demand. It claims that there is not the demand in the wider region to justify 5 trains an hour. This lack of ambition and defeatist attitude is as disappointing as it is wrong. As we know current transport links in South Yorkshire are poor and the current demand reflects that. With better connectivity, as Doncaster has shown with four trains an hour to London, demand would be greatly increased across the region.

As highlighted above, HS2 has the opportunity to make a real impact and grow the region’s economy. Basing decisions simply on the current level of demand is a disappointingly defeatist attitude that we believe undermines the ethos of the HS2 project.

¹ HS2 Limited Sheffield Meadowhall Station Factsheet July 2013



HS2's fourth argument is regarding local constraints and the engineering challenges of building a station at Meadowhall as well as the impact on urban industrial areas and environmental challenges of the route. However, HS2 have stated as recently as in the summer 2016 when recommending the M18 route that the constructability issues at Meadowhall can be overcome.

Given the lack of knowledge about the current route, including that HS2 seemed unaware of the new housing development at the Shimmer estate in Mexborough until fairly late on, we do not believe that the new M18 route's challenges have been fully investigated. As mentioned above, the engineering challenges at Sheffield Midland alone have not been fully answered and it is therefore impossible to make a reasonable comparison of the routes on this basis.

The final argument HS2 make is that of cost. HS2 claim that the new route will result in savings of £860m. Although we have heard repeated assurances that this decision will not be based solely on cost, we also recognise that it is, rightly, an important consideration for the Government. However we maintain that the claimed savings are illusory.

There is, on HS2's own figures, an extra cost of £1.7bn in operating costs on the M18 route compared to the previous Meadowhall route. Therefore, on a net costs basis, the difference is around £200 million, according to HS2's own figures published in their economic impact assessment.

Moreover, HS2 have acknowledged that any claimed savings exclude a number of costs, including the £300m cost of electrification of the northern loop to Leeds, the £200m-£300m cost of a Parkway station and potential extra costs of rolling stock. The upgrading to Sheffield Midland station that would allow HS2 trains to travel north of Sheffield to Leeds is currently also uncoded.

We would urge the Secretary of State to accept that there is little or no difference in net costs or indeed capital costs between the two routes.

In conclusion we strongly believe that the new route results in less connectivity for the wider region, increased journey times, poorer economic growth, fewer jobs and puts a limit on HS2's capacity to increase services in response to a growth in demand.

As supporters of the HS2 project, who believe in the necessity of improving our national infrastructure, we are disappointed by a route recommendation that has limited ambitions for the whole of the South Yorkshire region and which will not realise the benefits that HS2 could provide or do nearly enough to help tackle the inequalities we face

We must not miss the opportunity that HS2 could bring to invigorate the South Yorkshire region, to grow our economies, to better connect us and allow the region to share in the prosperity that the project can bring.

We would urge the Secretary of State to return to the previous Meadowhall option.

Yours sincerely,

Ed Miliband MP

Kevin Barron MP

Caroline Flint MP

John Healey MP

Angela Smith MP

Rosie Winterton MP