

Dear []

Request to speak up for nature in the upcoming HS2 debate, 13 September

We represent nine non-governmental organisations, each working to represent, support, and defend the natural world. For over a decade, NGOs like us have been united in challenging the approach taken to HS2, supported by local communities and our many thousands of members. We are still calling for an end to the damage it is causing to the unique and beautiful landscapes and habitats of England, from ancient woodlands to Chiltern Chalk Streams.

But we are now coming towards the end of the line.

We know that in proceeding with the current plans and implementation of HS2, the Government will be unable to meet its commitment to leave the environment in a better state for the next generation. It also makes the Government's target to see 30% of land managed for nature's recovery by 2030 almost impossible to meet, as 108 irreplaceable ancient woodlands, 693 Local Wildlife Sites, 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and more will be damaged or destroyed under current plans.

HS2 Ltd has ignored the specialist advice of environmental NGOs who signed the 'right lines charter'¹. As a result, not one nature-focused NGO has been able to support the approach to HS2 since its inception. This is an extraordinary situation, not least given the scheme has been touted as a 'green transport solution' over the last 12 years.

All of this is compounded by our first-hand experience of the devastation construction work is causing to local communities. This has jeopardised the good relationships those who care about nature have with HS2 Ltd and consecutive governments. As a result - thanks to a history of poor communication and an alarming lack of transparency around how the impacts can be limited - trust is now deeply damaged.

A Westminster Hall debate has been scheduled by the Petitions Committee in response to the 155,000 people who have called for HS2 to stop in its current form and for the relevant legislation to be repealed. The debate will be held on **Monday 13 September at 6pm**.

We stand in solidarity with the many hundreds of thousands of people who have raised concerns about HS2 over the years - and call on you, as our representatives, to press the Government during the debate to make a full response on several, critical, points (set out in Appendix 1).

United, we cannot help but remain extremely concerned about the deep scar HS2 will leave across our precious landscapes. As the UK Government prepares to host COP26 this year, the UK's biggest and most expensive transport scheme should be playing its part in addressing the needs of our natural world at such a critical time.

This debate offers us all the opportunity to get answers to fundamental questions and bring to a halt, the current approach to HS2.

Please ask them on our behalf.

¹ http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/uploads/files/Right_lines_Charter_FOR_WEBSITE.pdf

Yours faithfully,

Craig Bennet, The Wildlife Trusts
Chris Packham
Richard Walker
Darren Moorcroft, Woodland Trust
Emma Marsh, RSPB England
Gail Bradbrook, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion
James Thornton, Client Earth
John Sauven, Greenpeace UK
Julie Williams, Butterfly Conservation
Michael Mansfield QC
Tanya Steele, WWF
Tom Beeston, Chiltern Society

Appendix:

No tangible commitment to nature's recovery:

The risks of the scheme to vulnerable natural spaces and species, including irreplaceable habitats, and to local communities across the country has been evidenced, and shared directly with the Government and with HS2 Ltd². Much of what this report flagged as a concern is now a reality.

Despite an assurance that the scheme will achieve No Net Loss of Biodiversity route-wide, and stated aspirations to reach Biodiversity Net Gain, there is a distinct – and shocking, at this stage – lack of detail to show exactly how either of these can succeed.

Please ask:

Will the Government compel HS2 Ltd to publish a clear, long-term and fully costed strategy, with full calculations and detailed plans as to how it will achieve 1) No Net Loss for biodiversity, and 2) a Net Gain for biodiversity for non-irreplaceable habitats, and 3) set out how, as part of any commitments to Biodiversity Net Gain, impacts to nature and irreplaceable habitats are being avoided?

Weak carbon plans that will not tackle climate change:

A review of HS2 Ltd's adaptation approach is needed, as well as a review of the mitigation approach in the context of the latest IPCC report and the UK's Net Zero target.

The latest IPCC report shows that Governments need to step up action far more than current levels by 2030, to have any chance of staying below warming of 2C.

The wider rail industry is also recognising the impact of climate change through Network Rail's acknowledgment (following the Stonehaven review) that impacts from climate change were escalating faster than they had previously assumed³.

² The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, Woodland Trust, Chilterns Society (2019): "What's the Damage?" evidence report <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/hs2>

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928593/resilience-of-rail-infrastructure-interim-report.pdf

Please ask:

Will the Government ask HS2 Ltd to undertake a new long-term climate change risk assessment?

Destroyed trust from communities left disempowered:

People must be able to engage in decision-making in ways that are meaningful to them, which ensure they are listened to and demonstrate that their concerns are acted upon. For effective communication, sufficient information must be available to understand the real-life impacts on the future of locally-valued spaces for nature and the effects these will have within their communities.

The negative impact of HS2 Ltd's community approach on people's mental health and sense of stability can be found in conversation with people the full length of the line, and wider. Relationships have been damaged through poor communication, lack of transparency and first-hand experience of the devastation of construction work. Access to natural spaces have also been unnecessarily limited.

Please ask:

How will the Government ensure HS2 Ltd will rebuild trust with communities and NGOs?

How confident is the Government that the scheme will ensure equity in access to nature along the route?

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