

Transport & Health

THSG

Science Group

Administrative Address: - Land O' Cakes, 48, Middle Hillgate, Stockport, SK1 3DL

Please reply to: - **Dr. Stephen Watkins,**
1, Parklands,
Shaw,
OLDHAM,
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25.02.20

Dear Mr. Stephenson,

(a) HS2 ; COST SAVINGS AND ENHANCED BENEFITS TO THE NORTH
(b) THE WOODHEAD ROLLING MOTORWAY

THSG is one of the two major public health organisations in the transport field internationally. We are the main such organisation in the UK, where we also act as agent for the other (the North America-based International Professional Association for Transport and Health) and where we manage the Transport Special Interest Group of the Faculty of Public Health of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom. We would like to congratulate on your appointment as Minister of Transport with special responsibility for HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

Whilst neutral on the question of whether HS2 should be built, we have long advocated that, if it is built, phase 2B should be created largely by reinstatement of the former Great Central Railway, as a four-track railway with two high speed tracks, from Quanton just north of Aylesbury (where it would link to phase 1) to Lower Bredbury in Stockport via Rugby, Leicester, Nottingham and Sheffield. From Stockport it would extend into Manchester. There would also be a new spur from Penistone running north east until it meets the currently proposed phase 2B route to Leeds, which it would then follow into Leeds. Despite repeated queries we have never had any answer at all as to why this route has been rejected and, as you are looking for cost savings and enhanced benefit to the North, we would be grateful if you could ask for this to be looked at properly.

Much of the former Great Central Railway formation is still intact so the scheme can be built with cost savings and environmental benefits. It would bring high-speed links between Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield and additional conventional rail capacity, including a north-south freight route, and the Woodhead Rolling Motorway, a passenger and vehicle-carrying service over the Woodhead route which would, for vehicles, link the M1 and M60 and, for passengers, link the North West and South Yorkshire rail systems.

There have been places where the formation has been built over and tunnelling would be required but this is offset by the fact that it would not require the 13km tunnel that the current proposed route requires from Manchester Piccadilly Station to Manchester Airport. There would, of course, need to be a link from Lower Bredbury to Manchester and we have suggested several alternatives over the years, but probably the simplest and cheapest would be an elevated route above the M60 for about 2km then linking to the West Coast Main Line just north of Stockport Viaduct, with work to grade-separate the junctions from there into Manchester.

Another advantage of the proposal is that the benefits it delivers in the North, with the Woodhead Rolling Motorway and high-speed links from Manchester to Leeds and Sheffield are such that it would be worth building it from the north southwards to meet phase 1 and work could start earlier.

Some of the old GCR route has been incorporated into footpaths or cycle routes but we suggest that the whole route should have an elevated greenway above it, which would be a major new walking and cycling facility at relatively little cost in relation to the total cost of the HS2 scheme.

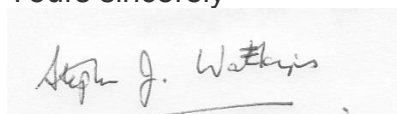
Some of the old GCR route has been incorporated into a heritage railway in the East Midlands, so we suggest that a couple of miles of that should be left intact by sinking the new railway into a cut and cover tunnel for that distance, and that the heritage railway should also be given one path an hour along the new conventional tracks to run a service from Aylesbury to Nottingham.

The high-speed tracks of the new route would link to phase 1 at Quainton, and indeed between Quainton and Brackley the new route could incorporate phase 1. There would be connections to the West Coast Main Line at Rugby for use by high speed trains from London to Stafford, Crewe and Liverpool, and from Birmingham to Sheffield and Leeds. The conventional tracks of the new route would link to the rest of the rail system at various points.

If this proposal has been seriously considered, and there is good reason for rejecting it, we would be grateful for the belated courtesy of an explanation as to its flaws. If on the other hand it has not been seriously considered we would be grateful if it could be explored and we would be happy to meet officials to discuss it.

Whether or not this proposal for an alternative HS2 is viable, we would still urge you to look very seriously at the Woodhead Rolling Motorway, details of which your department, Network Rail, the Highways Agency, and the Northern Powerhouse already have.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen J. Watkins". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

(Dr) STEPHEN J. WATKINS
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Co-chair, THSG