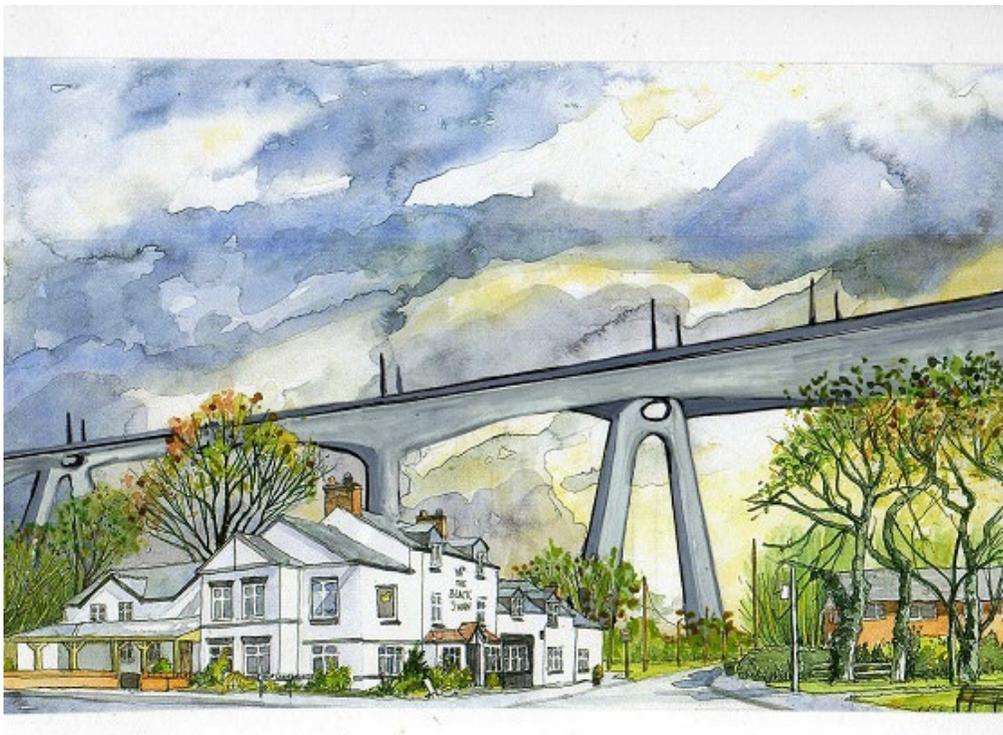


Hs2



The Golborne Link – Impacts and Alternatives

HS2

**The Golborne Link –
Impacts and Alternatives**

March 2015

**A report prepared by community groups from Lymm, Agden,
Warburton, Rixton-with-Glazebrook, Culcheth and Lowton**

**For more information see www.warringtonstophs2.co.uk and
www.lendf.co.uk**

The Golborne Link - Impacts and Alternatives

Executive Summary

In 2013, the Government proposed the construction of Phase 2 of the new High Speed 2 rail line to Manchester and Leeds. Included in the proposals were a link to the West Coast Main Line at Golborne, the Golborne Link, to provide through trains to Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Subsequently, the reports “HS2 Plus” and “Rebalancing Britain” made new proposals, including extending the line from Birmingham to Crewe in Phase 1, and building a new hub station at Crewe with connection to the existing rail network, including the West Coast Main Line, at Crewe.

The proposed Golborne Link has met with widespread opposition from the region, reflected in the responses to the route consultation. It will have a major impact on the area it runs through:

- **Environment:** The Golborne Link will have severe impacts on the environment along its length (see map on page 4). It will devastate those communities adjacent to the proposed route. It will also destroy the green belt buffer between Warrington and the Manchester conurbation. DfT abandoned a proposed motorway link here in 1993 because of concern over the impact on this green belt buffer.

It will also have a very major impact on the wider environment, cutting through key environmental and amenity sites, and generating noise levels which will be difficult or impossible to mitigate because of the elevation of the track. The elevation of the track in an otherwise flat landscape will also cause widespread visual intrusion which will similarly be difficult or impossible to mitigate. In particular, the huge viaduct necessary to carry the line over the Manchester Ship Canal will dominate the surrounding villages, some of which will be directly under its shadow.

- **Economy:** It will have significant impact on the local economy, closing businesses and farms, destroying over 700 jobs, and significantly reducing the values of many local houses, thus making their hard working owners significantly poorer.
- **Cost:** The cost for the Golborne Link to the West Coast Main Line given by the HS2 project as £800m is simply not credible. If costed on a pro rata basis with the rest of the line, it would cost £1.9bn at base cost, £2.8bn with contingencies, and £2.0bn if the costs of stations and tunnels are excluded from the calculation but nothing is added in for the major viaduct over the Manchester Ship Canal. We believe that £2.0bn is a more credible estimate of the likely construction cost. Against this, it has been estimated to generate benefits of only £400m, clearly not good value for money.
- **The Alternative:** Selectively upgrading the West Coast Main Line between Crewe and Golborne (and onwards to Wigan) would provide the required additional capacity for HS2 trains and also much needed additional capacity for many additional conventional trains, both passenger and freight, whereas the Golborne Link will only release one train path per hour in each direction on the West Coast Main Line.

HS2 estimate the cost to upgrade the West Coast Main Line to provide an alternative to the Golborne link as £750m, but this included the connection to the West Coast Main Line at Crewe, and so the cost will be significantly reduced, to perhaps £500m, if the proposal for the new hub station and associated connection at Crewe goes ahead.

The Golborne Link will cause very significant damage to the environment, the local economy and the communities it passes. It will destroy over 700 local jobs. The link is likely to cost in the region of £2,000m, whereas, if the Crewe Hub station goes ahead as proposed, additional costs for upgrading the West Coast Main Line will likely be in the region of £500m, thus saving £1.5bn whilst causing significantly less damage to the local economy, communities, and the environment, and providing greater benefits.

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Introduction

In 2013, the Government proposed the construction of Phase 2 of the new High Speed 2 rail line to Manchester. Included in the proposals were a link to the West Coast Main Line at Golborne, the Golborne Link, to provide through trains to Glasgow and Edinburgh, and a rolling stock depot at Golborne.

This was widely opposed by local people and many submissions were made in the ensuing Route Consultation, which closed at the end of January 2014. These were mainly made on the basis of the local impact on each community or location the line passes.

No individual submission that we are aware of brought together the complete picture of the impact of the Golborne Link as a whole.

Subsequently, the reports “HS2 Plus” and “Rebalancing Britain” were issued by HS2. These made new proposals including extending the line from Birmingham to Crewe in Phase 1, and building a new hub station at Crewe with connection to the existing rail network, including the West Coast Main Line, at Crewe, by 2027.

This is an important development which changes the balance of arguments and makes the construction of the Golborne link less attractive, and indeed unnecessary, if the Crewe proposals go ahead.

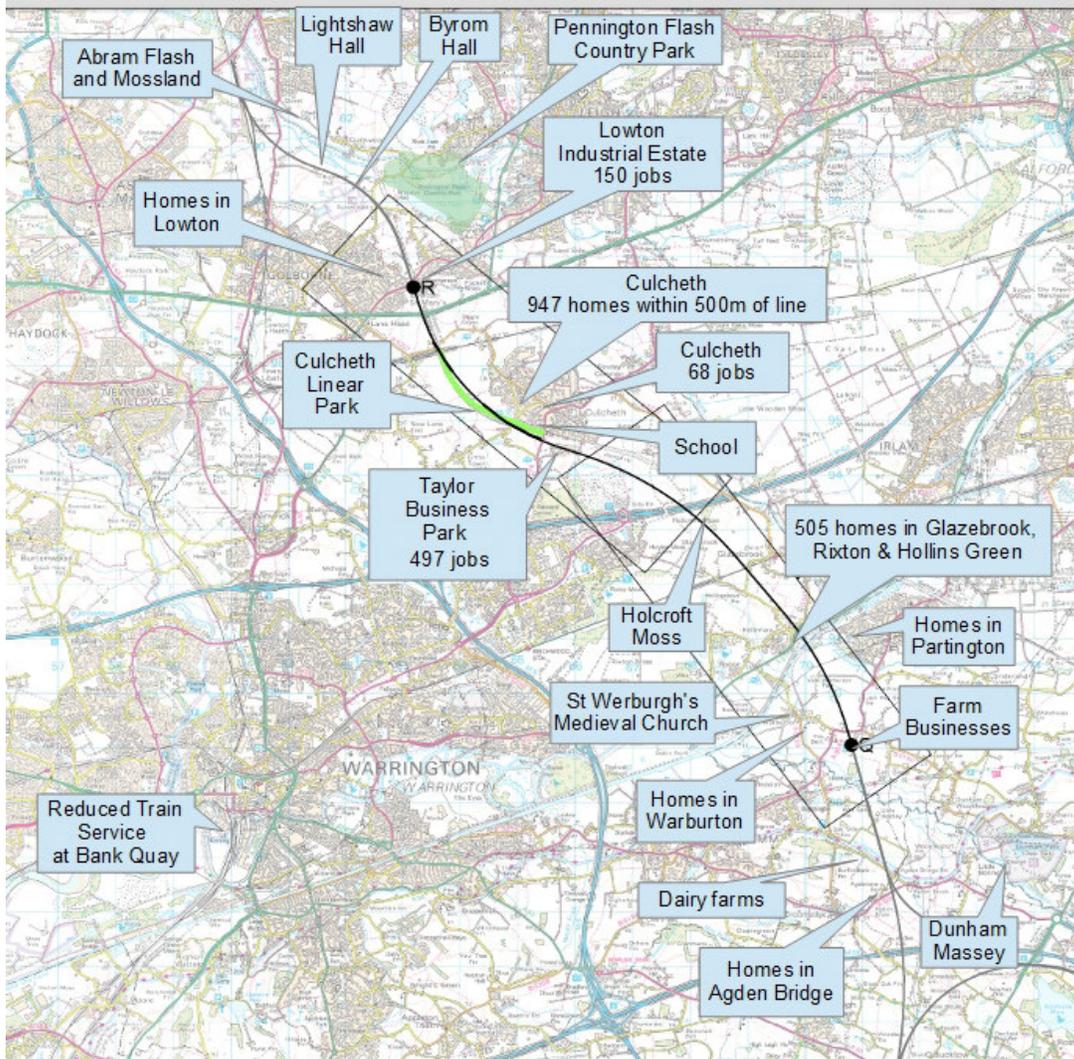
As these proposals were made after the Route Consultation closed at the end of January 2014, there has been no formal route to comment on them.

The purpose of this document is twofold:

- **To bring together the information in the various locally based submissions about the Golborne Link to the Route Consultation into one coherent document**
- **To comment on the subsequent proposals by HS2, which were not available for comment at the time the Route Consultation closed.**

Impacts of the Proposed Golborne Link

The proposed Golborne Link causes very damaging impacts all along its length, as can be seen from the map below which shows some of the locations affected:



Economic Impact

The proposed Golborne Link will have a significant negative impact on the local economy. The line proposed for the link passes through a number of locations significant to the local economy, which will be adversely affected. Businesses will close and jobs will be lost to the local economy.

The line passes through the Taylor Business Park near Culcheth, and employment sites in Lowton and Golborne; these jobs will all be lost to the area, as will the associated incomes, and business rates, if the line is built.



Taylor Industrial Estate

Frank Allen

For example, Warrington Borough Council point out that the Taylor Business Park, a long established employment area, is home to fifty companies, employing 497 staff and generating rental income of around £1.5 million per annum. Closure will mean the loss of £640,000 per annum in Business Rates. The current line of route will lead to total closure and loss of this important business park.

The value lost to the local economy is estimated at £9.6m for the 497 jobs on the Taylor Business Park (CADRAG R1).

There will be similar impacts elsewhere. In Lowton, for example, the line of route passes through an industrial estate employing 150 people (LENDF)

The disruption to local traffic and trade during construction will also be severe due to the number of roads to be bridged. Local communities, shops and businesses will be isolated from the major parts of Warrington, from which they draw customers and employees, whilst construction is under way. It is estimated this will result in the loss of a further 68 jobs in Culcheth village (CADRAG R1), for example.

In addition, there will be severe impacts on the farming community in the area.

Many farms will lose land, some becoming too small to be viable as a result. Some will have difficult or tortuous access to what remains, making it difficult or impossible for them to continue in business.

For example, Warrington Borough Council in its response to the Route Consultation identifies two major dairy farms in the Agden area that will likely cease to exist if the proposals go ahead.

In addition to the farms themselves, farming and other businesses are affected already by the planning blight, possible loss of land and facilities, and the uncertainty over the future. For example, Lymm Riding School, at Agden, will be severely affected by noise. Businesses on Warrington Lane, Agden, will be affected by the closure of Warrington Lane restricting access, for example to canal barge and marina businesses which require good access for abnormal loads.

Investments have been put on hold due to the uncertainty. As a result, businesses are running down instead of being developed and expanded, putting capital, income and jobs at risk.

The total number of jobs threatened by the proposal is over 700.

The proposed line will also adversely affect the wider economy of the region as it will reduce the frequency of trains stopping at Warrington Bank Quay, currently the main station in the area for London and Scotland. It is proposed that current through services to Scotland will be replaced by a smaller number of services which will terminate at Preston.

However, since there will only be a net reduction of a single train per hour in each direction north of Crewe, the Golborne Link will not have a significant contribution to increasing capacity on the West Coast Main Line for freight or local passenger services.

The proposed line will also affect house prices in the area. The recent PWC report on the property bond proposal recognised an impact on house prices close to the line, and estimated it at 10% to 20% depression for houses within 500m of the line, and higher for those closer in. There are 947 houses within 500m of the line in Culcheth alone, and with a typical house value of £239,000, a reduction of 10% would represent a loss of £23m to these families (CADRAG R1). Similarly, there are 505 houses within 500m of the line in the Rixton and Glazebrook area.

This represents a real loss in spending power for these families, who will lose a significant fraction of the value of their main asset which they have worked and saved to buy.

It is often argued that such falls in value are only temporary, and so only apply to those moving house during the affected period. However in this case the period in question is 19 years and it is likely that a majority of the houses affected will change hands in this time, so most of the residents will be affected.

In summary, the Golborne Link will have significant impact on the local economy, closing down businesses and farms, destroying over 700 jobs, and significantly reducing the values of many local houses, thus making their hard working owners significantly poorer.

Impact on Environment and Amenities

There are a number of key environmental sites and reserves that will be affected by the route of the Golborne Link and depot, including two SSSIs. Some of these are described below.

Lightshaw Meadows is an area of open countryside and a beautiful mosaic of wetlands located in the heart of Abram Flashes. It forms part of Wigan's Greenheart Regional Park. I

Byrom Hall and Lightshaw Hall are both Grade II listed buildings.

Abram Flash SSSI is a site with a mosaic of habitats, including mossland, wet grassland, reedbed, fen, and open water.

Holcroft Moss SSSI is the last remaining intact lowland raised mire in Cheshire. It is home to breeding birds such as yellowhammer and snipe, and plants including sphagnum moss and cottongrass, restricted to these unique habitats. Deer are also often seen on the site. The line passes within 50m of the site on an embankment and there will be significant construction work associated with the adjacent overpass of the M62 motorway.

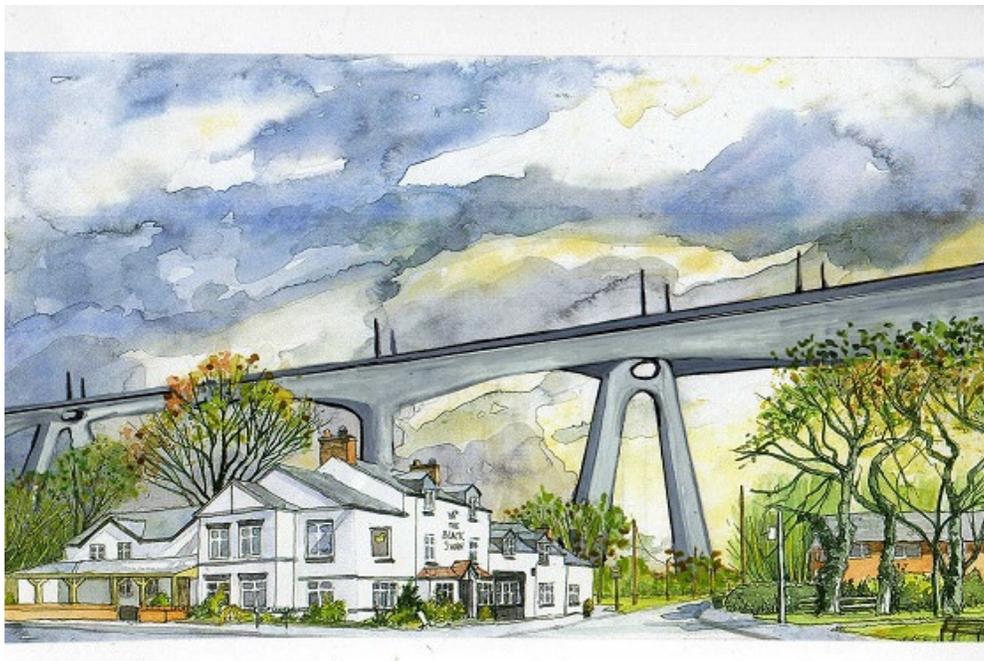
One of the most significant impacts of the Golborne link is its impact on the rural countryside. A significant area of high grade farmland will be lost, and farms will be rendered unviable and fall into disuse. The line of the route will break up farm holdings, making parts difficult of access and so impossible to work economically.

The proposed line runs through the green belt separating the Warrington area conurbation from the adjacent greater Manchester conurbation. Disruption of this will severely affect the quality of life and environment of a large number of people.

Warrington Borough Council commented:” The designated Green Belt at the eastern boundary of Warrington with Greater Manchester forms a ‘buffer zone’ that serves to prevent commercial and residential development coalescing into a single, continuous built-up Mersey Valley area. The Green Belt includes areas of local mossland which are of great ecological value supporting wildlife, flora and fauna.

These considerations clearly weighed heavily on the mind of the Secretary of State for Transport in 1993 when he directed that a new M62 motorway link route, including a high-level viaduct crossing of the Manchester Ship Canal be abandoned due to its unacceptable impact on this key area of Green Belt.”

The proposed HS2 line will cross the Manchester Ship Canal on a viaduct and embankments nearly 7 km long and over 30m high at its highest point. Its impact will be devastating on the areas it crosses and the communities it strides over.



Viaduct crossing Hollins Green

Ann Farrin

This viaduct is totally unsuitable from the point of view of its impact on local communities. It will also be vulnerable to weather such as high winds which often cause speed restrictions or

closure of the similar Thelwall Viaduct which carries the M6 motorway over the Manchester Ship Canal.

In addition, there are local environmental and amenity sites that will be affected, for example the Culcheth Linear Park, a 2.5km long wooded walk which is on the edge of Culcheth village, see photograph below. The impact on the Linear Park will be devastating as it runs almost parallel with the proposed line, which crosses the park in a cutting at the main access point, destroying the access from the village and cutting the park in two. The line will also sever the network of footpaths which cover the area, several radiating from the Linear Park.

Warrington Borough Council commented that " The route is particularly disruptive to Culcheth Village (a well established district shopping centre) where potential construction works are likely to effectively 'cut off' residents. The most damaging environmental impact will be on Culcheth Linear Park.

Culcheth Linear Park is a well established greenspace, converted from a disused railway line. It is a mainly wooded walk approximately 2.5km long. The main access point is alongside a bridge, where Wigshaw Lane crosses the park. The proposed route crosses Wigshaw Lane at the same point at a very acute angle, via a new bridge which of necessity will be considerably larger than that existing. The line will be in a cutting at this point and will be considerably wider than the linear park.



The HS2 line crosses Culcheth Linear Park here

Frank Allen

The linear park will be cut in two by the HS2 line and the main access point will be effectively removed. A short stretch of the linear park would be retained to the south of Wigshaw Lane bridge with access from Warrington Road. This access point would not be suitable for the mobility impaired, or parents with buggies, and the main section of remnant park will be cut off from the access via Wigshaw Lane. The only access to this part of the remaining linear park will be via unmade footpaths, across open fields."

HS2 agree that this part of the route will cause most damage and impact both visually and from the point of view of noise.

Visual Aspects

The line will have a massive impact visually, as the countryside is quite flat and so the major engineering structures that will be required will be visible for considerable distances. The biggest structure is the viaduct needed to take the line over the Manchester Ship Canal, which will have a height of 30m and be surmounted by the power catenary structure. This viaduct will stretch for considerable distances either side of the crossing, with a total length of about 7 km, and dominate the communities of Warburton, Hollins Green and Glazebrook.

In addition there will be bridges required over the Bridgewater canal, the M62 and several other roads all the way along the line of route. Due to the grade separated junction at Lymm, the line will cause visual devastation where it crosses the Bridgewater canal, with four tracks carried on two bridges raised 6 m above the canal, the crossing having a width of 100m, and continuing across the Bollin flood plain on a viaduct 345m long.

All of these will dominate the landscape for miles around.

In addition, much of the line will be visible above ground. Considerable lengths of line are proposed to be carried above ground on embankments, bridges, and viaducts, in order to cross the Manchester Ship Canal, the M62, and the many roads the proposed route crosses.

Where the line is proposed to be in cuttings, these are relatively shallow and the structures will be visible above the cutting edges in many places. The cuttings themselves will represent an impairment of the landscape.

The relatively flat and open nature of the landscape means that these will be prominent and visible for miles around. The net effect is to spoil the rural landscape and destroy the quality of life for those living in the communities affected.

For example, Trafford Council in their response to the Route Consultation raised concerns over the “very extensive visual and audible impact on these communities”, and in particular the impact of the elevated line through the Dunham/Warburton area and its impact on Dunham Massey, as well as the impact of the Ship Canal bridge on Partington. The concerns of Trafford Council were reflected in the response from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

The National Trust also comments that “...the importance of the wider landscape and the rural setting to Dunham Massey are key to understanding the place and there will be adverse impacts. The most adverse visual impact will be on tenanted farmland and cottages at Agden Bridge [near Lymm]. It is very difficult to see how this visual impact could be mitigated as the line needs to go over the Bridgewater Canal. “

Warrington Borough Council commented that “The proposed routing effectively cuts the villages of Glazebrook and Hollins Green in two. The close proximity of the route to Hollins Green in particular will mean that the character of the village with its distinctive identity and rural ambiance will be irrevocably altered.”

Noise and Vibration

There will be a great impact on the local communities from the noise associated with the high speed trains, which will include service trains during the day and trains to the depot through the night. A large number of houses will be affected – there are 947 houses within 500m in Culcheth, 505 in the Rixton and Glazebrook area, and many more in other communities along the line.

The fact that much of the line is elevated on the viaduct or embankments, including those mentioned in the section on visual impact above, will cause severe noise pollution and make it practically impossible to reduce the noise level by screening. Even the parts in cuttings will still cause significant noise as the cuttings are not deep enough to screen the trains completely.

One of the main attractions of the area is its quiet rural setting and this will be completely destroyed.

The response to the Route Consultation by the National Trust is critical of the methodology used by HS2 to assess the noise impact. They claim the analysis is internally inconsistent, that arbitrary assumptions have been made, and that the effect of the intermittent nature of the noise has not been properly evaluated. Most significantly, they point out that the treatment used does not adequately assess the impact on areas where currently the background noise level is low.

The National Trust also highlighted the difficulty of providing noise mitigation without using highly visible screens which would be inappropriate in the flat, open landscape.

The response from the Churches Conservation Trust highlights the impact of noise and vibration on the medieval church at Warburton, commenting that “Our medieval church in the village of Warburton is a jewel in our North West collection that we market to visitors as a ‘hidden gem’. Clearly the environmental impact of the proposed HS2 viaduct, in terms of noise and vibration will certainly compromise how our visitors experience this church and its environs, and disrupt the medieval music performed during heritage open days.” They also express concern over the impact of vibration on the church fabric.



St Werburgh's Medieval Church, Warburton

Noise will also have an impact on some businesses, for example Lymm Riding School will be adversely affected, as noted above.

In summary, the proposed Golborne link will have severe impacts on the environment along its length, affecting key sites and also the environment of the communities it passes. It will devastate those communities adjacent to the proposed route and the elevated nature of much of the route will exacerbate the impact and make mitigation difficult or impossible. It will also destroy the green belt buffer between Warrington and the Manchester conurbation; the

proposed motorway link road was abandoned in 1993 because of concern over the impact on this green belt buffer.

Disruption During Construction

The proposed line requires a number of significant civil structures in a short distance. The main ones of these are the viaduct over the Manchester Ship canal, and associated embankments, the depot at Golborne, and the three-way junction where the line diverges from the line to Manchester. In addition, there are bridges required where the line crosses the M62 motorway, and many roads, some of which have re-alignments proposed.

Construction will have the inevitable impact of round-the-clock noise, light pollution, dust and dirt, and additional traffic. Many homes and families will be subject to this disruption. In addition, the closure of so many roads will have a devastating effect on local businesses, and many will close with job losses as a result.

Warrington Borough Council commented that “The route is particularly disruptive to Culcheth Village (a well established district shopping centre) where potential construction works are likely to effectively ‘cut off’ residents.” It has been estimated that the disruption around Culcheth will result in the loss of 68 jobs in local Culcheth shops and other businesses (CADRAG R1).

Community Impact

The proposed line passes a number of communities. The impact on these will be severe in terms of environmental impact, amenity loss, and loss of jobs.

The proposed route passes the villages of Lymm and Agden, where it crosses the Bridgewater Canal on a viaduct six metres high.

The National Trust commented “The most adverse visual impact [around Dunham Massey] will be on tenanted farmland and cottages at Agden Bridge. It is very difficult to see how this visual impact could be mitigated as the line needs to go over the Bridgewater Canal. “

It then travels towards Warburton at a height of eight metres, cutting the village in two.

Trafford Council commented “The proposed route alignment cuts through the heart of historic rural communities at Warburton and Mossbrow and also runs adjacent to the residential community of Partington, within Trafford. We consider that the line will have a very extensive visible and audible impact on these communities, particularly as it rises to the high level crossing of the Manchester Ship Canal just to the west of this settlement.”

The proposed route then travels towards Rixton with Glazebrook, including Hollins Green, at a height of 28-30 metres as it passes over the Manchester Ship Canal on a mile long viaduct. It passes within 100m of the centuries old Black Swan hotel in Hollins Green. There are 505 houses in the Rixton and Glazebrook area within 500m of the line.

Warrington Borough Council commented “The impact of this viaduct will be severe on the parish of Rixton with Glazebrook. Even with attenuation noise levels from passing trains will be high. The proposed route effectively cuts the villages of Glazebrook and Hollins Green in two. The close proximity of the route to Hollins Green in particular will mean that the character of the village, with its distinctive identity and rural ambiance will be irrevocably altered.”

The proposed route continues to Culcheth, where it skirts the village and cuts through the Culcheth Linear Park at its main entrance point. There are 947 houses in Culcheth within

500m of the proposed route (CADRAG R1). These, and many others in the village, will be affected by the noise and vibration and the loss of treasured rural environment.

The line passes through the Taylor Business Park, which currently employs 497 people and which will be totally destroyed with the loss of these jobs to the local community.

Construction, including the three bridges required to carry local roads over the line, will also have a significant impact, cutting off Culcheth with its shops and businesses from the rest of Warrington and threatening the loss of a further 68 jobs as a result (CADRAG R1).

House prices will be hit severely, resulting in a large number of people being unable to move house or causing them significant financial losses if they do. In the vast majority of cases, under current proposals, there will be no compensation for the loss in value for the family's major asset, which they have worked and saved to buy.

The line passes Lowton and Golborne with similar impacts on local housing and jobs. Homes will be affected by the noise and visual intrusion, and disruption during construction. Many environmental sites are threatened, and 150 jobs will be lost from the Industrial Estate in Lowton which lies on the proposed route (LENDF).

In summary, the proposal to build the Golborne connection will have a devastating impact on the many communities it passes, affecting quality of life for the many residents involved, making them financially poorer, taking away their jobs, and destroying their tranquil rural environment. It will destroy local farms and businesses. It will also have a very major impact on the wider environment, cutting through key environmental and amenity sites, and generating noise levels which will be difficult or impossible to mitigate because of the elevation of the track. By the same token, the elevation of the track will cause widespread visual intrusion which will similarly be difficult or impossible to mitigate.

Costs and Benefits

Cost of New High Speed Line Golborne Link

The cost of the proposed Golborne link was assessed by CADRAG in their report CADRAG R1, submitted as part of their response to the Route Consultation in 2013, as follows:

The cost of the new high speed line from Lymm to Golborne was given by HS2 in March 2013 as just under £800m.

This cost quoted is for the 35 km of new line and equates to £22.9m per km.

In contrast, the total cost projected for HS2 build (excluding rolling stock) is £42.6bn, for 330 miles of track, equal to 531 km. This equates to £80.2 m per km.

The cost quoted for the link from the Birmingham to Manchester line to the West Coast Main Line at Golborne is thus 28.6% - less than a third - of the cost per km of the whole route, despite the requirement for a major junction at Lymm and the viaduct over the Manchester Ship Canal, itself a very significant engineering undertaking, and the need to bridge the M62.

Removing the contingencies, the cost for the HS2 network is £28.15bn, equating to £53.0 m per km, still more than double the cost quoted for the Golborne connection.

The analysis by Alan Debenham, attached as Appendix 2 to the CADRAG R1 report, shows that even if the cost of tunnels and stations is excluded from the overall HS2 cost, the figure quoted by HS2 for the cost of the Golborne connection is only 40% of the average cost of the line elsewhere. If the Golborne connection cost the same per km as the rest of the route, excluding tunnels and stations, the cost would be £2.0bn.

In summary, we believe the cost for the Golborne connection to the West Coast Main Line given by the HS2 project has been grossly under estimated and the cost of £800m quoted is simply not credible. If costed on a pro rata basis with the rest of the line, it would cost £1.9bn at base cost, £2.8bn with contingencies, and £2.0bn if the costs of stations and tunnels are excluded from the calculation but nothing is added in for the major viaduct over the Manchester Ship Canal. We believe that £2.0bn is a more credible estimate of the likely construction cost.

None of these figures of course include any part of the costs to the local communities in terms of lost jobs, impaired environment and quality of life, and lost house values, the vast majority of which will be borne by the local people not the Government, who do not propose to provide compensation for any but the few cases of what they consider exceptional hardship.

Benefits of New High Speed Line Golborne Link

The main benefit claimed by HS2 for the Golborne link is time saved in the journey to Glasgow. The HS2 analysis claims that the time saved in travel from London to Glasgow would be 13 minutes and this is valued by HS2 at £1.2 bn.

However the "value of time saved" argument has now been largely discounted as it has been accepted that time spent on trains by business travellers is not time wasted but often represents valuable productive time for those travelling.

An analysis by Alan Debenham (AAD) has shown that the value of time saved is discounted to £0.4bn as a result of this. Extracts from this analysis are given in Appendix 2 to CADRAG R1.

The benefits cited by HS2 will not accrue to the local population whose communities will be affected, since there will be no station or other benefits local to them. For the local communities, the HS2 proposal only represents a threat to their communities and quality of life.

The main National argument for HS2 now hinges on the improvement in capacity on the rail network as a whole. However, the Golborne link provides little improvement in capacity on this part of the West Coast Main Line, since there are only two through passenger trains per hour in each direction that can be transferred to the proposed line. This will free up two slots in the timetable, and one of these is proposed for an additional train per hour to Liverpool in each direction. Thus the net capacity benefit from this proposed line is to provide an additional one train per hour in each direction on the West Coast Main Line.

In summary, the Golborne link is expected to cost in the region of £2.0bn to construct and generate benefits of only £400m, clearly not good value for money. It will not free up significant capacity on the West Coast Main Line, this being limited to one train per hour in each direction on current proposals.

Alternatives

The proposed Golborne link does not form part of the HS2 route from Birmingham to Manchester. It provides a link to the West Coast Main Line which will allow Classic Compatible trains to proceed to Glasgow and Edinburgh and may eventually form part of the high speed link to Scotland if such a link is approved in the future.

A depot is proposed at Golborne for rolling stock maintenance but this could be sited elsewhere.

Because the Golborne Link is not required for the route to Manchester, alternative access to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) is possible through a number of options, some of which are set out below.

West Coast Main Line Upgrade

As an alternative to the Golborne link and connection to the West Coast Main Line at Golborne, connection could be made at Crewe with upgrading of the existing West Coast Main Line from Crewe to Golborne:

This could involve upgrading the existing track to increase capacity, or providing new high speed track alongside. Both these are considered below.

Option 1: Capacity Upgrade



This was suggested by HS2 as an alternative and considered in CADRAG R1, and the LENDF response.

The current West Coast Main Line between Crewe and Wigan is constrained by a relatively small number of pinch points. For example, much of the line was laid to four tracks, in some places it has since been reduced to two tracks to reduce maintenance costs, or is reduced to two tracks where it crosses bridges. The whole section could be upgraded to four tracks by improvements at these pinch points.

Such an upgrade would allow the Classic Compatible trains to travel from Crewe to the North and Scotland on the existing West Coast Main Line as they are proposed to from Wigan northwards in the current HS2 proposals.

In addition, such an upgrade would provide a major improvement to the capacity for other traffic, passenger and freight, which the Golborne Link cannot do as it only provides for high speed passenger trains and no freight.

The current HS2 proposals only provide

for a single additional train per hour in each direction on the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe; two trains per hour are transferred to the Golborne link but an additional Classic Compatible train is proposed for Preston, so the net reduction on the West Coast Main Line is a single train per hour in each direction, which it is proposed to use for an additional Liverpool train.

Upgrading the West Coast Main Line in this option would provide capacity for many more additional trains, both passenger and freight, as well as HS2.

Option 2: Upgrade to Higher Speed

This was also proposed in the LENDF response.

It would be possible to lay an additional track alongside the existing West Coast Main Line, using the available width where possible. More construction work would be required than simply upgrading the existing track, and more land required in some places, but it would provide a separate and higher speed option for HS2 trains.

Costs of Upgrading the West Coast Main Line

HS2 have stated they have considered upgrading the West Coast Main Line and concluded the costs are in the region of £750m. We believe this refers to the cost of a capacity upgrade, similar to Option 1 above, although this is not entirely clear.

However HS2 stated this also included the costs of remodelling Crewe station and providing the connection to the West Coast Main Line that would be required at Crewe. Since this is now proposed to be provided in any event for the Phase 1 extension to Crewe, the cost of the further work required to upgrade the West Coast Main Line as an alternative to the Golborne link will be considerable reduced, possibly as much as a halving of the cost.

Tunnelling to Golborne

One of the striking features of the HS2 proposals is the very small impact of the proposed route on communities in Greater Manchester. This is primarily because of the proposal for the line to enter a tunnel at the edge of the greater Manchester conurbation and only emerge close to Piccadilly Station.

It has been proposed, by the Rixton group amongst others, that a similar solution be adopted for the Golborne link, providing a tunnel for the line where it passes the various communities affected and to allow it to pass under the Manchester Ship Canal and M62. This would remove most if not all of the adverse impacts generated by the route on these communities.

Tunnelling in Manchester

An alternative proposal, raised by the Warburton group, would be for the line to Piccadilly Station in Manchester to be extended to Victoria Station so that the line could then be extended along the existing rail corridor to the North West of Manchester, joining the West Coast Main Line south of Preston.

In summary there are a number of alternatives to constructing the Golborne link, which offer potentially similar or greater benefits, in some cases at significantly lower cost, and by utilising existing rail corridors will cause much reduced economic, environmental and community impact.

Recent Developments and New Proposals

Subsequent to the closure of the Route Consultation at the end of January 2014, a report was published by HS2 entitled “HS2 Plus” and a further report “Rebalancing Britain” has since been published. Since there is no opportunity to respond to these in the framework of the Route Consultation, long since closed, this report aims to comment on these new proposals, and their impact, in the public arena.

These reports made a number of proposals which go beyond the route proposals on which the Route Consultation was based. In particular, these reports propose that Crewe become a North West Hub for HS2 and the construction of the line from Birmingham to Crewe should be accelerated, so the Crewe hub becomes available in 2027 instead of 2033.

Integral to this proposal is the provision of an enhanced HS2 station at Crewe with connection from the HS2 line to the West Coast Main Line, so the services can continue north along the West Coast Main Line.

This has a major impact on the proposal for the Golborne Link.

First, the proposed depot at Golborne will not be available to service the HS2 trains terminating at Crewe from 2027 since the line linking it to Crewe will not be in place. Since the high speed line will terminate at Crewe initially, it would make a great deal more sense in any event to service these trains in the vicinity of Crewe, rather than to transfer them to Golborne for servicing.

Therefore it is likely that operational necessity will mean the depot proposed for Golborne will not now be built at Golborne.

Second, the proposal is now to provide an enhanced station and a link to the West Coast Main Line at Crewe by 2027. This removes a considerable element of cost from HS2’s figures for the upgraded West Coast Main Line in comparison to the Golborne link, since the remodelling of the station and the provision of a connection to the West Coast Main Line at Crewe will be required whether the Golborne link goes ahead or not.

The original argument for the Golborne link, put forward by HS2, can be summarised as follows:

The Golborne link will cost £800m, slightly higher in cost to upgrading the West Coast Main Line at £750m. For this extra £50m, a time saving of 13 minutes is achieved for travel to Glasgow, valued at £1.2bn.

This has now been largely discredited and overtaken by events.

The likely cost of the Golborne link is now seen as being considerably higher, in the region of £2bn, whereas the additional cost of upgrading the West Coast Main Line, if the proposals in “Rebalancing Britain” for a hub station at Crewe in 2027 are accepted, as seems overwhelmingly likely, has reduced to perhaps £500m. Also the benefit from the Golborne link has fallen to a figure in the region of £400m (CADRAG R1), due to the value of savings in travel time being more correctly assessed.

Thus the current position can be summarised as follows:

The Golborne link is likely to cost in the region of £2,000m, whereas, if the Crewe hub goes ahead as proposed, additional costs for upgrading the West Coast Main Line will be in the region of £500m. The additional cost of £1,500m for the Golborne link will deliver a value in the region of £400m, very poor value for money.

Conclusions

The proposed Golborne link, which allows HS2 traffic to Scotland to proceed via the West Coast Main Line, will cause devastating impacts on the communities it passes.

It will degrade their environment by noise and visual intrusion, which will be difficult or impossible to mitigate due to the elevated nature of much of the route. Several of the communities will be completely dominated by massive elevated structures, visible for miles around. The wider environment will also be affected and key sites and amenities will be lost.

Concern for the environmental impact in the critical green belt buffer between Warrington and Greater Manchester caused a motor way link road on a similar route to be abandoned in 1993.

It will also cause significant financial loss and major economic damage through loss of local businesses and over 700 local jobs.

The cost of the Golborne link is expected to be in the region of £2.0bn, and the benefits it generates only £400m. This is clearly very poor value for money.

Alternatives have been proposed which offer the potential of similar or greater benefits, some for lower cost.

Recently, new proposals have been made by HS2 to build a new hub station at Crewe as part of Phase 1, completed by 2027. This proposal further weakens the case for building the Golborne link, as the alternative connection at Crewe will be built anyway if it goes ahead, and the remaining cost of upgrading local sections of the West Coast Main Line will be small compared to the cost of the Golborne Link; moreover the upgraded West Coast Main Line will offer significantly greater benefits to rail capacity than the Golborne Link.

If the proposal for the hub station at Crewe goes ahead, as seems likely, then the minimal benefits from the Golborne link will no longer justify the cost to the local communities, the environment, and the Treasury.

References

The following submissions to the HS2 Phase 2 Route Consultation have been used in compiling this document:

Warrington Borough Council
Trafford Council
Greater Manchester Council
The National Trust
The Churches Conservation Trust
Culcheth And District Rail Action Group (CADRAG), specifically CADRAG R1
LENDF

Other references

PWC report to HS2 on the Property Bond proposals, dated March 2014
DfT decision on the M56/M62 motorway link, Ref CNW M56-62/1/1/08, dated September 1993

