

# **UK: HS2 to proceed as government adopts High Speed North vision**

Construction of the first phase of High Speed 2 is to continue, Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the House of Commons on February 11. In recommitting to the national high speed rail programme, Johnson also said the government intended to rename the sections of HS2 serving northern England as High Speed North.

The government announced a number of significant administrative changes to the HS2 programme, including establishing a separate management organisation to redevelop the southern terminus at London Euston and creating a full-time ministerial role with responsibility for high speed rail.

The parliamentary bill authorising the 225 km HS2 Phase 1 linking London with the West Midlands received Royal Assent in February 2017, since when significant early construction work has been undertaken, notably around the station sites at London Euston and Birmingham Curzon Street. Two further phases are planned, Phase 2a linking Lichfield with Crewe and Phase 2b serving Leeds, York, Manchester and Wigan.

## **Oakervee Review published**

Johnson criticised aspects of the delivery of HS2 so far, suggesting that project promoter HS2 Ltd 'had not distinguished itself' when dealing with local communities along the route. However, he suggested that neither this nor increases in the cost of the scheme had not 'detracted from the fundamental value' of HS2.

Alongside the parliamentary statement, the government published the Oakervee Review which had been commissioned last

summer to examine the status of HS2 and assess how and whether the scheme should proceed.

This report 'considers that, on balance, ministers should proceed with the HS2 project, subject to a number of qualifications. The latest economic appraisal indicates that the net cost to the transport budget in proceeding with HS2 is around £62bn to £69bn at 2015 prices.'

The review's proposed changes include reducing the planned throughput on the Phase 1 section from 18 trains/h to 14 trains/h with passive provision for 16 in the future.

## **High Speed North proposed**

The High Speed North programme will replace Phase 2b of HS2 while also encompassing plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail. This proposal for an east-west line broadly running from Liverpool to Leeds via Bradford is at a much earlier stage of planning than HS2, and Johnson said the government was exploring how a pan-industry authority could be established to accelerate delivery of new rail infrastructure in northern England.

Johnson told MPs that developing faster connections between northern cities would 'make no sense' without HS2 providing 'north-south links along our long and spindly island'. Nevertheless, he suggested that work by the Oakervee Review and the National Infrastructure Commission would be used to deliver 'an integrated plan for rail in the north' of England.

Responding to the government's decision, an HS2 Ltd spokesperson said the announcement 'provides much needed clarity on the future of the project for our contractors and the wider community. HS2 has been 10 years in the planning and development, and we are shovel-ready to start building the first new railway north of London for over a century.'

Source: [railwaygazette.com](http://railwaygazette.com)