

Buckinghamshire County Council PR 2330 18/08/2011 [For Immediate Release]

Anti HS2 fight gains momentum as 17th council joins 51m group

Just days after Oxfordshire County threw its support behind 51m - councils united in opposing HS2 - Three Rivers District, in Hertfordshire, has put its name to the cause, becoming the 17th member of the group.

The group, led by Buckinghamshire County Council, opposes the Government's proposals to spend £32 billion on a high-speed rail line (HS2) from Euston, London to Birmingham, with spurs to Manchester and Leeds to be added later.

The 17-strong group took the name 51m because, if approved, the project will cost every single Parliamentary constituency in the UK £51m - or about £1,000 per household.

Ray Puddifoot, deputy chair of 51m and leader of the London Borough of Hillingdon, said: "The Secretary of State can no longer ignore the logic of the 51m Group argument, or the strength of opposition to HS2, which grows daily. As more authorities look deeper into HS2's business and environmental cases, the flaws are being seen. We've always said there are better ways to spend £32 billion of the nation's money. When every family in the country is being asked to tighten their belt and pick up their share of the national debt burden, now is not the time to be throwing money at a vanity project which will not deliver financial returns, will not regenerate our northern communities, is not green and will do irreparable harm to the environment."

Martin Trevett, Three Rivers District Council's Portfolio Holder for the Environment, said: "The Council has been liaising closely with the 51m consortium of local authorities along the route and wishes to express its support for the consortium's representations and concerns. In particular this Council takes the view that the business case for the new rail link has not been demonstrated either for the main route or for the Heathrow Link.

"It is this Council's view that the business case must be demonstrated and made available to consultees for further evaluation before a decision is made on whether or not to proceed with the rail link."

51m has made a submission and presented its case to the Transport Select Committee, presented to the Institution of Civil Engineering and the Royal Town Planning Institute, and submitted a strong response to the Government's public consultation on HS2.

The consultation ended on July 29, but the group remains committed to continuing its opposition. For more information, visit the 51m website - www.51m.co.uk

The group is urging the public to tell their MPs how they feel about HS2, and doing that is just a tap away on the 51m website - hit the Write to Your MP tab, type in your postcode and the details appear.

51m position statement

Each of the councils has signed up to the following position statement:

"The authorities have come together to oppose the proposals for High Speed Rail as they are currently proposed.

We do not believe that the business case stacks up and therefore cannot support the route suggested by Government and strongly object to the proposals.

We are opposed to the current High Speed rail proposals as they are presently outlined and do not believe that they are in the best interests of the UK as a whole in terms of the benefits claimed in the business case.

We are not opposed to the need for higher speed rail per se and fully acknowledge the need for strategic improvement to the national rail infrastructure but cannot agree with the current proposals as the economic and environmental benefits are not at all credible.

We do not believe that all the other alternatives to achieve the transport capacity, regeneration and environmental benefits have been fully explored by the Government and with in excess of £30billion proposed to be invested, we owe it to the nation to ensure these are fully explored."