

The following open letter from BCC Leader Martin Tett has been sent to all local media today

HS2: AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL BUCKINGHAMSHIRE RESIDENTS FROM MARTIN TETT, LEADER, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The announcement by Justine Greening of the Coalition Government's decision to go ahead with HS2 is clearly disappointing if not unexpected. Whilst we may have lost a battle, we are far from losing the campaign and I am determined that we redouble our efforts to stop this ill-conceived project.

Our opponents have tried to stereotype those who oppose HS2 as 'Chiltern NIMBYs'. I, by contrast, see us as the people right across this country who have had cause to analyse this proposal and who see it for what it actually is, a vast waste of hard-earned taxpayers' money combined with environmental vandalism on an almost unprecedented scale.

The Government's 'spin machine' has been in overdrive during the announcement with, no doubt coincidentally-leaked reports, and attempts to conceal the facts. A thorough analysis of the Government's material has now shown some damning conclusions. Firstly, the business case for HS2, already poor, has become far, far worse. The published 'Benefit Cost Ratio' for the London to Birmingham section has declined from a predicted 2.7 return for every pound spent in March 2010, to 1.7 in 2012. Far worse, when the figures are adjusted for known risks buried deep in the report, such as the latest economic forecasts, updated forecasting methods and a more realistic value of the time saved by passengers, the return drops as low as a dire 90p for every pound. In other words, HS2 actually loses the hard-pressed taxpayer 10p for every one of the £32 billion spent on it. This is well below the threshold that the Department for Transport would normally allow for any project. No wonder the Government tried to 'bury bad news'.

By contrast, the Government's own consultants show that the alternative put forward by the 51m Alliance of 18 local authorities opposed to HS2 of improving our existing lines at far lower cost, has a 'Benefit Cost Ratio' of 5, delivering £5 for every taxpayers' pound invested. No wonder the Government tried so hard to discredit this far better option.

Secondly, despite the attempt to persuade MPs that it is 'tunnelling under the Chilterns', in reality only an extra 1.4 miles of extra tunnelling has been added. The rest of the route, some 5.5 miles remains untunnelled. In addition, HS2 is now in many cases worse for many people living along this route. The Government's so called extra 'mitigation' of a short route change in Amersham and extra tunnelling, has been counter-balanced by reducing the depth of the cutting between Little Missenden and Wendover from 9 metres to only 2 metres. As a result people along this section are likely to now see and hear the trains even more than before.

Lastly, the Government has ignored the vast response to its own Public Consultation. 55,000 people across the country responded to this. Compare that to the 7,000 who replied to the Public Consultation last year on the proposed sale of the National Forests which led to a rapid U-turn. Despite Philip Hammond's desperate attempts to drum up support by everyone from northern businessman to Bob Crow's railwaymen, the Government's case was decisively rejected in every one of the seven consultation questions. These responses have been completely ignored despite a dire business case. This discredits the entire consultation process.

So what can we do now? Plenty. As 51m, your local councils are considering legal action against this scheme. In addition, it will be 2013 before a Bill is introduced to Parliament for the London to Birmingham section of HS2. This gives us over a year to spread the key messages nationally that this

project represents even more appalling waste of taxpayers' money than we had originally thought; that it will result in environmental damage along its entire route; that building it would cause enormous disruption to services into Euston station for eight years and finally, that a far, far better alternative exists which has been all but ignored.

As the 51m Alliance we pledge to continue to support the residents of Buckinghamshire.

Martin Tett

Leader Buckinghamshire County Council