



WHAT'S THE DAMAGE?

Why HS2 will cost nature too much



SUMMARY REPORT

PLACES UNDER THREAT



Ancient woodlands

A total of 108 ancient woodlands are threatened with loss or damage. Of those under threat, Whitmore Wood in Staffordshire represents the single biggest loss of ancient woodland – with around half of it under threat in Phase 2b. The wood could be saved by tunnelling, but currently this option has been dismissed.



Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area

Over 50 organisations have been working together using £600,000 of government funding to create an urban landscape with high-quality greenspaces running throughout. The proposed HS2 Phase 1 route will slice this landscape in half and also destroy at least 80% of the Wildlife Trusts' Park Hall Nature Reserve.



Rothwell Country Park

Designated as a Local Wildlife Site in 2019, this is part of the Leeds Wildlife Habitat Network, connecting up greenspaces in and around the city. Current proposals for Phase 2b will take the route straight through the most important areas for wildlife and reverse work that has been done to completely remove invasive non-native species including giant hogweed. Simply being at threat from the planned route is limiting available investment to allow Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Leeds City Council to continue to improve this important wild place for people and wildlife.



Assessing the impact

The Wildlife Trusts commissioned a comprehensive assessment of the potential impact of HS2 to nature and wild places along the proposed route. The resulting report draws on data from the 14 Wildlife Trusts affected along the route, the National Trust, Woodland Trust, RSPB and Chilterns Conservation Board. It evidences the broad range of impacts on habitats, species and protected wildlife sites, and draws on a range of expert responses to proposed mitigation measures.

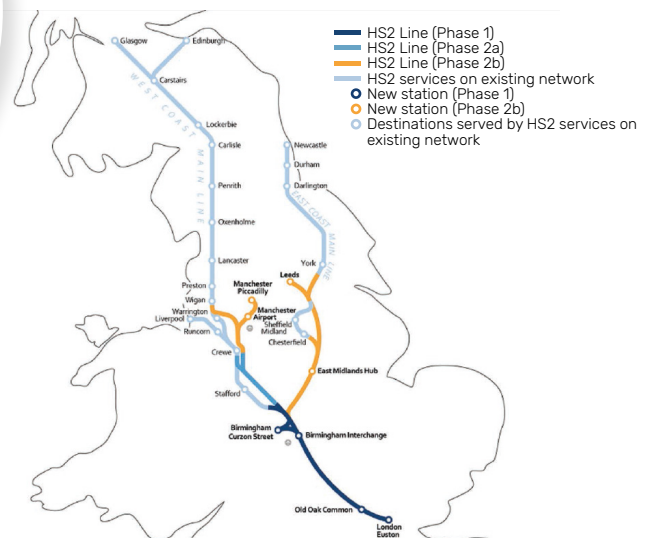
This is a summary of the findings and reveals potential widespread destruction and fragmentation of vast swathes of natural habitat and important protected wildlife sites, resulting in the loss of irreplaceable habitats, increased fragmentation of remaining habitats – meaning an ongoing risk of wildlife loss in the future – and the local extinction of already endangered species.

The findings highlight multiple examples of inappropriate mitigation measures, including planting trees on important wetland habitat. Ill-judged proposals such as these could result in further damage to important wildlife habitats. Our assessment showed an unacceptable lack of proper accountability within the HS2 Environmental Statements for the impacts on Local Wildlife Sites, local species populations and wider ecological networks. With insufficient consideration of the impacts on these areas, comes mitigation provision and compensation that is wholly inadequate.

Background to HS2

A new high-speed railway was announced by the Government in January 2012. Phase 1 was granted Royal Assent in 2017, which grants the powers to progress with its construction. Phases 2a and 2b are yet to receive Royal Assent.

In announcing the project, HS2 was lauded as 'green transport' and HS2 Ltd pledged to 'no net loss' of wildlife in the building of the route.



WILDLIFE UNDER THREAT

Wild places at risk

HS2 proposals puts an alarming number of wild places at risk. This includes protected sites and landscape-scale initiatives, designated due to their importance for wildlife. Protected wildlife sites* at significant risk include:

- **Five internationally designated wildlife sites** – includes three Special Areas of Conservation and two Ramsar sites. They have been assessed as being of international importance due to the special/rare mix of natural features, habitats and wildlife
- **33 Sites of Special Scientific Interest** – home to important and often rare plants or animals; two are also National Nature Reserves
- **21 Local Nature Reserves** – important to their local area for their wildlife or geological value, or as important for education and/or enjoyment
- **693 Local Wildlife Sites** – these wildlife-rich places play a critical role in providing a refuge for wildlife, acting as stepping stones, corridors and buffers in often less hospitable areas for wildlife
- **Four Nature Improvement Areas** – landscape-scale initiatives covering large swathes of land; three in collective receipt of £1.7 million of public money for restoration and to better connect them up for wildlife and people – work which will be undone under current plans
- **22 Living Landscapes** – Wildlife Trust-led initiatives working on a landscape-scale to create more, bigger, better and joined up wild places allowing nature and people to thrive
- **18 Wildlife Trust nature reserves** – cared for and managed with public funds and donations.

*Some of the sites included in the figures have more than one designation.

Further important wild places are also under threat including irreplaceable ancient woodland, veteran trees, wood pasture, old meadows and wetlands. This includes four National Trust properties. Loss and fragmentation of wild places impact on wildlife but it will also reduce access to greenspace, negatively impacting on the health and wellbeing of local communities.

Species at risk

Current HS2 proposals will cause loss and fragmentation of suitable wildlife habitat, making it more difficult for species to respond to changes in food availability, climate change or development.

Several scarce and protected wildlife species are under threat, with a long-term and potentially irreversible impact on their population. The risk for some species is so great, they could go locally extinct, greatly reducing their ability to ever recover their former ranges. Putting these species at risk is contrary to Government biodiversity policies, international obligations and European law.

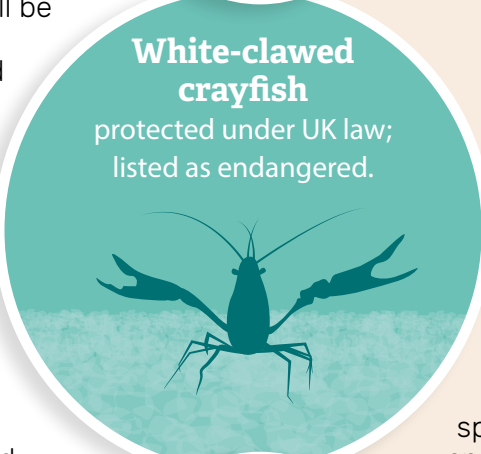
Willow tit

on Red List as species at risk and a priority species for conservation.



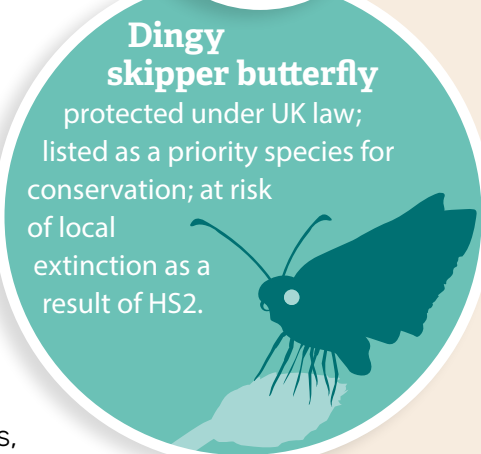
White-clawed crayfish

protected under UK law; listed as endangered.



Dingy skipper butterfly

protected under UK law; listed as a priority species for conservation; at risk of local extinction as a result of HS2.



Willow tit

Willow tits are the UK's most threatened resident bird, suffering a 94% decline since the 1970s.

Phase 2b of the route passes through several significant areas of willow tit habitat in Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. The willow tit, like some of the other species under threat, have been the focus of a long term and costly restoration project (*Back from the Brink* in the case of willow tits); investment in our natural world that will be jeopardised by the route.

White-clawed crayfish

The globally endangered and European-protected white-clawed crayfish is present in rivers, streams and ponds along the route.

Changes in water quality and quantity, and an increased risk of pollution events could have a serious impact on the survival of these species. Not all sites for this species have been assessed including tributaries to Mere Gutter and Basford Brook in Cheshire, so the overall impact on this species is unknown.

Dingy skipper butterfly

In Derbyshire, the dingy skipper occurs on several sites that could be significantly affected by HS2 including at Staveley, where one of the largest populations exist. Habitat loss here could lead to the local extinction of this butterfly, which is already struggling and listed as being of 'conservation priority'.

How the proposed mitigation stacks up

Multiple examples of inappropriate and/or inadequate mitigation measures have been proposed by HS2 Ltd in Phase 2a and 2b of the route. Inappropriate measures include planting plantation woodland of low-wildlife value. This would negatively impact the existing habitat and could lead to the destruction of further important habitats away from the route if planted on a high-wildlife value site.

Many mitigation measures do not go far enough, with the loss and damage to Local Wildlife Sites unaccounted for in the Environment Statements. The plans also fail to include mitigation for landscape-scale restoration projects and local species populations. An inconsistent approach to evaluating data was found, including the use of out-of-date and incomplete data for Local Wildlife Sites. This, in combination with insufficient information on survey methodologies, results and impact assessments, leads to concerns that the Environmental Statements do not represent an accurate picture of the full impact on wildlife. In some areas, 47% of sites at risk from HS2 are understood not to have been surveyed.

Conclusion

In this time of climatic and ecological crisis, the risks to nature HS2 poses are unacceptable. The route risks pushing nature closer to the brink, with local species extinctions, destruction of carbon-storing habitats and biodiversity irreversibly damaged. Current plans provide inadequate mitigation and compensation, while at the same time HS2 will damage recovered habitats and restoration projects, which support significant landscape-scale restoration and could be enhanced as part of mitigation. Given the evidence of the escalating environmental costs The Wildlife Trusts are calling for all HS2 works to stop immediately, and for the scheme to be redesigned.

IT IS TIME TO STOP AND RETHINK.

Following a rethink, any redesigned rail link or sustainable transport scheme must embrace the unique opportunity to create a green legacy supporting a Nature Recovery Network – a joined up network of wild habitats that would allow nature and people to thrive, by identifying and connecting new and existing wild places to create more, bigger, better and joined up wild habitats. The current Government has committed to this vision – and should ensure any national infrastructure proposal adhere to it.

Find out more

Read the full report "What's the damage? Why HS2 will cost nature too much", our consultation responses to each phase of the project and our report "A Greener Vision for HS2", which we developed in response to early announcements: wildlifetrusts.org/hs2

Development and wildlife

The Wildlife Trusts believe that building homes, business premises and transport links can and should have an overall positive impact on nature. The infrastructure that supports society should be delivered and maintained in a sustainable way that minimises our climate change contribution and delivers more wildlife. Climate change poses a huge threat to biodiversity and the majority of Britain's greenhouse gas emissions come from transport. We need sustainable transport solutions and renewable energy supplies, but it is essential that these do not increase negative impacts on the environment. Wildlife Trusts are working with planners, developers and construction firms to make space for wildlife and habitats in new developments to ensure these schemes are delivered in a way that helps wildlife.

The Wildlife Trusts

The Wildlife Trusts is a grassroots movement of people from a wide range of backgrounds and walks of life, who believe that we need nature and nature needs us. We have more than 800,000 members and 40,000 volunteers.

For more than a century we have been saving wildlife and wild places, increasing people's awareness and understanding of the natural world, and deepening people's relationship with it. We work on land and sea, from mountain tops to the seabed, from hidden valleys and coves to city streets. Wherever you are, Wildlife Trust people, places and projects are never far away. Find out more about The Wildlife Trusts at wildlifetrusts.org/about-us



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