



Department for Transport

From the Permanent Secretary

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

E-Mail: permanentsecretaries@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.dft.gov.uk

03 May 2022

Dame Meg Hillier MP

Chair

Public Accounts Committee

[Sent via email]

Dear Chair,

Public Accounts Committee Hearing on HS2 Euston – Monday April 24th, 2023.

I undertook to write on several issues raised by Committee members at this hearing.

Dawlish Line and Phase 4 Funding

Anne Marie Morris MP asked about progress of works on the Dawlish Line. The Government is committed to improving the resilience of the vital railway route to the southwest through Dawlish. To date we have invested £165 million in delivering solutions to protect the line. The South West Resilience Programme consists of five distinct phases. Phases 1 and 2 are the construction of a new sea wall at Dawlish at a cost of £80m. Phase 1 was opened in Summer 2020 and the resilience element of Phase 2 is also complete, with additional improvements to Dawlish station remaining outstanding, including a new accessible footbridge. Phase 3 is the construction of a rockfall shelter and cliff protection measures north of Parsons Tunnel between Dawlish and Teignmouth. This is currently under construction at a cost of £53m and is expected to be completed by December 2023.

Phase 4 comprises cliff protection measures between Dawlish and Holcombe that has £32m committed funding. Network Rail is currently reviewing the scope of works for this phase because of inflation pressures, focusing on maximizing resilience within the current funding envelope. Phase 5 covers a mile-long stretch of route between Holcombe and Teignmouth, characterized by steep high cliffs adjacent to the sea. Network Rail's initial proposals for Phase 5 were unaffordable and locally contentious. Network Rail is currently developing a detailed scope, cost and a risk-based delivery proposal, based on further geotechnical surveys and analysis of the cliffs. The intention is that this will address the risks posed by this mile-long stretch of route.

There is no moratorium on spending for new rail infrastructure enhancement projects, however we will need to work within the funding envelope set out in the Autumn 2022 Spending Review and confirmed in the Spring Budget. Given the impact of inflation, this means some phasing and prioritization will be required. We are committed to publishing a Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (RNEP) update as soon as possible to provide clarity on the progress of projects.

Hammersmith Bridge

Sarah Olney MP asked about funding for Hammersmith Bridge. As stated in previous correspondence, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF), as asset owner and project lead, is responsible for carrying out the required repair works on Hammersmith Bridge. The Department would expect any contingency plans for the second, strengthening, stage of works to form part of the business case currently being drafted by LBHF and their advisors. We remain committed to the previously agreed and announced tripartite approach to funding, under which the Department, TfL and LBHF will each contribute a third of costs.

Aviation Noise Policy

Sarah Olney MP also asked a question about Government's aircraft noise policy.

Prior to the announcement in March of this year, overarching aviation noise policy was set out in the Aviation Policy Framework 2013. In 2018, the Government consulted on a change to that policy through the Aviation 2050 green paper, from which you quoted. That change was to set a new objective:

To limit, and where possible, reduce total adverse effects on health and quality of life from aviation noise.

This brought national aviation noise policy in line with airspace policy, updated in 2017. The previous objective, in the Aviation Policy Framework 2013 was:

To limit and where possible reduce the number of people in the UK significantly affected by aircraft noise.

In addition, in 2020, the government consulted on national night flight policy, specifically to include the following statement in our overarching aviation noise policy:

There should be a balance between the local and national economic and consumer benefits of night flights, both in terms of passenger and freight operations, against their social and health implications, in line with ICAO's Balanced Approach

On the 27 March 2023 the Department published its new noise policy:

The government's overall policy on aviation noise is to balance the economic and consumer benefits of aviation against their social and health implications in line with the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Balanced Approach to Aircraft Noise Management. This should consider the local and national context of both passenger and freight operations and recognise the additional health impacts of night flights.

The impact of aviation noise must be mitigated as much as is practicable and realistic to do so, limiting, and where possible reducing, the total adverse impacts on health and quality of life from aviation noise.

This confirmed the change proposed in the 2018 consultation, reiterates the UK's existing commitment to the International Civil Aviation Organisation's (ICAO) Balanced Approach to Aviation Noise Management, includes text from the 2020 night flight consultation, and references one of the objectives from the Air Navigation Guidance 2017 ("*the environmental impact of aviation must be mitigated as much as is practicable and realistic to do so*")

The Government's commitment to reduction of aviation noise remains unchanged as a result of the revision to the overarching aviation noise policy statement, the purpose of which is to clarify policy. We intend to publish a noise policy paper later this year which will set out the Government's plan to monitor our progress against the new objective, what specific actions we are taking in this respect, and how the Government will evaluate whether the policy aims are being met.

In summary, we do not envisage that this change will lead to an increase in noise experienced by Ms Olney's constituents. The number of flights at Heathrow is capped on an annual basis, and there are restrictions on night flights; this policy change makes no difference to these limits. Ms Olney will also be aware that the Department is currently consulting on a new night-time noise abatement objective for Heathrow and the other airports where the Government sets noise controls, and we intend to issue a further consultation later this year on the future night flights regime.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bernadette Kelly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB
Permanent Secretary, Department for Transport