

Public Accounts Committee

Our Ref: CEO-22-1119

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27 May 2022

Dear Dame Meg,

I welcomed the opportunity to provide a progress update on HS2 to your Committee on 16 May. Members' genuine interest, continued scrutiny and advice on a range of project areas will continue to support successful delivery of the HS2 programme.

During the session I committed to write to the Committee with detail on wifi connectivity on HS2 trains. I am pleased to set out this information below along with clarification of the costs to the project related to Covid-19.

Wifi speed on HS2 trains

The Department, in its role as Project Sponsor, requires HS2 Ltd to deliver a railway that enables passengers to reliably access communication networks in a way that meets their reasonable needs and expectations.

The company's approach is to provide trackside equipment along the route and in the tunnels that will connect to the onboard systems to which passengers will be able to link for both Wi-Fi and mobile phone connectivity. To ensure that the solution meets the requirements, the company will continue to assess technology developments and demand predictions throughout the design of the railway. As these systems are the subject of a live procurement exercise, no decisions have been taken on network specifications. However, HS2 Ltd's baseline expectations are for reliable connection speeds in the range of Gigabits to the train.

Costs to the project related to Covid-19

While the Department has already informed the Committee's clerks, I would like to note a correction we have asked to be made to the transcript, regarding the costs to the project related to Covid-19. The March 2022 HS2 6-monthly report to Parliament confirms HS2 Ltd's assessment of the likely financial impact within the range of £400 - £700 million. In my answer I inadvertently underestimated the ranges within this for the direct and indirect costs.

Direct costs are in the range of £150 million - £300 million and include amendments made to sites or workplaces, the purchase of protective equipment and less productive working arrangements. Indirect costs are in the range of £250 - £400 million and includes delays, prolongation and disruption and principally relate to additional preliminary costs and excess inflation. Formal claims will be subject to government scrutiny and will require formal approval from Her Majesty's Treasury before funds from government-retained contingency can be allocated.

Rearranged Committee visit to HS2 Euston station

We look forward to welcoming the Committee to site in the next few months. Euston represents the last big regeneration area in London, spanning 60 acres. It is a unique opportunity to redevelop and reconnect a new destination with new homes, businesses, shops and community facilities along with open and green spaces. We published new images of the updated station design prior to the pre-election period, and are now engaging the public and stakeholders as part of our Schedule 17 pre-application consultation with LB Camden.

In his October 2021 update to Parliament, HS2 Minister Andrew Stephenson confirmed the move to a less complex, more efficient 10-platform design, which can be built in a single-stage. This will allow for more efficient design and delivery, and integration with the redevelopment of the Network Rail station whilst keeping the capacity to run 17 high-speed trains per hour.

I trust this letter has been useful, but please do let me know where I can be of assistance to you and the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Thurston
Chief Executive Officer
High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd