



From the Secretary of State

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Dear colleague,

27 July 2011

The consultation period on high speed rail ends on 29 July and I wanted to take the opportunity to update you on some of the preparatory work I am asking HS2 Ltd to take forward while I consider the responses. I should make clear at the outset that this preparatory work does not pre-empt the decision I will take following analysis of the consultation responses.

As laid out in the Department's published business plan, I intend to announce my decision on the proposed project by the end of the year.

If I decide to proceed with the project there will be a great deal of detailed design work to prepare for a Hybrid Bill – this would include further public dialogue on details of the proposal, including mitigation measures.

Much of this work would be done by HS2 Ltd, but there would be tasks requiring specialist skills e.g. carrying out detailed engineering design and preparing the environmental impact assessment. We are required by law to follow strict rules around procurement for such contracts, which involves relatively long timescales. Pending my decision, I am asking HS2 Ltd to ensure it is in the best possible position to move forward quickly, should I decide to go ahead with the proposal.

I have therefore agreed with them that, subject to the requirement that the award of any contracts is conditional on a decision to go ahead with the proposal, they should start the procurement process over the summer for a number of contracts that will be needed to provide engineering and environmental support for the proposed project, should we decide to go ahead. Taking these steps now will not incur any cost to the public purse beyond that for administering the procurement, but will enable us to move forward swiftly if a decision is made in December to proceed.

The first step will be to publish a notice in the Official Journal of the European Union for a design development partner. This will be followed by further notices for framework contracts covering engineering and environmental work. It will take approximately six months to go through the process of evaluating expressions of interest, issuing invitations to tender, and evaluation of bids. Let me reiterate that there is no question of pre-empting a decision on the proposal, but by beginning this process over the summer, it would be possible to award contracts immediately, if and only if a decision is made to go ahead.

I hope this clearly sets out the position.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip', with a horizontal line underneath the letters.

PHILIP HAMMOND