

HS2 would ride roughshod over our rural roots

HS2 will slice through 79 rights of way in Buckinghamshire alone – including 67 footpaths, 11 bridleways and one byway.

At the October 14 seminar held in HS2 Ltd's London offices, action groups were told that "these will be extinguished, diverted or maintained".

However, the real cost to the public of walking and cycling in the countryside near HS2's proposed route is bigger than this, and some would say far bigger.

Bucks County Council's HS2 Public Rights of Way Report tells us that a 1km corridor (½km on either side of the proposed route) contains 449 rights of way in Buckinghamshire alone.

Many may choose not to walk within even half a km of the 225mph trains each producing a noise peak of more than 95dB LAeq at 25m every two to three minutes for 19 hours a day when going for a peaceful rural ramble. How many rights of way will actually fall into disuse?

The government recognises that encouraging walking and cycling is becoming increasingly important for sustainability and health reasons (Department for Transport's WebTAG Walking and Cycling, and Physical Fitness).

Why has HS2 designed a route that will curtail these beneficial activities in a nationally important area so accessible to London?

Bucks County Council's map shows that rights of way are particularly dense within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

An important special quality stated in the Conservation Board's Management Plan is the peace and quiet the AONB offers visitors from towns and cities.

Its policies emphasise the importance placed on developing quiet pursuits – walking and cycling – for public health and sustainability purposes.

If HS2 had planned its route on a major transport corridor, as in the case of HS1, all the footpaths it would have crossed would have already been severed by that existing corridor.

By choosing a "virgin" rural route, a huge tract of public rights of way along a third of the length of England has been rendered virtually unusable.

This is just one element of the massive environmental impact of HS2 by not making use of a major transport corridor.

It seems that HS2 has overemphasised reduced journey times at the expense of the natural environment.

In its response to a Freedom of Information Act request, HS2 states that routes between London and Birmingham using the high capacity M40 and M1 corridors are only three and a half minutes and five minutes slower respectively than the proposed route.

What are most people's priorities? To be in Birmingham three and a half minutes more quickly, or to preserve, and to be able to enjoy, the diminishing English countryside?

Marilyn Fletcher (by email)