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for Transport

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From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
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Dear Emma

Due to the limited time remaining at the end of the Second Reading of the High Speed Rail (London to West Midlands) Bill, I was unable to respond to many of the points raised during the debate. I therefore write to outline my response to your comments where I was unable to do so during the debate itself.

We recognise the importance of protecting the natural environment and The Chilterns AONB. This issue has been a long running one, but we must balance our duty to protect the environment with protecting public money.

Since the Scheme was announced, we have introduced major changes to the proposed route in the Chilterns AONB and provided additional mitigation measures to minimise the environmental impacts and to address local community concerns. This includes a 2.6km extension of the bored tunnel under the AONB to South Heath at an additional cost of £47m – as recommended by the HS2 Select Committee in the House of Commons - an extension of the green tunnel in Wendover, and deeper cuttings and noise barriers.

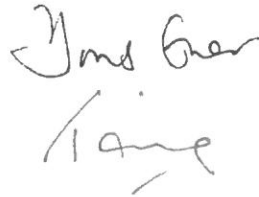
The remaining parts of the route on the surface in the Chilterns are those most close to the existing A413 dual carriageway and the existing Chilterns Main Line.

The Select Committee in the other place were clear that they do not believe the case for a long tunnel has been made, and have been unconvinced by other tunnel options such as the 4.1km extension to Leather Lane. A full tunnel is of course not without impacts and would come at a significant financial cost.

Furthermore, along surface sections of the HS2 route environmental measures such as landscaping, noise fences and planting will help to reduce impacts of the Proposed Scheme and help integrate it into the surrounding landscape. In recognition of the special qualities of the Chilterns AONB, the Transport Secretary has provided a number of assurances to Buckinghamshire County Council - including a commitment to provide £3m of funding for environmental integration and enhancement measures over and above those already proposed.

A copy of this letter has been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

I hope this answers the points mentioned sufficiently.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lord Ahmad'.

LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON