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Dear Mr Lefroy,

Thank you for your letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> February 2013 concerning HS2 through the Stafford Constituency. I am sorry for the delay. For ease of reference I have answered each of your comments individually below.

**The route does not follow the path of any of the three options indicated by HS2 earlier. What are the full reasons for not selecting any of options 1, 2 or 3?**

The reasons for the Government's choice of this section of the initial preferred route are set out in Sections 6.3 to 6.5 inclusive of the Department for Transport January 2013 report "High Speed Rail Investing in Britain's Future Phase Two: The route to Leeds, Manchester and beyond".

The initial preferred option for this route is based on work that considered a wide variety of options through this area. The route choice in this area, as elsewhere, was derived from a balance of passenger demand, cost, engineering and the impacts on the environment and communities.

Since our report to Government in March 2012, route refinement has been carried out to give assurances to the Environment Agency about avoiding impacts on Pasturefields Salt Marsh. The new route that was developed would be to the south of the Pasturefields SAC and hence have less impact on it.

**My constituents, including those who will see their properties demolished or severely affected, were advised out of the blue. There is no hardship scheme in place to compensate those have an urgent need to move and whose properties have suffered a severe loss in value overnight or, indeed, become impossible to sell as mortgage companies will not advance money on them. Why was a scheme not in place immediately so that my constituents would at least have some certainty? What can I advise my constituents who need to sell their homes and are now in limbo?**

I am sorry that your constituents were not informed of the route before the announcement. We were not able to send letters to those directly affected by the

initial preferred route until the route had been presented to Parliament. As you will be aware, the Ministerial Code (para 9.1) states, "When Parliament is in session, the most important announcements of Government policy should be made, in the first instance, in Parliament". On the day of the announcement of initial preferred line of route for Phase Two, the Minister of State for Transport wrote to those who owned buildings and/or land, which were considered at that time at risk of being acquired as a result of HS2 on the basis of the route announced on 28 January 2013. This included an introduction to the EHS consultation. The Minister of State also wrote to those who own property above proposed sections of tunnel to explain any implications for them.

Regarding there not being compensation scheme in place, although the proposals for an Exceptional Hardship Scheme (EHS) for Phase Two are based on the Phase One scheme, that scheme was not targeted at people living in the same areas. It is right that those now affected by Phase Two have the opportunity to scrutinise and comment on the proposals before they are finalised, and that evidence is carefully considered before the Secretary of State makes a decision on this important policy proposal. The Government has listened to the feedback received on the earlier scheme and the scheme being consulted on at the moment includes a number of the lessons learnt.

The consultation on the EHS ends on 29 April 2013, and the expectation would be that the Scheme would be launched as soon as possible following the close of the consultation.

**Construction on the route, if it is approved by Parliament and goes ahead, will not happen until 2026. Why was it necessary to determine a route so far in advance of construction, giving many more years of uncertainty to my constituents even than to those affected by the potential construction of phase one to Birmingham?**

As you will be aware the construction of a major infrastructure like HS2 does not just start at the actual point of building it. There is a great deal of work to do before hand, which includes consulting with the public on the route (as in line with Government policy), detailed environment impact assessment and a hybrid bill process. The route announced by Government in January 2013 is an initial preferred route and was announced ahead of a consultation so people had time to review all the accompanying documentation. However, we do expect construction to begin at least two years before 2026.

**What was the date on which the proposed route was decided by HS2?**

The initial preferred route was not decided by HS2 Ltd; it was chosen by Government.

**Several of my constituents who are affected by the route have substantial planning applications – including for much-needed business investment - pending, either on or close to the route. What should they do?**

