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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Ribbon of trees to hide HS2 rail line

Isabel Oakeshott and Hannah Summers Published: 13 January
2013



MORE
than
4m
trees are
to be
planted
along
the
planned
HS2
high-
speed
rail link
between
London
and the
north of
England
in an
effort to
help it
blend in
with the

Four million trees will be planted along the line (Alastair Shay)

countryside.

Ministers hope the foliage will provide visual screening and cut noise from the line.

The trees, a mixture of evergreen and deciduous from British nurseries, should go some way to offsetting the carbon impacts of the building work, according to the Department for Transport.

However, environmental groups say while new planting is welcome, it will not compensate for the destruction of ancient woodlands and protected areas of outstanding natural beauty such as the Chilterns when the line is built. The government plans to start planting the trees as soon as it has acquired the land for the £32bn line. Trains will hurtle through the countryside from London to Birmingham and beyond to Manchester and Leeds at up to 225mph.

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Ministers hope that fast-tracking planting will give the trees plenty of time to grow before the

scheduled completion of the scheme in 2033. A Whitehall source said: “Planting trees at an earlier stage would enable them time to grow and maximise the landscape and wildlife benefits as well as providing more effective screening for the line once the main engineering works have been completed.”

But critics argue that the transport department should focus on avoiding impact to the landscape rather than compensating for it.

“Landscape is more than just that which meets the eye, it is about the character of an area that has been formed by centuries of interaction between humans and nature,” says Ralph Smyth, senior transport campaigner for the Campaign to Protect Rural England. “Just as when you are painting, in some places you may need to use a thin brush, certainly not a roller. Tree planting will need to vary in scale and should be part of a wider plant palette.”

Ministers have promised to maximise biodiversity benefits, match existing landscape character and consult experts about the possibility of replacing some of the ash trees lost during the outbreak of dieback disease.

But conservation groups remain deeply concerned. The Woodland Trust fears the new railway will damage or destroy 21 ancient woods. The organisation’s chief executive, Sue Holden, said: “Ancient woodland supports a rich variety of rare and endangered species and covers just 2% of the UK’s land area.

“Once destroyed, the centuries-old soils and unique mix of species cannot be recreated by planting new trees. The fragmentation of habitats is also of huge concern — noise and vibration associated with high-speed rail has shown consistently in studies to have a huge negative impact on wildlife.”

Others have questioned whether the new trees will do anything to reduce the roar of the trains.

Steve Rodrick, of the Chilterns Conservation Board, said new trees would “not provide any noise mitigation whatsoever”. He added: “The figure of 4m trees sounds huge but in practice when you are planting at 20,000 or 30,000 trees per hectare the area covered is not quite so impressive.

“Most of the 4m trees will . . . be shrubs such as hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel. They will never be large trees because they don’t want any trees falling on the track.

“If you only have deciduous shrubs that don’t have leaves on for half the year their effectiveness at screening is very limited. This is simply a sticking plaster over a gaping wound.”

The government confirmed plans to plant 2m trees along the phase 1 route between London and the West Midlands in 2011 but has now doubled the figure before the second phase of the project.

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They will have to be at least 60 feet high to mitigate the effects of construction pollution.
One hundred years on.....

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David Duff

5 days ago

No doubt the HS2 will fall victim to leafs on the line and be delayed as normal lines in autumn and winter....should be renamed the Occasional Line

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MJ DAVEY

5 days ago

whilst i am sure most times readers are looking forward to the time when they can revert to reading their morning edition of the stoneage times drinking nettle coffee in their upmarket cave, the one-eyed ecomentalists with 10 children and 30 horses might like to consider their impact on the environmental landscape before bewailing a mere railway line. remember steam? perhaps the real problem is the size of human population? stop having so many offspring. you won't need the merc 4x4or 5 iphones or the huge house in the city or the maclaren twin seater.

that way we can build things that everyone benefits from and spread a little more considerately around the countryside...

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edward walpole-brown

5 days ago

So with the announcement last week of 37.5 billion pounds to be spent on updating the existing infrastructure within the next five years The Westminster Asylum is well on its way to a tenth of a trillion pounds of expenditure just on the railways. Core!

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