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HS2 could help spread high-speed broadband, minister says

Controversial high-speed rail route from London to Birmingham may also carry fibre optic cables and improve other utilities

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A high-speed train crosses the Birmingham and Fazeley canal viaduct in an artist's impression of the proposed HS2 route. Photograph: EPA

High-speed rail could also help spread high-speed **broadband** across Britain, according to the government, which is developing plans for cables to be run along the new track as it seeks to push the benefits of the controversial £33bn project.

Ministers say the new high-speed rail network, **HS2**, will be designed to allow fibre optic cabling for a broadband superhighway to be accommodated without any additional land use or visual intrusion.

The government is keen to reposition HS2 as a vital national infrastructure project after ~~opposition groups demolished early cost-benefit claims~~ based on savings in journey

times. ~~Opponents have sprung up along the route~~, particularly in the Chilterns, and the protests are likely to spread when the route for the second phase, adding a Y-shaped section to Manchester and Leeds to the initial 140-mile ~~London-Birmingham~~ track, is announced this month.

Transport minister Simon Burns said: "HS2 is far more than a new railway line – it is a national infrastructure project that will bring places and people closer together while creating jobs and driving growth.

"Construction of HS2 gives us the perfect opportunity to explore how we can make it easier for even more people to benefit from ultra-fast broadband – and potentially deliver improvements to the provision of other utility services, including water and electricity."

The Department for Transport said it would work with industry experts to exploit the crossover potential of modern infrastructure developments more generally.

Ofcom data shows that 70-90% of homes in most areas along the proposed route already have access to superfast broadband. However, as with the trains, the additional capacity and speeds should have a beneficial effect in regions beyond.

Despite ~~rural opposition~~, the council leaders of the eight major English cities outside London have joined to urge the government to announce the route as soon as possible and bring forward the planned date of works to maximise the benefits. Should the bill be passed as expected next year, the network is scheduled to be in operation by 2032.

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