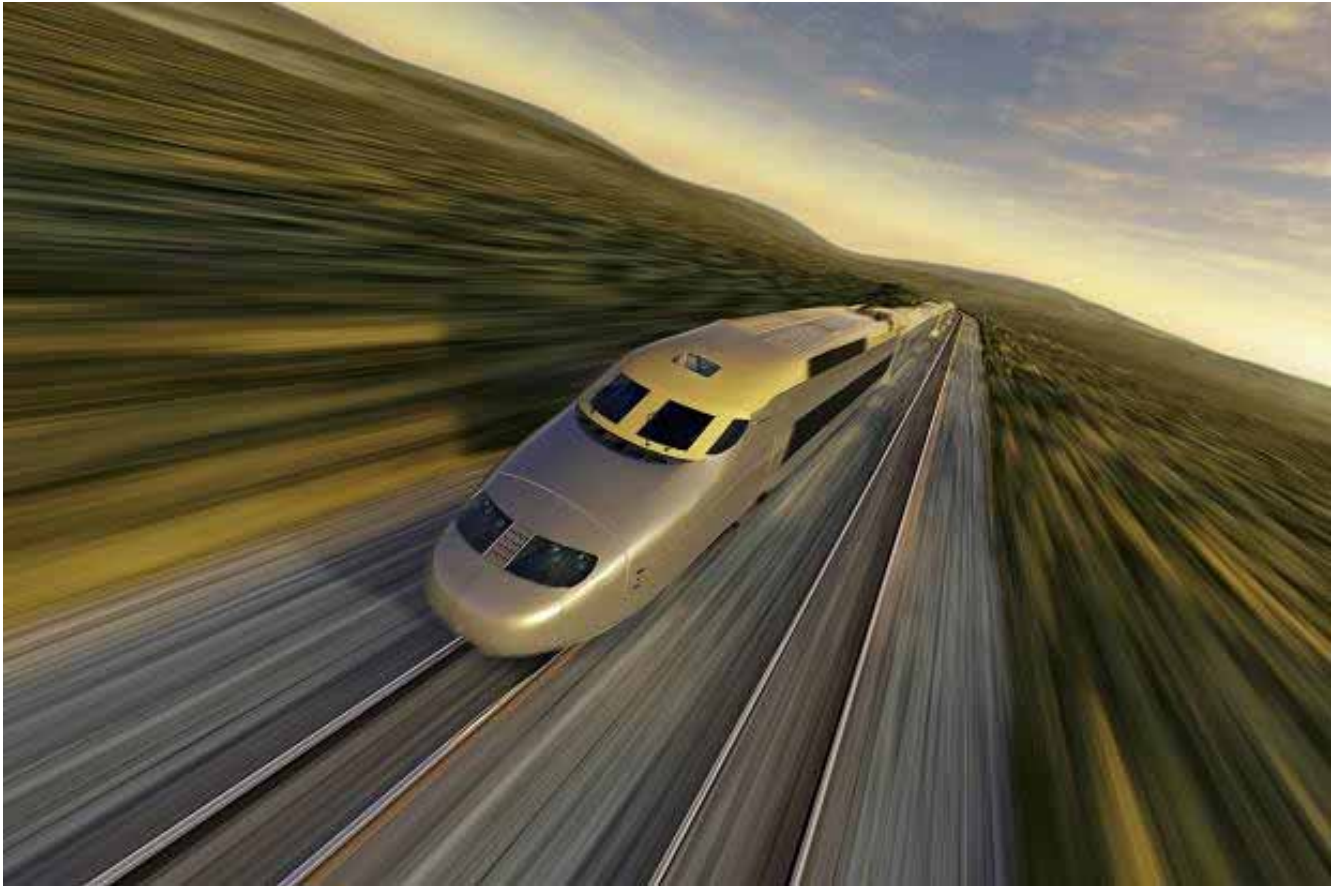


Full speed ahead for HS2 after judge rejects challenges



Trains are due to be running at 225mph between London and Birmingham by 2026 Doug Armand

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A judge dismissed a legal challenge against the £33 billion high speed railway this morning, leaving ministers clear to press on with the government's flagship infrastructure project.

Mr Justice Ouseley dismissed nine out of ten challenges against the railway brought by councils, local protest groups and a golf club.

However, he did uphold a single challenge against the way the government had consulted on its compensation scheme for people whose homes and businesses will be destroyed by the railway running between London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds.

Ministers vowed to rerun the consultation exercise as soon as possible and insisted that the ruling would not delay the project. Trains are due to be running at 225mph between London and Birmingham by 2026 and by 2033 to the North.

Simon Burns, the minister for high speed rail, told *The Times*: “The judge has given us the green light to proceed with this project which is in the national interest.”

He said that he would re-run the consultation on compensation to bring “certainty and clarity” to people affected by the line. “This is a very worrying time for homeowners,” he said. The minister dismissed reports that the project was already over-budget.

The government plans to spend £500 million before the diggers move in during the next parliament. It plans to introduce legislation paving the way for the railway by the end of the year.

Martin Tett, the leader of Buckinghamshire County Council which is spearheading opposition to the proposals, said it was “highly likely” that they would appeal. “This is a great victory for local people,” he claimed.

Richard Houghton, a spokesman for HS2 Action Alliance, said: “We are very, very pleased.” He noted that in upholding the group’s challenge the judge had ruled that the way the consultation on compensation had been conducted was “so unfair as to be unlawful”.

He said that the group would appeal on environmental grounds.

Mr Justice Ouseley heard five separate challenges against plans to build the fastest railway in Europe. Councils represented by the 51M group had argued that the Government’s consultation process was flawed and that there had been inadequate environmental assessment.

HS2 Action Alliance had claimed that the Government failed to comply with environmental law as well as failing to consult fairly on compensation to be paid to homeowners and businesses affected by the line.

Heathrow Hub lobby group and a golf club in Aylesbury also made independent court challenges.

The judge rejected all but one case.

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