**LANE HEAD SOUTH RESIDENTS ASSSOCIATION**

**LOWTON EAST NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT FORUM**

**LOWTON WEST RESIDENTS**

**THE VOICE FOR GOLBORNE AND LOWTON WEST**

 c/o 63 Haddon Road

Private residential address is not disclosed via online media due to GDPR

 Lowton

 Near Warrington

 WA3 2JQ

2nd December 2020

Andrew Stephenson MP

Minister of State

Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Dear Minister

**HS2 – GOLBORNE SPUR**

I am writing to you on behalf of the above residents’ groups, to ask you to cancel the Golborne HS2 Spur which passes through Lowton and Golborne, in the Leigh constituency. We know that there are other communities along the proposed Spur which share our view, and which have put forward their own arguments against its provision – many of them chiming with our own.

In terms of Lowton and Golborne, we believe there are a number of reasons why the Golborne Spur should be cancelled, and a portion of the £3 billion pounds saved spent locally on much needed transport improvements. The remainder could make a significant contribution to the regional proposals put forward by Transport for the North to provide essential regional and East-West connection improvements.

HS2 trains passing through Crewe will continue to travel up the existing West Coast Main Line to serve both Warrington and Wigan, and onward to Glasgow and Edinburgh, as they do now. Originally, we were advised that the HS2 Golborne Spur was needed to save on journey times – High Speed Rail. However, when it was revealed that the journey time of trains travelling along the Spur to Preston would in fact only be reduced by less than 15 – 20 minutes, the justification emphasis was changed to that of ‘capacity’.

However, even before the unprecedented times which we now find ourselves in, data gathered for a House of Commons Library Paper CBP8601, published in June 2019, questioned the requirement for increased passenger capacity on the West Coast Main Line. The 2019 paper details how, in the context of HS2, passenger growth on long distance franchises had been slowing for the better part of the last five years, particularly inter-city travel, which appears to negate the need for increased capacity on the West Coast Main Line. The abstract concludes:

*the analysis in the paper shows that much of the capacity constraints on the network, from a passenger crowding point of view, only occur during the peak periods of the day and on confined parts of the network. During most other periods of the day, trains are travelling at less than half of their capacity.*

*From a passenger crowding point of view, the additional capacity provided by HS2 on the West Coast Main Line appears to be over and above what is required to meet capacity pressures for several decades.*

Projected rail passenger numbers are likely to be revised further to reflect changes in work practices that were already evolving due to the increased use of ‘on line’ technology. Covid-19 has highlighted the opportunities provided by remote working and remote meetings, resulting in significant savings to employers both in inter-city travel costs and time management whether travelling by rail or car. We believe it is unnecessary and therefore uneconomic to construct another line to connect to the West Coast Main Line South of Wigan.

Golborne and Lowton residents currently access the West Coast Main Line at Wigan or Warrington stations and this would still be the case with or without the Spur. It is confirmed that High Speed trains travelling along the Spur to and from London will not stop at Wigan so, despite many years of disruption during construction, and the devastating effect on our green spaces, there is absolutely no benefit to local residents or the local economy.

The proposed route of the Golborne spur shows the line in very close proximity to housing, as it passes through Lowton St Mary’s, blighting the value of hundreds of homes. After travelling through a cutting, the line is expected to rise on an embankment to a height of between 4 and 6 metres as it passes close to another area of several hundred properties. It then bisects a much-valued local green space, Byrom Hall Wood, in a 75 metre-wide corridor, with massive destruction of ancient hedgerows, woodland and wildlife habitat which will take many years to recover. In addition, we understand that, with the line at such a height through the woodland, noise barriers will be erected on top of the embankment – noise disturbance being reduced (not eradicated) by a considerable loss of visual amenity in what is now a beautiful rural setting.

The water supply in Lowton West is extracted from a borehole which is extremely close to the proposed route. HS2 officials have not been able to provide an assurance that this source will not be affected by pollution from the construction or operation of HS2. Indeed, that they are already in talks with United Utilities to develop a ‘contingency plan’ to provide an alternative water supply suggests that this is something that is more than the vague ‘unlikely’ scenario they put forward. However, the numbers of new houses built in Lowton over recent years – in excess of 2,000 – has already resulted in extremely low pressure in those areas of Lowton not served by the borehole and any further demand on the existing supply will only serve to worsen this further.

Lowton and Golborne has seen vehicular traffic and congestion explode due to increased house building, without any accompanying transport infrastructure investment, over recent years. We believe that the money saved by scrapping the Spur could be used to provide significant regional and local transport improvements which would be of enormous benefit.

Golborne and Lowton residents are not opposed to progress. Urged on by constituents, successive Members of Parliament have lobbied for the provision of a local railway station within the Greater Manchester area. It is well documented that Leigh, our nearest town, is one of the largest in the United Kingdom not to have any rail connection since its last station closed in 1969.

We are aware that the current Member of Parliament for Leigh, James Grundy, continues to make the argument for the provision of rail links served by stations at Golborne and Kenyon Junction. Introduction of these local rail links as part of an integrated public transport system would be extremely welcome and improve our local economy.

James also supports the extension of the Atherleigh Way Bypass to the M6 motorway, which would remove considerable volumes of commercial and private vehicular traffic from our narrow village roads. The Leigh Guided Busway has proved to have a very limited effect on journey times into Manchester at peak periods and would benefit considerably from an upgrade to tram or light railway provision directly into the city centre, rather than coming to an end several miles outside Manchester at Ellenbrook, as it does now.

 These comparatively low-cost transport improvements would reduce commuting journey times – significantly increasing job opportunities for local residents in the cities of Liverpool and Manchester and boosting the local economy, whilst bringing down traffic congestion on our roads.

In these straightened financial times, we believe the £3 billion price tag on the Golborne Spur vastly outweighs any economic benefit, either nationally or locally, and we urge you to cancel it and concentrate the funds released on upgrading transport infrastructure in the local communities that desperately need it and would provide a much better ‘return on investment’.

Yours faithfully

Kathleen Johnson, Chair, on behalf of Lane Head South Residents

Edward Thwaite, Chair, on behalf of Lowton East Neighbourhood Development Forum

Linda Graham, Chair, on behalf of Lowton West Residents

Alan Percival, Chair, on behalf of The Voice for Golborne and Lowton West

c.c James Grundy, Member of Parliament for Leigh