

HS2 begins search for Phase 2b ground investigation contractors – a contract worth around £300 million

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Plans to extend Britain's new high speed railway from the Midlands to the North took a giant leap forward this week as HS2 Ltd announced that it has begun the search for a team of specialist ground investigation contractors.

The single framework contract – worth around £300m – will include the appointment of a lead 'Ground Investigation Partner' supported by up to ten specialist ground investigation contractors to deliver the sophisticated programme of work.

This flexible approach will allow HS2 Ltd to call on as much technical expertise as required, depending on design needs and the outcome of the government's Integrated Rail Plan, which is expected to be published later this year.

As part of the government's plans to build back better and deliver economic benefits and improved transport links to the North quicker, the Government has instructed HS2 Ltd to proceed with legislation for

the Western leg of Phase 2b – from Crewe to Manchester as a priority. This will vastly improve connectivity, create thousands of new jobs and business opportunities, and help to rebalance the UK's economy into the next decade and beyond.

HS2's Procurement and Supply Chain Director, Andrew Cubitt, said: "This framework agreement is an important step in our plans to bring HS2 to the North. It will enable us to procure a comprehensive body of ground investigation data to inform our future civil engineering works.

"The structure of the framework agreement means that more than ten contractors could benefit from the opportunities we are creating, which comes at a vital time for UK businesses seeking stability and growth as we strive to recover from the effects of the pandemic."

The flexible framework approach also allows for contractors to be pulled in to deliver ground investigation work to support the delivery of the government's Integrated Rail Plan.

In civil engineering, the largest element of technical and financial risk lies in the ground, and in particular, unexpected ground conditions are the most common cause for significant cost and programme overrun. The Phase 2b ground investigations programme is designed with the specific aim of reducing this risk.

In total, the ground investigation programme allows for more than 15,000 exploratory holes and will enable a model of the ground beneath the whole route to be developed. This geotechnical data has a vital role to play in informing the design and construction of the railway and allows ground hazards to be addressed and managed effectively.

The procurement is for an initial eight-year framework, with the option to extend for a further two years. It is split into two lots:

- The Ground Investigation Partner – worth up to £85m – will be responsible for managing and co-ordinating the packaging of GI works as well as the planning and the implementation of GI site enabling works.
- The GI Contractors – worth up to £215m – will be responsible for the acquisition and formal reporting of geotechnical, hydrogeological and geo-environmental data through surveys, the excavation and detailed logging of exploratory holes, and high-quality in-situ and laboratory testing.

The launch of the contract opportunity this week does not commit HS2 to any spending at this stage. Bidders will be shortlisted towards the end of the year with the contract award expected in 2022.

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd