

**High Profile Month for HS2**

This last month has seen HS2 become quite a high profile political event, with media interest continuing on a regular basis such that I will not attempt to cover all that has been written. This activity has demonstrated the success of all involved over the last 18 months in campaigns targeting senior politicians, wooing press contacts etc

**Supreme Court Hearing**

Before covering all this activity, an update on the Court actions is needed as the date for the Supreme Court appeal on the Environmental Impact Assessment has been set for October 15 and 16 with the decision likely to be released early in the new year. The main action is being taken by HS2AA and a group of local borough and district councils that are most directly affected by HS2, including Camden, Hillingdon, at least four district councils, including Chiltern. I understand that the Supreme Court has to consider whether the case against the Government should be referred to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and it could refer the action without a decision. A key issue is a conflict between English Law and European Law and the interpretation of European Law by English Law. It seems that the dissenting judge in the Court of Appeal considered that the matter should be referred to the ECJ.

Bucks County Council have decided, as their grounds of the appeal are the same as HS2AA's, to support HS2AA's action financially and not to take action themselves. They are also funding new work on capacity issues and alternatives to HS2. Chiltern DC's aims are to get the case referred to ECJ as determination there will take two years during which progress on the Hybrid Bill should be challenged. All delays are in our interests as costs would go on up to even more ludicrous levels.

**Paving Bill and the Hybrid Bill**

I understand this is with the House of Lords awaiting their Lordships return from the summer break so the widescale political and media criticism of cost and benefit might affect its progress

The Hybrid bill is scheduled to be lodged by November. It is interesting to note that Alison Munro (CEO of HS2) was reported in the Times as saying that Parliament may defer legislation on HS2 until after the General Election in 2015, indicating an admission that HS2 are behind with their work for it; the Draft Environmental Statement indicated acres of areas where this applied.

Bucks CC have appointed Parliamentary Agents to advise on petitioning for the Hybrid bill to help with their strategy. A further summit is promised, inter alia, to assist people and businesses affected that will have grounds for petitioning direct to Parliament during the select committee stages.

The Government has appealed against a decision requiring it to disclose the Major Projects Authority report that HS2 was put on an Amber Red alert, meaning its successful delivery is in doubt with major risks or issues apparent in a number of key areas. One retiring member this month has stated that in his opinion HS2 could remain on the critical list for some time.

**Recent Developments through the Media**

The two major recent important disclosures in the media have been on costs.

First the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) produced their independent research study into the cost of HS2 and concluded that stated the cost of HS2 has been dramatically underestimated and "defies economic logic." Key areas for the underestimate include buying off opposition with route changes, including those around Osborne's constituency, lobbying for necessary spending on access for out of town locations for stations etc. This report puts true cost of HS2 at £80 billion.

That the IEA is a respected think tank within the Treasury means it should be considered seriously. It may explain reports in the Financial Times that the “Treasury brandishes £73 billion bill as HS2 battle escalates”. Treasury officials appear to have leaked their concerns at the cash cost, as the £43 billion was based on 2011 costs, excluding inflation and VAT, and excluded rolling stock. This report shows the anxiety in the Treasury of having to continue to support the Government’s determination to continue with HS2 to support its claims for the wider economic benefits and reversing the north south divide, both arguments being advanced without supporting evidence.

On the same day that the IEA report was reported, the Daily Mail’s headlined another thrust against HS2 “A Stake in the Heart of Middle England” with evidence taken from HS2’s own information of the extent of the damage along the route, identifying areas within a 40 mile corridor of the route. The editorial was “halt this HS2 monstrosity in its tracks.” The basis was disclosures to the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), that included lorry routes down a network of country roads, noise blighting some of the most tranquil areas, damage to beauty spots, and the absence of compensation for the damage. Interestingly this article listed 6 affected areas, none in the Chilterns AONB, helpfully widening the scope for opposition.

A great deal of focus will now be on the promised revised business cost ratio that HS2 “are working on” but did not provide with their revised costs but stated it will be issued “in the autumn.”

### **BBC News and Newsnight joined the HS2 Act**

Alistair Darling, as a former Secretary of State for Transport and Chancellor of the Exchequer, repeated his lack of support for HS2, saying he does not support it as the cost would be at the expense of the rest of the rail network which would suffer. With his experience let us hope the Labour Party agree such that the all party consensus fails. In addition it was interesting that on the BBC News Ed Balls has now said there would be no blank cheque for HS2.

The same evening on Newsnight Gavin Essler made mince meat of Maria Eagle who was trying to continue to support HS2 without answering his question of what the limit for the Balls cheque was.

### **Business Opinion**

Whereas business opinion has been supportive of HS2, a number of cracks are starting to appear. First the chief executive of Legal and General, in announcing his company and the pension industry had £15 billion to invest in infrastructure projects, said they would not invest in HS2 because of its absence of economic benefits. Since then many business leader groups, strong supporters of HS2, have raised doubts over HS2. These include the Institute of Directors, who will be issuing a hard hitting report on Tuesday suggesting alternatives to HS2, the British Chambers of Commerce have stated it could review its support if costs increased, and the Confederation of British Industries that HS2 must wash its face and be value for money, particularly at times of austerity. Even the result in a poll in the Manchester Evening News produced an 82% no vote on HS2!

### **Community Forums**

We have just been advised that HS2 are restating the Community Forums again in the area in mid September so there may be further information forthcoming from them on such critical local matters as proposals for lorry routes, landscape mitigation, rights of way reinstatements etc, but I am not holding my breath.

**Lastly** a tailpiece. Last Friday when HS2 featured in the BBC’s evening news report it was pleasing to watch one of my newsletter readers in Little Missenden appearing and arguing sensibly against HS2!

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