

GMStopHS2 Newsletter

Progress on Petitioning on the Hybrid Bill

The Select Committee have agreed that HS2AA and StopHS2 should be eligible to petition. In doing so they stated “HS2AA and StopHS2 have sufficiently demonstrated they are representative of the people specially and directly affected by the bill and are not just protests against the bill.”

The Chair of the committee has said there is plenty of time to hear petitions, the consequence of which is that hearing them may take up to 2 years. However for petitions actually to be read, the petitioners, or a representative agent, must appear before the committee and exhibits have to be presented 2 days beforehand.

The committee started hearing petitions in Birmingham before the summer recess and have now recommenced hearings from Birmingham area Councils, It was surprising the Birmingham Council petitioned as they have always been in favour of HS2. I now understand, as they have received reassurances they have withdrawn their petition (even though there are no binding obligations recorded yet). The petitioning process seems to be that the petitioner presents his case, HS2 respond to it, the petitioner can then cross examine HS2 before making a closing statement.

Chiltern District Council (CDC) are running a petitioning seminar next Friday so look up for details from their website or email C Harding at CDC offices

Information Maps and Additional Provisions

HS2 have announced that there are to be additional provisions to the Hybrid Bill that are likely to include details of further land acquisitions and other changes / additions to the Environmental Statement. Great and Little Missenden, Wendover and Stoke Manderville parishes have been notified that their areas are affected. The first of these additional provisions are to be deposited in Parliament on 9 September. As these amend the Hybrid bill on which petitions were submitted, we understand that these will have to be the subject of a short debate before the House, then, if approved by Parliament be the subject of a consultation, and then can be petitioned against by affected parties. There is likely to be a 4 week period in which to petition. The plans to redesign Euston are not yet included, presumably not designed yet, so further additional provisions will be needed for that at least in not for other areas.

Sixth Property Consultation

Even though this is the sixth consultation, everyone is encouraged to respond and include a demand for a property bond as the only fair mitigation. Basically it is the same scheme as in April with a tiny sop entitled ”sharing the benefits of HS2” for houses between 120 and 300 m of the line of £7,500 to £22,500.

The Bucks CC draft response is available at <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/environment/hs2/consultations/> HS2AA’s will be on their site very soon with a simple “Dear Prime Minister letter” that can be filled in and completed online. Also StopHS2 and 51M websites will help.

Please make sure you all respond by the end of the consultation period **23.45 on September 30.**

House of Lords Inquiry into the Economic Case for HS2

This enquiry into the economic case for HS2 is to be chaired by the Labour peer Lord Hollick and appears to be a labour initiative. Bucks CC, CDC, the 51M group of councils, HS2AA and the Chiltern Society are all submitting evidence due by 15 September.

Mary Creagh, the shadow transport minister, has stated that on rail franchises their “aim is not to waste money. Our aim is to drive value for the taxpayer and get the best service for the best” How can this fit in with building HS2 when the 51M alternative is so much better value?

Media Coverage

Damien McBride has written an article in the Times entitled “Labour must scrap HS2 to avoid a rail disaster” He goes on to describe Labour’s position as a fudge as they are supporting it on the basis that it does not cost too much but all transport projects overrun, are late and over budget. HS2 is the only big budget project that is available to be scrapped in favour of more politically beneficial promises. McBride is now out of favour in the party but he is an acknowledged policy thinker and former heavyweight.

The Government has been active in proposing a HS3 rail link from Leeds and Manchester (so short a distance that a proper high speed train would not be able to reach top speed!). A reasons for this could be that HS2 has not had the desired effect in the north for the Tories and it could possibly provide a climb down on HS2. There is still strong demand from the northern councils that want HS2 and HS3 and cannot see the need to choose between them. This DfT initiative has backfired with their announced intentions for cuts and fare increases in new northern rail franchises (as commuter fares there are up to half those in the south east.)

Lastly the Government has announce that the new headquarters for HS2 will be in Birmingham and that there are proposed to be benefits of £330million provided to Birmingham local enterprise partnerships for HS2 related developments No doubt this has been excluded from the costs of HS2 like much else .

Party conferences and a Briefing of Labour Party

Either HS2AA or StopHS2 will be at the two major party conferences and those of the Greens and UKIP.

In preparation for these, and at a recent meeting with the labour party officials, HS2AA has re-emphasised to the party a number of further problems with HS2 to consider. Firstly they have emphasised that the Benefit Cost Ratio confirms that HS2 will require a substantial operating subsidy and that the arguments for the benefits it will generate will only amount to half the subsidy needed.

Secondly they have shown that the Government’s case for HS2 rely on the benefits being projected up to 2092 and not 2050 as they maintain. The economic benefits so claimed are 1.8 (and 2.3 with the wider economic benefits) when actually they are .49 and 1.73 .

Thirdly on capacity as it is agreed that the proposals of lengthening the trains and cutting out the bottlenecks (one of which is planned now anyway) will solve the long distance passenger capacity so the argument has changed to releasing capacity on fast lanes for commuter and freight trains. However now proposing Crossrail is expanded to Hertfordshire will provide extra commuter train capacity on the WCML anyway

Fourthly the proposals to rebuild Euston are planned to last until 2036 so that for the first 10 years of HS2, the trains will end at Old Oak Common, thereby reducing the saving of travel time to central London.

Bucks CC meetings Update

Transport for Bucks have sought local opinions on the traffic problems for the Missendens during construction both as far as access to the villages and dealing with A413 congestion. They have also continued local meetings that cover key issues for them to negotiate with HS2. They are also gathering in evidence for use by petitioners. Further meetings will be held in September and a summit on 8 October. They intend to give advice on attending the select committee hearings and strongly recommend attending a session beforehand

Bucks CC have met with HS2 on transport problems without much success as HS2 will not make any commitments “as the route has not yet reached the design stage yet” so discussions with HS2 fruitless. They have presented HS2 with some 45 transport major transport issues in the county that HS2 have not been considered and will need to be addressed.

Legal Cases

The High Court dismissed the case brought by Hillingdon Council and HS2AA that a SEA should have been carried out before the safeguarding directions were issued. The judgement was made partly on issues that were not raised by either party! Leave to appeal is being sought.

Tunnel News

The new proposal for a level tunnel through the whole of the AONB from CDC, initially dismissed out of hand by HS2, now might be being looked at by their consultants.

Another recently announced relevant point on tunnels is that the EU TSI directive requiring an intervention gap for tunnels over 24 km is being amended from 1 January thereby enabling possible further scope for amending, and possibly even reducing, the costs of tunnelling through all of the AONB.

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