

Environmental Statement(ES)

Thanks to the incompetent work of the DfT, the ES consultation period has been extended twice now, first to 10 by the House of Commons and then to 27 February by the House of Lords. This was because HS2 failed to circulate the whole document initially. The effect of this delay will be to put back the timetable for the Hybrid bill second reading by a month and then the Easter recess puts it back further.

HS2 had admitted that it is behind schedule with HS2, possibly at least 6 months behind, and the Secretary of State admits that it is unlikely the hybrid bill will be passed by before the election. This further delay makes it even more unlikely. These decisions were announced after our open meeting in Great Missenden Memorial Hall on 12 January.

The revised estimated dates for the future progress of the legislative programme are now

27 February	End of consultation on the ES
3 March	Responses sent by Minister for independent analysis and a report to Parliament in 28 days
11-25 April	Easter Recess of Parliament
28 April	Hybrid bill earliest likely second reading, which will set petitioning period
12 May	Estimated end of petitioning registration period

The second reading is the vote, in principle, to build HS2, though the route can be amended by petitioning

The local action groups in the Central Chilterns Community Forum area are using the extension to ensure all major points are included in the responses from the communities (both from the local community forums as a whole, the local villages and individual responses). For example the recent floods have drawn attention of the press to the fact that the ES has not fully assessed the flood risks for HS2.

The extension gives more time to increase the number of responses, especially the postcard response demanding an extended tunnel throughout the Chilterns AONB. Do make sure all your contacts are submitting a freepost response (name and postcode is all that is required)

More and more errors, inconsistencies and illogical conclusions are being found in the ES, only proving it is not fit for purpose. For example the figures for traffic increases on the A 413 do not add up; more lorries go into Wycombe road junction roundabout than exit it!

Supreme Court Decision

This delayed decision was announced and the appeal by HS2AA and others was dismissed, along with the application to appeal to Europe. The Court took a very narrow and conservative view that is considered not to accord with EU law or the Aarhus Convention. The plaintiffs plan to take the matter further.

Parliamentary and DfT Developments

The Government, as was reported last month did not appeal the decision of the Information Commissioner to publish the Major Project Assessment (MPA) report of November 2011 that labelled HS2 red/amber alert mark (ie it was in danger of failing), have just overruled the Information Commissioner's ruling and vetoed the publication of the report. The last time this veto was made was when the weapons of mass destruction was discussed over the lead up to the Iraq war! Since then under the coalition transparency agreement David Cameron declared that each MPA report must be disclosed after a 2 year period.!

Furthermore the reason given by McLaughlin for not publishing the report, which was prepared 2 years ago, "was to preserve future policy making rather than suppressing damaging information". A month before he had objecting to the request for release as "it would create political and presentational difficulties at a crucial point in HS2 project development." Has he changed his mind because HS2 is a weapon of mass destruction of housing and the countryside?! The Information Commissioner has pledged to report to Parliament on this matter and there has been a request that the legal exchanges on the matter be disclosed so this embarrassing matter may rebound again.

Another critical report on HS2 has been sat upon by the DfT at the time they were publishing the KPMG report on the alleged benefits of £15 billion to the economy of the Midlands and north. This second, unpublished, report (entitled Assessment from Modelling and Appraisal of the sub-National, Regional and Local Economy Impacts of Transport) was dated September and was published on the DfT website in October 2013 seven weeks after the KPMG report. It stated the KPMG report which showed the benefits to the economy from HS2, for the Midlands and the North, to be highly exaggerated.

Following all this political deviousness, HS2 are relaunching, again, their public relations effort to try to convince the country. They are abandoning the need for inter city high speed route and will focus on cutting overcrowding on commuter routes, cutting the £50 billion cost by starting to work from both ends to speed up the construction works and reduce the costs from inflation. The new chairman, Sir David Higgins, started this in an interview in the Telegraph this week, an interview that really said very little, referring to capacity problems (but capacity is still undefined as people on trains or trains on tracks), political consensus on HS2 is essential, building from both ends (but the planning for phase 2 for the north is much further behind phase 1) the vague promises that HS2 will connect to the cities of the north and make them richer, and platitudes like "if it takes three years instead of one, it adds two years of inflation to the cost"! It will be interesting to see what he reports on the project in March, as he has been commissioned to do by Cameron.

This relaunch comes at a time when polls in Yorkshire are showing a majority of opposition to HS2, many towns there will suffer downgrading of services and Wakefield have voted to oppose HS2. Ed Balls is still sitting on the fence, saying Labour could delay the bill until after the general election to give the party more scope to kill off the scheme or scale it down after the election if it won power.

Lastly the Water Minister has admitted that the risk of flooding for HS2 has not been fully assessed yet!

HS2 Ltd

As well as a new chairman, HS2 have removed Alison Munro as chief executive and appointed a new chief executive, Simon Kirby, at a salary of £750,000 per annum! Was this, and the £300,000 plus for the chairman included in the budget?.

Interesting snippets of detail used by HS2 to justify the project keep emerging. In the economic case for HS2, £8 billion saving on classic trains was included in the argument. It transpires this is from a 50% cut in classic existing trains on the west coast mainline and 36% on the east and west coast main lines combined.

Other Media News

So far HS2 has spent £300 million on outside consultants between January 2011 and October 2013, before Parliamentary approval has been obtained to build the line.

The Times published the change of heart by the CPRE who, nationally, have consistently been supportive of HS2 on 23 January under the headline "Betrayed rural body turns against HS2." They argued (at last) that the line would cause unacceptable damage to the Chilterns AONB and this could only be mitigated by a more expensive tunnel.

The Institute of Directors have come out against HS2 following a survey of their members, no more than 2/5 thereof believe HS2 would have a positive impact on their businesses. HS2 is not the infrastructure project Britain needs, not enough businesses will benefit from it and the importance of HS2 has fallen significantly to members over the last 2 years

Lastly in case you missed it, the local UKIP county councillor was stopped by police from travelling in an anti HS2 van 2 miles from Chequers last week!

Mark Ladd

PS Do keep getting friends and family to send off postcard responses to the ES telling David Cameron that the only AONB on the route needs a full tunnel. Alternatively for a 30 second personal response go to website of HS2AA hs2aa.org/es-2014 for guidance. Numbers who respond is key.