

GMStopHS2 Newsletter

Second Reading of the Hybrid Bill

This has been listed to take place on 28 April, the earliest date possible following all the incompetence by the DfT in producing and publishing their inadequate Environmental Statement. This debate will confirm the principle of the high Speed link between London and Birmingham. After it the principle will no longer be open to debate but the bill will then be subject to scrutiny by the select committee and petitions on it. The second reading will take 2 days due to the number of amendments being tabled. The limited timescales for registering petitions on HS2 have also been announced as being from 29 April to 23 May for the general public but only to 16 May for businesses and local authorities.

A number of briefing meetings on petitioning have been held and one is planned at Little Missenden at 5.30 on 13 April. Amersham StopHS2 are holding a drop in session from 10-3 on Saturday April 12 in the small barn hall at Amersham Community Centre and Great Missenden StopHS2 are holding their drop in session at the White Lion in Great Missenden on Saturday 26 April from 10am -1 pm. These are all aimed at helping those who are “directly and significantly affected” to prepare their cases to submit to Parliament. Simple guides and draft presentation format will be available and advice given how to proceed

It is important that as many petitions are made as possible. Some 1000 Crossrail petitions took 2 years to be heard. Let us aim for more for HS2. The select committee members are 3 Conservative MP's (Norfolk North West, Poole and Worthing West), 2 Labour (Bolton SE and Gateshead) and 1 Lib Dem (Eastleigh).

As well as complaining about the effect of HS2, all petitions have to include a proposal from the petitioner how to solve the problem the source of the petition. Undoubtedly the majority of local petitions will commence with solution of the extended tunnel.

In preparing a petition, do remember that the Bucks County Council blueprint is an important analysis of potential mitigation measures that are needed for this area. It is available on their HS2 website.

Compensation Consultation

Another announcement on compensation this week with a sixth consultation on the last two proposals below!

- The new proposals inevitable are incredibly complicated and seem to comprise
- Express purchase scheme for the 60m route safeguarded area for those with an urgent need to sell;
- The exceptional hardship scheme continues for those with a pressing need to sell;
- A voluntary purchase scheme of the unblighted value for beyond the safeguarded area to 120 metres;
- A new “Need to Sell” to take the place of the exceptional hardship scheme; and beyond that
- A homeowner payment scheme for rural areas up to 300 metres of a cash payment of between £7,500 and £22,000 (between 1% and 3% of the value of the properties already bought by HS2).

This latter proposal of compensation proposed has been ignored in the business case for HS2..

Higgins Report to the Government

Sir David Higgins has produced his promised report on HS2. Cameron ordered him to produce detailed plans to tackle the spiralling costs of HS2 and to maximise the benefits for all parts of the country! Higgins reported that the costs had been understated but brought them into line by proposing abolishing the link between HS2 and HS1. The Secretary of State has accepted abandoning the direct link to HS1 and agreed the revival of the earlier proposed £1.2 billion plans for Euston. No doubt this is to try to find redevelopment benefits around Euston to offset some extra costs but no proposal for how such development will be paid for has been included.

Higgins also told the Transport Select Committee that Crossrail 2 is needed to resolve access from Euston as the Victoria line is already at capacity in rush hours. The Government has also acknowledged this problem but has, of course, ignored the cost of £14 billion that Crossrail 2 will add to the cost of HS2.

He has focussed on the latest arguments for HS2, greater capacity and connectivity, especially in the north, and the north south divide, observing that the UK is London centred with so many FTSE 100 companies based there. He ignores that only 66 are London based (In France 83% of major companies are Paris based).

All his proposals appear to have been made without taking into account the consequences of change to the Hybrid Bill which has to be amended for the HS1/HS2 link and presumably for the re-examination of the Euston proposals. The proposals for phase 2 are to be reviewed but for phase 1 "no major changes costing billions are to be contemplated". His aim is to complete HS2 6 years earlier, HS2 should speed up the construction of phase 2, particularly between Lichfield and Crewe, and start construction from the north.

Parliamentary and DfT Developments

The House of Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee has now reported on the Environmental Protection proposed for phase 1. Their conclusions included lowering the speed of the trains by 40 mph to 185 mph to reduce carbon emissions, noted HS2 had failed to carry out reviews of half of the ancient woodland, with the wildlife affected, and the biodiversity offsetting plans are not comprehensive and there should be a legally binding commitment to reduce carbon emissions.

HS2 does not currently feature high on the Labour Party agenda, even though Lord Mandelson describes HS2 as a cruel joke on the north.. They are likely to vote in favour of HS2 as the power in the party comes from the key local councils, (especially Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds) and the Trades Unions as well as the parliamentary party. The first two are in favour, even though several northern smaller councils (e.g. Wakefield and Bradford) are against as there is no benefit for them. The prospects are that Labour will vote in favour but reserve their position to change the policy, or even cancel HS2, if elected if the reallocation of the budgeted resources for HS2 can be better allocated for their more immediate aims.

Counteracting Higgins HS2Action Alliance have highlighted the benefits of HS2 have been extrapolated until 2096 whereas the costs, especially staff costs, have only been included to 2036! Also HS2 have admitted there is no research and design budget included and there is no flood risk assessment carried out yet.

Lastly the Government is to receive a challenge from the Information Commissioner for a judicial review over its decision to withhold the Major Projects Authority report on HS2.

HS2 Growth Task Force

The Government, through Lord Deighton, the commercial secretary to the Treasury, has just issued a further HS2 report, this one from a HS2Growth Task Force no doubt to try to persuade MP's to support HS2. Basically it said "get on with HS2 and the growth will come", without any explanation of how HS2 could generate local jobs, growth or regeneration. The key message provided was to "get cities ready for HS2, get transport networks ready, get people ready and get businesses ready" with very little detailed proposals provided, beyond a Minister be appointed to coordinate regeneration plans.

Environmental Statement

The independent assessor's report has been issued. The overall impression is that many of the key issues have been reported in the report. The greatest issue of concern of respondents was minimising the effect of the route through the AONB through the overwhelming demand for a tunnel under the Chilterns AONB (12,637 comments out of 21,883 received). The Chilterns aquifer and the River Misbourne feature heavily among the 4,787 responses on Water Resources.

That is the good news the report identified many key issues; the bad news is that it is very unlikely the MP's will read or the Government take any notice of this 112 page report

Postscript

In giving evidence to the environmental audit committee, Nick Rose (the Chiltern District Council leader) told MPs that at the community forums conducted by HS2 "We were told half truths. We were given nothing. They were not interested in anything we said. Everything was set in stone. We found the whole process pretty much futile. The whole exercise was nothing short of a cynical charade" So say all that attended them.

Mark Ladd