

**Progress on Petitioning on the Hybrid Bill**

The Select Committee have progressed their hearings at a quick pace as many petitions in the Birmingham Council areas have been withdrawn, presumably as these were technical petitions or they have negotiated settlements with HS2 to suit themselves (as all Birmingham Council are in favour of HS2).

The most interesting settlement, and one of the most significant changes to phase 1, that emerged is that the Department of Transport have agreed changes negotiated by HS2 for a tunnel (under the Trent and Mersey Canal, the west coast mainline and A 38 road in the Lichfield area) instead of high embankments and viaducts. In doing so they stated, inter alia, that the impact on the landscape will be reduced.

HS2 are being active in contacting petitioners to try to resolve grounds for petitioning so as to speed up the petitioning process. In doing so they are continuing to give assurances to petitioners in their attempt to remove petitions. However if these assurances are not entered as undertakings in the parliamentary records, they are worthless as there is no obligation for HS2 to keep such assurances, as Kent CC found on HS1.

Another matter gleaned from individual petitions heard is that counsel for HS2 on occasions responded to petitioners with irrelevant or incorrect facts "as he is acting as an advocate". However petitioners have the last word, errors and irrelevant responses can be pointed out.

I understand that HS2AA are about to appear to make their preliminary case on the inadequacies of the environmental statement, which will be interesting to see what defence is given

Training sessions for future petitioners being organised by the Clerk to the Committee, see [prbohoc@parliament.uk](mailto:prbohoc@parliament.uk) which may be worth attending.

**Additional Provisions**

HS2 disclosed additional provisions to the Hybrid Bill for extra landtake to meet their needs. Petitioning in respect of these requirements was permitted in the month following their disclosure.

An important addition provision affects Birmingham where more land is required for the maintenance depot. At the Select Committee Hearing HS2 were forced to admit that they had omitted to take account of the 1300 jobs already at the site whereas HS2 will only create 640 (there was also potential for 5200 to be created there that will be lost).

Locally these included amendment to the route from the balancing pond by the railway line below Mantles Wood that actually was a slight improvement as very slightly less ancient woodland was required and the route was amended to be adjacent to the Chiltern Line but there was no restriction to the quantity of traffic using this exit on to a dangerous narrow part of the A 413.

Curiously HS2 have just announced that the additional requirements for the reconstruction of Euston Station will not be presented to Parliament until after the election; what a surprise!

**House of Lords Inquiry into the Economic Case for HS2**

This enquiry into the economic case for HS2, chaired by the Labour peer Lord Hollick, is presently sitting and significant relevant economic evidence has been produced to it by HS2AA and Wendover Action Group.

This review is likely to be much more thorough than any House of Commons review and so could become an important boost for the cause, even though supporters of HS2 totally ignore any criticism.

## **Party Conferences**

A report received from the Labour party conference was depressing as HS2 was not a headline issue and did not create much interest. The basic Labour position is they will be supporting HS2 in their election manifesto but with a reservation on costs (for what that is worth from the spending party),

At the Conservative conference the Transport minister, McLaughlin, did not receive any applause when HS2 was mentioned, a factor that campaign monitors hopefully would have noticed. A great number of delegates said they were against HS2 “but the leader does not listen”

UKIP have pledged to scrap HS2 whereas the Greens chair forecasts it will never be built!

In its manifesto, ConservativeHome, a group supported by Lord Ashcroft that champions grass roots Tories, concludes the northern constituencies to be the key battleground for the election. It has advocated scrapping HS2 being yet another London-centric megaproject that will not reach the north until 2030. The party should be redirecting the investment into northern infrastructure funds under the control of local elected mayors.

## **Bucks CC s Update**

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 major transport issues in the county that HS2 have not addressed and will need to be.

The Select Committee have carried out some site visits along the route so they can understand the problems being petitioned against. These visits are managed by HS2 but in conjunction with the County Councils. Bucks CC are lobbying for a longer visit period than one day for a county on the basis of the length of the route in the County. They have also sought local opinion of key areas to be visited.

Chiltern District Council have concluded that HS2 will cost the district £170 million whereas the Government have announced their compensation community fund to compensate areas affected of £30 million for the whole route! CDC only covers 3.5 miles of the open route. On this basis the overall affect to the Chilterns area will be very much higher than the supposed £350 million cost for a tunnel through the AONB.

## **Compensation Debate**

On Tuesday, the House of Commons held a short debate on the compensation proposals. Although it only lasted 40 minutes, the purpose was to focus on the inadequacies of the proposals that were likely increasingly to be the subject of petitions. It was reassuring to note that the chair of the Select Committee, Robert Syms, was present throughout. During site visits, the coach taking the Committee along the route stopped at many houses that would be affected.

## **Legal Cases**

Hillingdon Council and HS2AA have won their right to appeal to Court of Appeal that a SEA should have been carried out before the safeguarding directions were issued. As the judgement was made partly on issues that were not raised by either party it might be interesting.

## **Finally**

The GMStopHS2 group has joined other local organisations, including GMPC and the Chiltern Society, to commission the Chilterns Conservation Board to undertake a survey on the effects of HS2 on tourism in the area. This should be finalised by the end of the year and will provide excellent evidence to support local petitioners who have raised this issue in their petitions.

Mark