

GMStopHS2 Newsletter

Progress on Petitioning on the Hybrid Bill

Almost 50% of the petitions on HS2 have been generated in Bucks and therefore it is now very unlikely that the select committee will hear any Bucks petitions before the election. The committee will not want to deal with such contentious issues as tunnelling under the AONB before the general election,

HS2 have made a special presentation to the Select Committee on tunnelling but apparently this was totally engineering based and totally ignored any environmental benefits or costs.

HS2AA have appeared before the Select Committee on compensation and the Property Bond. During their appearance, HS2 and their counsel were seriously wrong footed by some of HS2AA's evidence and also by the Chair questioning why HS2 were not talking to the Government on the Property Bond.

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 as petitioners have the last word, errors and irrelevant responses can be pointed out.

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

Training sessions are being organised by the Clerk to the Committee, see prbohoc@parliament.uk

Nearer the time that petitions are to be heard we will be holding training sessions locally as well.

Additional Provisions and Euston Rebuilding Problems

Curiously HS2 had announced that the additional requirements for the reconstruction of Euston Station will not be presented to Parliament until after the election; what a surprise! This fact was picked up from the StopHS2 website by the Sunday Telegraph in an article by Andrew Gilligan entitled "HS2 slowly dying as Euston Terminus plan grinds to a halt". Minutes seen had quoted HS2 and Network rail's development director for Euston stating design work had stopped as HS2 "simply could not get the costs and benefits of the scheme to balance in an acceptable way." They went on to say that the proposed scheme was "not a fundable option" and "it could not be made to work financially- there is no business case". The main issue appears to be affordable housing for Camden whose Council are opposed to HS2. HS2 say 20% affordable housing makes the development unaffordable whereas Camden is demanding more, up to 50%

Halting of the process is expected to add at least a year to the timetable, making the original timetable of preparatory work for Euston to start in April 2015 and demolitions in early 2016 impossible. On timings, Robert Goodwill, the under secretary at the DfT was reported as saying he expects it will take 3 years before building starts due to the time to get the legislation through the Houses of Commons and the Lords.

Higgins Supporting the Announcement of HS3 and HS2 Plans

Higgins, the chair of HS2, was rolled out to give his analysis and support of phase 2 for HS2 and their announcement for HS3, a proposed fast link between Leeds and Manchester. Higgins called

for an interchange at Crewe, on the Birmingham – Manchester branch, and greater connectivity to the announced HS3, but turned down the request for stations at Stoke and Sheffield city centre.

MoneyWeek commented that HS2 was nothing more than an expensive gimmick, HS3 would cost £7 billion (with £10 billion a reasonable estimate) and 25 minutes saving on 55 was irrelevant in the context of total journey times from door to door. This is the key real timing of course.

The day before this announcement a poll in the Sunday Times reported that 53% of those surveyed opposed the £25 billion plans to extend HS2 to Leeds and Manchester and only 22% supported it.

In advance of this announcement, Higgins was quoted, scaremongering in an attempt to generate support for HS2, that the greatest threat to the Chilterns was from housing not HS2 and, in HS2's absence, another motorway to the west midlands needed to be built. His basis for these unjustified remarks appears to be that the housing needs for the country be resolved by building in the midlands, and north, and with HS2 becoming a commuter route for workers in London.

Higgins also has continued his bullying tactics at the political parties on his own future. A FT article, reporting on his Transport Select Committee evidence, was headed "HS2 chief threatens to quit" in 15 months time if there is not an agreed budget for HS2 approved by the next Government..

Financing HS2 and other Infrastructure Projects

The Chief Executive of Legal & General, who have stated they have £15 billion they are prepared to invest in British infrastructure, has challenged the Government again by saying it needs to focus on boosting regional cities and loosen the focus on London; saying "We need more local decisions and to make real progress on small measures not grandiose schemes like HS2 that will cost billions"

There were reports that Qatar was "keen to invest heavily in HS2," but it was on projects springing up after HS2, such as renovating around the rail hubs at Old Oak Common and Curzon Street.

House of Lords Inquiry into the Economic Case for HS2

HS2AA's evidence produced to this inquiry showed that the Benefit Cost Ratio for HS2 was less than 1. The DfT made a long formal response but HS2AA had already, with approval, lodged a significant rebuttal of most of the DfT's case and response prior to their appearance.

The committee have already heard evidence on several key issues including time taken on journeys door to door, premium ticket prices, lack of strategic planning, lack of evidence on the north south divide, demand overestimated and costs underestimated and smaller schemes give better value for money.

Bucks CC Updates

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 sought local opinion of key areas to be visited in their planning for the visit.

They are studying the impact of Heavy Goods Vehicles on roads that they will share with local communities

Compensation Debate

The House of Commons held a short debate on the compensation proposals. Lasting only 40 minutes, it focussed on the inadequacies of the proposals that increasingly will be the subject of petitions. It was reassuring to note that the chair of the Select Committee, Robert Syms, was present throughout.

Legal Cases

Hillingdon Council and HS2AA won their right to appeal to Court of Appeal that a SEA should have been carried out before the safeguarding directions were issued and the case commenced on 24 November. As the judgement was made partly on issues that were not raised by either party the result could be interesting.

Finally

GMStopHS2 and other local organisations, (GM Parish Council, the Chiltern Society etc,) commissioned the Chilterns Conservation Board to arrange an independent survey on the effects of HS2 on tourism. Due by the end of the year it will, hopefully, provide evidence to support local petitioners who raised tourism issues.

Plaid Cymru at their conference are now one of three parties in Parliament that formally opposes HS2 a, along with the Greens and UKIP. That makes 3 parties but only 6 MPs!

Happy Christmas and may HS2 have a more troubled New Year

Mark