

GMStopHS2 Newsletter

Select Committee Hearings from the Chilterns

Since the last newsletter all local activity has been on preparing and presenting the numerous petitions from the Chiltern Area to the Select committee. So far the Parish Councils have all been heard, along with Wendover, Chesham and Amersham town councils. All have been represented by Counsel. Each have made significant points, such as on disruption, traffic, failures of HS2 to carry out vital work (credible traffic surveys, hydrology tests on the chalk aquifers, the river Misbourne and the Wendover brooks) as well as the disruptive effects on individual's lives. Bucks CC recent second appearance continued their argument for a longer tunnel, covered major issues particularly local traffic issues and the inadequate community fund of £30 million for the whole route. A number of issues have been resolved or deferred due to draft assurances or ongoing discussions with HS2, including on traffic. A draft assurance has been received on capacity issues at 20 major junctions and safety issues at 40 other junctions. However a major junction now considered is the Beaconsfield A355/A40 junction as the greatest prospective major blockage (so the proposed Wilton relief road is essential). On flood and water issues, draft assurances to BCC include the re-siting of a number of balancing points and baseline groundwater conditions. The size of the community fund, being based on HS1, was argued to be totally inappropriate for Bucks where, unlike Kent, there was no gain at all but only pain from HS2.

Additional Provisions 4 (Extended Tunnel) and Revised Environmental Statements

The deadline for reacting to the two amendments caused by the extension to the Chilterns Tunnel are

- To petition against AP4 is 13 November; and
- To respond to the revisions to the Environmental statement (the consultation) is 27 November

Those who are worse affected now must give these provisions and the new environmental statements careful consideration to assess whether petitioning and or a response to the Supplementary Statement is required

Chalfonts and Amersham area (CF8)

HS2 have reassessed in AP4 the significant effects changes as being effects on traffic and the consequence of the Environmental Agency's Source Protection Zones for public water supplies. In the former case, as the traffic figures now published are even less credible than those in the original ES, (At the Select Committee HS2 admitted incorrect figures in their traffic modelling and further work was needed). On the public water supply the same incompetence exists as HS2 make conclusions on the water table and the effect of building HS2 when they admitted they have still to carry out the necessary hydrology tests on the river Misbourne valley. Thus for both these reassessments HS2 have made in AP4 are invalid.

Design changes are required to the both the Chalfonts ventshafts to include tunnel cooling equipment. These changes will also involve some further landtake at Chalfont St Giles. The tunnel is also proposed to be about a metre deeper in places along the route.

Shardeloes park and garden will appear in bill to cover alterations to the walled garden due to its condition.

Central Chilterns Area (CF9)

The significant effects in this statement here, apart from the major changes from the tunnel extension, are listed as ecological and traffic effects. The ecology report is that HS2 have found the great crested newts have disappeared and admitted their traffic modelling figures are incorrect. However most of the revised ES is the consequence of the tunnel extension, with the greater part of the commentary highlighting the lessening of the effects of HS2 to the AONB. The changes referred to include the deepening of tunnel, a revised design for the Little Missenden ventshaft, the new ventshaft at Annie Baileys, a hectare in size, with a smaller works compound, the new tunnel portal and earthworks at Bury Farm and a minor revision to footpaths away from the line itself. The direct road from the link road roundabout to the new tunnel portal is stated to be temporary during construction, with the permanent access to the portal to be made directly from Frith Hill.

Euston Redevelopment and Consequential Changes to HS2

The long running sore of Euston redevelopment continues with the announcement that HS2 are now proposing a bolt-on redevelopment as opposed to the original promised redevelopment of Euston called for by Chancellor Osborne, Higgins of HS2 and Camden Council. This plan will involve taking 7 years longer, now totalling 16 years. The announced plans are for 11 new platforms to be built in 2 stages (6 for phase 1 and 5 more for stage 2). There will be a reduction from 6 to 4 for classic, non HS2 mainline routes trains.

Just after this announcement, the Transport minister was reported as proposing HS2 terminates at Old Oak Common, at least for the decade while the Euston redevelopment takes place. Passengers will then have to change platforms to join Crossrail into central London, thereby removing the claimed timesaving benefits of HS2 from city centre to city centre.

As for HS2's general operation, it has been reported that the first of 3 critical reviews of the operations of HS2 that are required to be conducted by the Government prior to the Royal Assent was scheduled to take place by the end of this year has now been delayed until the spring as it was feared HS2 would not satisfy the required tests on IT and project management systems were not up to scratch.

House of Lords Debate

In the debate on the HS2 bill major criticism was expressed over HS2. Particularly Lord Hollick, who chaired the Committee review, stated much evidence from HS2 was either defective, unconvincing or out of date. (Key evidence included HS2's percentage of business travel used on the 3 main routes is at least 10% overstated compared to the National Rail Passenger Survey and the value of business time used was shot to pieces.) He stated that the process was short of what is required for a project relying on taxpayers money. This reliance involved £56 billion and needed £37 billion public subsidy on which no return was expected. This total process has failed to be independently and objectively assessed.

Inevitably Lord Adonis defended the project saying that it would create hundreds of thousands of jobs, tens of thousands of homes and thousands of companies around the 4 stations involved! All these claims are of course were totally unsubstantiated by him or by any reasoned research.

Additional Provisions (AP3 Euston and Camden)

144 more petitions have been submitted on the new proposals for Euston and Camden. This is encouraging as existing petitioners did not have to petition again

Political Opinions

Stop HS2 made more of an impact at the SNP conference than they ever thought they could have imagined. The surprising finding with the SNP was their interest and knowledge even though it does not affect Scotland. The Stop HS2 argument found almost total support among delegates but

the key issue remains whether to hold fire on this for want of better arguments that affect them more.

At the Labour conference they had the best reception they have ever had finding greater numbers having a go at HS2 than ever before, in spite of Trade Union opposition (it means more trains stupid!). Corbyn is doubtful about HS2 but does not know if this is a fight to take on. In short the Labour quandary remains either HS2 or what else to use the funds for and are there other arguments that affect Labour more.

Campaigners were also present at the Conservative and Liberal conferences.

As MP for Uxbridge Boris Johnson's opinions on HS2 are interesting. In recent articles he has proposed that HS2 be buried for long tracts through the country just as the Tokyo to Osaka train and then at the time of the Chinese State visit, the Chinese having incurred major costs, and embarrassing failures, on their High Speed Train are looking to export their knowledge as a case of recovering something from their investment.

Mark Ladd