

**Introduction**

Now that HS2 is firmly on the political agenda, it is difficult to keep up with and report on the news. The Government is rushing on with its plans to deliver HS2 (unfortunately projects of this size get minds of their own, ignoring fundamental flaws that emerge). The media are having a field day as the initial all party support for HS2 is being questioned within the main parties, as well as by the various watchdogs. We can't cover all that happens!

**Basic Stages of the Implementation Programme**

1. This week in preparation for the report stage and third reading of the Paving bill to allocate finance for the project, which is already running over the levels of expenditure approved, the Department of Transport have issued another revised business case, the fifth in three years!
2. Next "informed indications" are that the draft hybrid bill will be deposited before parliament on 27 November, the last date available for this year. The bill will incorporate the environmental assessment that has to be subject to a public consultation.
3. The vital consultation on this is likely to be over the Christmas period and only be for 56 days, a wholly inadequate time to consider a statement of 50,000 words basically only available on line.
5. The registration of intent to petition Parliament by those affected has to be made within a like timetable.
- 6 The Supreme Court judgement on the actions against HS2 is also expected to be made by the end of November.

All this activity explains why HS2 is so frequently in the news, especially as the Government is desperate to regain support for its flagship white elephant.

**Political Arguments**

With such an imminent legislative programme, Cameron has entered the fray trying to blame Labour for raising questions about HS2 even to the extent of possibly not maintaining the cross party support for HS2. All Ed Balls, and other labour politicians have done, is to "question the increasing costs of HS2 as the benefits are becoming less clear". The new shadow transport minister has left open the option to decide whether to support HS2 until April 2014 when the legislation to approve the first phase of HS2 maybe laid before Parliament. Labour seem to be seeing the opportunity to spend £50 billion in other ways and on other projects. This means HS2 will be a significant issue at the European and local elections next May.

In the House of Lords debate Peter Mandelson was "more sceptical", adding: "I have been an ardent pro-railway supporter all my adult life. But it is precisely for that reason that I do not support HS2. I think the sheer cost of it will suck the very life blood out of the rest of the country's rail system."

He also said Sir Rod Eddington's report on transport in 2006 had been forgotten. It had "firmly rejected" HS2 and concluded a "wide range of incremental improvements" would be better. HS2 was a "political trophy project justified on flimsy evidence to be about modernity and prosperity."

**Government Attitude Unchanged**

The Government tried to reset the HS2 agenda by using a Network Rail report of 14 years of gridlock without HS2 to support the introduction of another business case. In doing it omits reference disruption by HS2 (of 11 stations, including reducing Euston to 13 from 18 platforms, and the major roadworks on the motorway network with MI moved in two places, M41 in one and carnage around M6/M42 for the Birmingham airport station).

Unfortunately on the same day he describes "The HS2 project is the grimmest embodiment yet of how awful railway policy has become, whereby tens of billions will be frittered on services for which there is no obvious demand-while existing routes will suffer, links between cities outside London will be as poor as ever, and commuter and branch lines will remain under-resourced and overcrowded"

The use of the KPMG report, riddled with caveats not quoted, on the economic benefits of HS2 backfired further as the Government had to release the areas that lose out, thereby increasing the opposition to HS2.

## Revised Business Case (BCR)

This latest throw by HS2 reduces the BCR, including the specious wider economic benefits, from 2.5 to 2.3. All the previous business cases have been criticised by many august bodies including the Public Accounts and the Treasury Select Committees, and the National Audit Office.

The BCR is still exaggerated and they have hidden the 'base' BCR by focussing on the spurious wider economic benefits that have been subject to such serious questioning. They have also double counted the time savings for other cities from HS2 (like Newcastle) compared to current timings and have not allowed for improved times already proposed by the introduction of new trains.

Early comments on the latest case are the BCR still includes the absurd assumption that business people do not work on trains but quantifies the time differently by re-valuing the cost of crowding to them at a rate that is 5 times higher than before and raising the % of business travellers to 65% of HS2 passengers.

## Compensation Consultation

This is currently taking place and closes on December 4. There is a last roadshow in the area taking place on 2 November in Wendover Memorial Hall (10-5pm)

Regardless of whether you have an interest, it is important that every voter responds to the postcard consultation campaign that is taking place now and very easy to complete. Copies are available from most campaigners.

## Supreme Court Appeal by HS2AA

The unexpected, and unusual, appearance of 7 (not 5) judges at the Supreme Court hearing may have been explained either by the case being either a constitutional or a major public interest matter. The constitutional question was whether an European directive could tell Parliament what to do and mention was made of calling Parliament, in the form of the Speaker, to appear before the Court. Regardless the case poses a dilemma for the Government as the decision could well be issued just as the Hybrid bill was presented to Parliament

The possible outcomes and consequences are if the case is lost, a possible complaint to the EU or Aarhus Compliance Committee; if it is won the Strategic environmental assessment would take a year to complete; and if it is referred to the EU a delay of a year or more.

## Future Events

Bucks County Council are holding an open day on November 5 to brief on the petitioning process. More detail on this will follow as it is vital that all who can, and have the right to petition, do so.

## Conclusion



Matt says it all today

Mark Ladd

