

## **GM StopHS2 Newsletter**

### **Department of Transport and the West Coast Mainline Franchise Fiasco**

The third Minister of Transport (DFT) in three years arrived in his new position and the first thing he had to do was to abort his predecessor's decision on the West Coast Mainline franchise recommended by the department he heads up. Apparently erroneous information was given to each of the 4 bidders by the DFT with the result that too little protection was given to the taxpayers in the light of the collapse of the franchisee. It could be likelihood of legal action from Virgin Rail may have caused the DFT to look again at their decision making process.

Even though it had been reported that HS2 has not been affected by a similar mistake, Cheryl Gillan has called for an urgent review of HS2 on the basis it relies on some of the flawed assumptions as the West Coast Mainline. HS2 Action Alliance have seized of this error to campaign in the media that as "legal action exposes fundamental flaws for the award of the franchise" the DFT have already written the headline for HS2. Let us hope so!

Little else has been forthcoming about what the flaws were. However Robert Peston in the Times online has reported his findings. Civil servants create their own financial model for complicated long term contracts so as to help evaluate bids against it and to help create a level playing field for bidders. A ready reckoner was given to say how much revenue increase can be made and how much capital has to be held to protect the taxpayer. The DFT said that mistakes were made in the way projections for inflation and passenger numbers were calculated. The result was that all bids offered too little protection to the taxpayers. Peston goes on to say that Virgin Rail received the erroneous data and concluded it was wrong and apparently told the DFT, who ignored that advice.

As estimated passenger numbers proved excessive for HS1 and are a fundamental obvious weakness identified in the HS2 business case, there is reason to expect that aspects of that case for HS2 are affected too. Maybe the prospect of actual Judicial Reviews might have the same impact.

However Patrick McLoughlin stated at the Conservative Party Conference that he was going to push on faster than ever on HS2. Having stated this (to please the troops present?) there are 2 key issues that he must deal with if he really meant what he said; to announce the compensation proposals and decide on the Y route. Both these issues have been delayed more than once already.

As the MP for Derbyshire Dales, a constituency that takes in part of the Peak District National Park and might be close to the Y route, he has stated that Simon Burns, his deputy, will lead on HS2.

### **Consultation Responses**

Another demonstration the DFT is not fit for purpose is the announcement they slipped out on their website that 722 more consultation responses, including the Amersham action group, had been lost.

### **Community Forums**

Another round of forums, whereby HS2 are meant to engage on mitigation and their local concerns, has been held. These have been no more satisfactory than previous ones, with HS2 spending too much time talking about their current thinking and not enough listening to concerns or answering questions on issues put to them. For example at the Wendover meeting HS2 spent three quarters of the meeting talking, hardly an ideal way to engage with local communities.

At the Central Chilterns (Great Missenden and all the Chiltern Ridges villages) forum, the proposed location for the construction camps were advised. With the proposed Amersham tunnel emerging at Mantles Wood, a construction site will be required there, with access either to the B485 (Chesham to Great Missenden road)

or to the straight road from Hyde Heath that joins the B485. For the Hyde Lane bridge there will be a construction site accessed to the B485 and this will be the same site for the South Heath tunnel, at or close to Annie Baileys. Frith Hill would likely to house access and some form of construction site to enable building of the north end of the green tunnel and at Kings Lane a permanent diversion was proposed along the green tunnel to the Chesham road.

At the Chalfont and Amersham forum, proposed relocation of two of the ventilation shafts, which would be separate construction sites, were advised, one at Lower Bottom Farm and the other now to be alongside the Amersham bypass right at the junction with the A404 High Wycombe road.

However, as these announcements were made towards the end of the time allocated for the meetings, there was very little discussion time on the effects of these announcements locally. Similarly other vital local effects of HS2, such as the effect on the water supplies taken from pumping stations on the route, anticipated road closures during construction, removal of spoil by road and the effect on local traffic, were not discussed.

On tunnelling exits it would be necessary to build porous portals to help mitigate noise on exits. These portals could be built within the tunnels for the shorter South Heath tunnel but this would be less likely for the longer Amersham tunnel, thus increasing the damage to the centre of the AONB.

### **Parliamentary Compensation and Mitigation Committee**

The highly unsatisfactory arrangements for the Community Forums were formally drawn to the attention of several MP's at a meeting at Westminster on 13 September when it was demonstrated that HS2 were failing to fulfil their own terms of reference at forums up and down the line, with a similar pattern to the consultation, namely little or no dialogue. Other problems listed were minutes, standard agendas issued by HS2 for all forums, refusal to issue papers in advance, failure to answer questions by HS2, HS2 lecturing forums, no discussion locally on suitability of construction sites, inexperience of engineers at forums etc. This led Cheryl Gillan to ask, inter alia, if the fact that the budget for mitigation being of only £250 million mean that HS2 were not responsive to mitigation proposals?

Andrea Leadsom, the chair, stated there had been a clear explanation of the problems and this had been a pretty poor feedback on them thus far. There were clear points for HS2 to take away and that minutes of forum would be taken into account in the hybrid bill. She then summed up that the views of many forums had been heard so it was essential that HS2 made the forums more viable and think how to make them more effective. She added that there were major problems of the compensation schemes and the Y route to come.

### **Nation Audit Office**

It has been announced that the National Audit office is to investigate the business case for HS2 to see that it accords with good practice. It is encouraging that they have already received input from HS2 Action Alliance and agreed to accept it as evidence to be considered.

### **Conclusion**

The Sunday Times business section published an excellent letter from Marilyn Fletcher of Great Missenden not only referring to the need to reappraise of HS2 in the light of WCML fiasco, the breaches of process leading to at least 4 judicial reviews, the more serious point for DFT to answer is why has HS2 got so far before any decision is taken on Britain's hub airport?

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