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11th September, 2012.

Dear Martin

Community Forums – Experience to Date

Thank you for your letter dated 9th August regarding your concerns about current functioning of Community Forums along the route.

It is always valuable to have views from key stakeholders such as yourself and your concern about our engagement with local communities. I believe that it is fair to say that the ambition of our engagement approach, involving up to 28 Community Forums and 6 Planning Forums along the Phase 1 Route, matches the ambition of the High Speed 2 Project itself. We do not claim to have got everything right from the start, but I genuinely believe that we have worked hard to improve our engagement and to work closely with local communities about what we are doing. We of course need always to remind ourselves that people understandably have concerns over a project of such a scale as High Speed 2, and equally of course over its impacts, for which adequate mitigation needs to be explained in detail as design develops. That is the reality of projects such as this.

I shall take the comments you make about the Community Forums in the same order as set out in your letter. Please see my responses highlighted on the pages following.

Local Concerns

- At the time of the announcement of the Community Fora we wrote to Alison Munro to request that the first round was deferred until after our Buckinghamshire Summit on 19th April this year. This would have allowed us to develop a common approach with communities and smooth the way for engagement. This request was ignored.

We felt it was important to start the forums as soon as possible in order to engage early with affected parties along the whole length of the route. As stated in Alison Munro's letter to you of 27 March 2012, the forums are not decision-making bodies; the aim is to identify mitigation needs and opportunities, and there is value in doing this early. With this in mind, I am not sure what benefit there would have been in delaying the forums, and think

that the progress made in Buckinghamshire with regard to building relationships and developing people's understanding of the project has demonstrated the value of having started when we did.

- The first round of Fora took place during the early mobilisation of HS2 Ltd. Consequently they were under-resourced and newly appointed staff showed a dismaying lack of familiarity with the project and the local area. Minutes of meetings took several weeks to be circulated and in many cases it was felt that these were not a true representation or record of the business that took place.

Since the Secretary of State's announcement in January we have worked hard to recruit experienced staff to help us manage the forums. I accept that in some cases during the first round we might not have been able to get all papers out as quickly or to the standard that we and others would want, but we are now much better able to respond to forum requests, including circulating draft minutes to all attendees within two weeks of each meeting, and providing more notice of the dates and times of future meetings.

- Between the first and second rounds of meetings there was confusion regarding membership. The composition of some Fora was changed or extended but these changes were not published. The County Council asked for clarity on membership and HS2 Ltd then sent a policy, which had not been seen before. This policy was not generally circulated and surely should have been made clear to everyone at the start of the process.

Each community forum area has a varying set of concerns and priorities, and we feel that the communities are best placed to decide who participates in the forums. This approach has generally been accepted by the Forum with the composition of attendees being decided at a local level.

In the very few cases where concern has been expressed regarding who should participate in a particular forum, we have responded by providing some guidance. This guidance is by no means prescriptive, and we do not believe it would be of benefit to forums where membership is not an issue.

- It was hoped that the second round of Community Fora would make better progress as staff bedded into their roles. However, it appears that HS2 Ltd has not been able to explain adequately why information sought by residents on Fora is not yet forthcoming. A common request is for noise information, which apparently will not be available until spring 2013. This delay could be accepted by local people if an adequate explanation was forthcoming, but so far none has been set out in writing.

We are currently carrying out sound surveys to gather the data we need to assess the noise impact of HS2. We will present full details of our assessment of noise impact as part of the draft Environmental Statement consultation in spring 2013.

In the meantime, we are happy to provide the community forums with a presentation on how the data is collected, how the assessment works and how mitigation might be achieved.

- It is also not clear how the proposal that noise information etc will not be available until 2013 fits with a 'design snapshot' later this year?

The 'design snapshot' is not directly related to the availability of information on noise, but is an opportunity for our specialists to assess various types of impact and to help us identify opportunities for mitigation within the design.

The assessment of noise impact depends on other parts of the Environmental Impact Assessment, and will therefore not be complete until spring 2013.

- Fora have asked for a timetable of technical work but have received only a very high-level, indicative programme. Information on the consultation website is very limited and published versions of minutes take several weeks to appear. A FAQ section has been requested and there has been no positive indication that this will be provided. Apparently all the information on the website has to go through a central office for approval and this has an adverse impact on the responsiveness of HS2 Ltd.

I agree that a set of public FAQs for Buckinghamshire would also be helpful, and, as I mentioned when we met here in June, if you are able to supply some questions, we will be happy to provide this. I understand the value of locally-relevant information, however, it is essential that what we tell people is reliable, particularly given the major impacts a scheme such as HS2 can have. The timeline we have produced is the best indicative guide to the programme of technical work that we are currently able to provide.

- Fora are aware that the window of opportunity between now and the Hybrid Bill is very limited. Consequently they have asked for more frequent meetings, which have been refused by HS2 Ltd staff. Nevertheless, it appears that the same staff can find time to have many bilateral meetings with 'stakeholders' where there is no commitment to share the outcomes of discussions with people in the locality.

The forums are an opportunity to discuss concerns about the impact of HS2 and it therefore make sense to time them, where possible, to coincide with relevant developments or new information becoming available. We are committed to a programme of community forum meetings every two months until the hybrid bill, and we currently have dates confirmed for the Buckinghamshire forum areas in September and November.

We offer bilateral meetings to people who want to discuss particular concerns, which they might not want to share or discuss at a forum. Providing a meeting

note of these discussions would only be possible with permission from those who have called the meeting.

- Information is poorly managed. Rumours of a 'design freeze / design snapshot' could have been quieted if a consistent message had been published by HS2 Ltd as soon as possible. Instead, this has been addressed in an ad-hoc manner, principally verbally. Similarly, it would be helpful if HS2 Ltd set out in writing to everyone what their policy on preservation of Rights of Way will be?

I do not agree that information has been poorly managed: it is inevitable that more information has become available as the project has progressed. We are currently preparing a complete re-launch of our 2 websites which will help in this regard. *Our approach to the preservation of Rights of Way is as follows:* "We would seek to maintain existing public rights of way through the design of HS2, though this may not be practicable in all circumstances.

In some areas we have already designed green-tunnels for environmental reasons, and these will also help maintain access across the line. Elsewhere, as part of the design process, we will consult with local people and councils to identify the best way of maintaining public rights of way and we would seek to do this with as little disruption possible."

- Procedures are not commonly understood. For the second round of Community Fora draft minutes were sent only to the meeting attendees, then published on the website when agreed. However, this process was not shared with invitees who were not able to attend; nor were they notified when the agreed minutes were published. Communication here is totally inadequate.

We have committed to sending a draft set of minutes to all those who have attended each meeting within two weeks of the meeting having taken place. However, it is important that the discussions are accurately and fairly represented in the minutes, and that those who took part are satisfied with them before they are made public. We therefore allow some time for initial comments before publishing the minutes on our website.

We do use social media to inform people when the minutes are on the website, but we will also ensure that people are notified by email when this has happened.

Proposed Improvements

Again, I will comment on your proposals as set out in your letter.

1. Deployment of staff with greater experience at community engagement to supplement existing personnel.

The Stakeholder team for the Buckinghamshire area is led by an experienced manager, who will continue with the necessary recruitment to increase resources for the team.

2. Clarity on Terms of Reference and membership.

The Terms of Reference were accepted at an early stage with very little discussion or concern at some forums. At others, where this issue has not been clear or agreed by the forum we have listened to concerns and worked to find consensus to ensure that the forum reflects local people and groups.

3. Greater speed at turning around requests for information, minutes of meetings etc We have agreed to send a draft set of minutes to all attendees within two weeks of each forum meeting.

4. A Work Programme that clearly shows how the timeline for the Fora relates to the timeline for the other project elements e.g. the 'design snapshot

The timeline we have provided shows the work programme in as much detail as we are currently able to provide.

5. A detailed timetable of technical work proposed.

The timeline we have produced (attached) is the best indicative guide to the programme of technical work that we currently have.

5. Greater frequency of meetings of HS2's Community Fora if requested by local communities.

The bi-monthly programme allows for the logistics and information gathering required to ensure that the forums receive a comprehensive stakeholder service. This frequency also allows for the secretariat time required. However, we will continue to offer bilateral meetings outside planned forum dates and can be available to meet communities at times to suit them.

6. Fewer alternative 'Stakeholder meetings'. If these are held then HS2 staff to secure permission from the other party to share the minutes or notes of each meeting with the relevant Community Forum.

We will continue to offer bilateral meetings and attend them where asked. We can seek permission to share a record of the meetings, but this might not be given.

Strategic changes

Thank you for your comments regarding a Whole Route Forum. I know that you have written separately to the Secretary of State about this and I understand that she is replying to you regarding this and the other issues that you raised with her.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Oakervee', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Douglas Oakervee, CBE, FR Eng.
Chairman.

Cc: Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin, MP, Secretary of State for Transport
51M Authorities
All MPs for 51M Authorities