

## Meeting notes Thursday October 14<sup>th</sup> 2010.

High Speed 2 Technical Seminars – HS2 Offices Victoria Street, London

### Background:

High Speed 2 Limited invited interested parties (local government officials and HS2 Action Group representatives) to a day of 3 'Technical Seminars' to review and discuss various aspects of their proposals.

The three seminars were entitled:

- Modelling, Forecasting and Economic Appraisal
- Technical Specifications
- Noise

The first day of seminars was arranged for October 14<sup>th</sup>, with a similar day being held on November 12<sup>th</sup>. The Speen Area Action Group were allocated a place on October 14<sup>th</sup> and Mel Foster attended on behalf of the Group.

### Summary

Each seminar had around 30 attendees from various local government bodies, with 6 - 7 Action Group representatives. For the most part, the same people stayed for all 3 sessions.

HS2 Ltd stated their intention to upload both the full presentation slides and details of the Q and A sessions onto their website, but it is not clear when this will be done, so a decision has been taken to share our annotated slides and these notes on the Speen website.

The following sections provide a very brief summary of what were quite long sessions – for a more complete picture, please see the PowerPoint slides which were presented during each seminar. Generally, each set of slides were delivered and then questions asked at the end.

### **Session 1 - Modelling, Forecasting and Economic Appraisal**

This was a long session which demonstrated that the assumptions behind the demand case are deeply flawed - although you can imagine that both the DfT and HS2 Ltd refused to give any ground, and steadfastly defended their position. Under much questioning, they did concede that more work was needed on some of the major cracks in their case (such as the value of business travel time).

They admitted they had taken no account whatsoever of technology or changing business practices (!) alleged that they had taken on board the criticisms from the PAC following the HS1 forecasting debacle, but given some of the long silences and bumbling responses, showed that they could not really justify their positions, but were going to do so anyway.

Perhaps the most worrying development, which we could have predicted, was that they are now following Hammond's line in saying that the business case isn't the most important factor in the decision, and that the unquantifiable but significant 'potential benefits' of regional regeneration are key factors upon which ministerial decisions will be made. This of course, despite the fact that the business case includes 'Wider Economic Benefits' of just £3.6 disputed billions. They came out with some hogwash that there are other benefits which are not included. It also became clear that

they are not prepared - or do not have - to reveal some of the detailed workings behind the model which makes some of the numbers impossible to scrutinise - a problem which many people have already encountered in seeking to make sense of the numbers.

### **Session 2 - Technical specifications.**

This session was informative and slightly less controversial, as this focussed on the technical aspects of the project. There were some interesting clarifications - such as the fact that the plan is for 14 trains per hour EACH WAY, rising to 18 trains per hour each way.

Also, there was clearly little focus on issues with tunnels, such as the frequency and design of vents/escape shafts - information which will not be available until consultation. The engineers refused to be drawn on route choice, but did say that no work had been undertaken on Routes 2.5 or 4 since March 2010 - although that may mean nothing at all.

### **Session 3 - Noise.**

This session arguably produced the most incredible and hotly debated topic of the day - mainly because the presenters showed what a pathetic job HS2 Ltd has done to understand noise issues. On most subjects, they either had no clue, gave confused and contradictory answers, or were just annoying.

Key issues include the fact that the FOI data on affected properties is inexplicable (but almost certainly dramatically understated) and that there are no targets for what constitutes an acceptable noise level - nor have they checked HS1 noise levels against the original plan for that line.

This session concluded with a brief discussion on the consultation process, during which I could not resist quoting Hammonds "we will listen to the arguments that put and we will rebut them and I believe we will rebut them effectively and vigorously" asking what view should be taken on the upcoming consultation process in light of his comments (and the abject failure of the Government to respond to key points in the EHS consultation). You will appreciate that this question was not liked, nor did they have any answer, other than to say that 'Cabinet Office guidelines will be followed'. This does not inspire confidence.

In conclusion, this may have been a 'box-ticking' exercise so that HS2 Ltd can say that they have actively engaged - pre-consultation - with interested parties, in the same way that Hammond can tell Cameron he has visited all MPs etc on the route. Even if this is the case, I believe that there are cracks in all of the arguments which can be exploited, amplified and used to generate national interest in the weakness and failings of the project.

Note:

*These summary notes and comments annotated on the slides are the personal views and observations of the author. Official outputs from the seminars are expected from HS2 Ltd, and these will be made available when they are published.*