

## Meeting notes Friday June 18<sup>th</sup> 2010.

### Bucks CC HS2 Stakeholders Meeting. - Aylesbury Vale District Council Offices

#### Background:

At our ‘inaugural’ meeting in the KWIV, Paul Rogerson suggested that we try to engage with a series of stakeholder meetings being held by Bucks CC on HS2. I subsequently was able to register the group, and attended the first meeting (of a possible series of 3) last Friday – Paul also attended.

Attached is a full list of attendees and written statements from David Lidington and Cheryl Gillan, neither of whom could attend.

#### Summary

The meeting focussed on information sharing and developing understanding of the issues, rather than action plans. In this respect, there was not a great deal of new information in addition to that already contained in the Bluespace and Transport Watch reports, although further re-inforcement of the basic flaws in the case and the underlying assumptions was evident.

There were powerful statements from John Bercow and Steve Baker against HS2, and the political dimension of HS2 being developed ‘because everyone else had one’ was highlighted.

My overall conclusion is that the more the business case is probed, the weaker it becomes, and the Government’s confusing position on possible route extensions (as evidenced by Theresa Villiers statements in the adjournment debate on June 9<sup>th</sup>) will extend the timescale, not reduce it as she claimed, most probably weaken the business case from its current state and continue to fuel concerns over route selection etc:

If HS2 is being pushed by the Government for purely political reasons, they will care less about the business case – and it has already been mentioned to me by Lidington that environmental considerations are virtually irrelevant.

However, this strengthens the belief that focus has to remain on the Business Case, which is the most important single argument against HS2. Other arguments, such as loss of amenity, woodlands and other damage to the environment will provide additional tools to create massive public opinion – not just in the Chilterns – but nationally, against the projects so the Government will be forced to cancel the project.

Demonstrating all the things we cannot have (schools, hospitals, police, etc;) will be a powerful mechanism for defeating the political argument. In this respect, the HS2AA campaign proposals (see below) could be key.

#### Meeting points.

##### 1. Statements from John Bercow and Steve Baker

Mr Speaker eloquently stated his position – the following are quotes:

“never been persuaded by the HS2 business case”, “irresponsible”, “entirely undesirable use of funds” “the initial estimate [of cost] is always wrong”. He also said that pigs would fly before

**June 19 2010**

private sector money could be attracted, as the railways had always been loss-making and required Government subsidy, and the private sector wouldn't buy the business case.

He also said that although he could not speak nor vote on the matter, he could exert great influence behind the scenes, broker meetings etc; that would be more influential than if than if he were a backbencher.

Steve Baker, MP for High Wycombe, supported all of Bercow's statements and added points of his own, saying that we couldn't afford this project now, and we wouldn't be able to afford it in the future, referring to ongoing burden on the taxpayer. He also said that Government would "mess it up" and that Government should not try to run entrepreneurial projects at all.

His most entertaining contribution was to describe the entire project as a "pantomime" after the HS2AA presentation on the business case.

It was suggested that an all-party parliamentary group could be formed to oppose HS2, and that this would depend on the number of MPs who could be persuaded to take up the case.

## 2. Keynote speech

Christian Wolmar, a railway journalist and broadcaster, gave a keynote speech outlining the weaknesses of the business case, highlighting that the HS2 case is positioned as solving a capacity problem, but focuses instead on speed.

He showed how capacity, based on "reasonable forecasts" of demand (cf the HS2 business case) could be met by investing in the current, classic rail infrastructure, and also demonstrated the difficulty and lack of logic in the Government's plans to link to Heathrow and some of the suggested routes north of Birmingham.

## 3. Chris Williams – Chief Exec Bucks CC

Chris advised that the Chair of HS2 could not attend, and that other members of staff had been "instructed" not to attend the meeting.

He also advised that HS2 were expecting a new instructions from Government imminently, and that the consultation planned for the autumn would almost certainly now be delayed until spring 2011.

Bucks CC have already written formally to Philip Hammond, and are co-ordinating with other county councils along the route. The county position is that to proceed, HS2 must pass a business case test and an environmental test. If both are passed, then the route should go elsewhere, for example, along the WCML corridor.

## 4. HS2AA Business Case presentation

Hilary Wharf and Bruce Weston, two directors of HS2AA Ltd, presented an 'expanded' argument based on the Bluespace thinking report.

In addition to providing more detail on the inaccuracy of the assumptions on growth etc; they also explored the viability of alternative ways to increase capacity. One novel idea is to de-classify 1<sup>st</sup> class coached as standard class, which could increase capacity by 14% with existing trains and infrastructure.

The full presentation will be made available in the next week, and will be included in our 'Key Documents' set when released.

Two points came up which we have been exploring with the CBI (which I must follow up on) being the impact of broadband on physical travel (vs electronic communication) and business travel restrictions – both of which were deemed to be downward pressures on travel demand, although it was acknowledged that at this time, quantification was difficult, if not impossible.

An interesting factoid was given by Transport Watch – that the French TGV places a burden on the French taxpayer equivalent to 1% of GDP.

#### 5. Other speakers - summary

**John Taylor** spoke for the Chiltern Society and outlined their 5 strands of attack: Questioning the remit to HS2, Geology, Alternative solutions, Noise and the Business Case.

**John Savin** from the Wendover Action Group focussed on the many flaws in the proposed direct link to Heathrow.

**Shirley Judges** from the Chiltern Conservation Board gave an expanded version of their HS2 presentation and introduced the point that the Chilterns is a massive aquifer and that the impact of the tunnelling etc; would seriously impact water supplies. It also emerged that in Kent, many small paths and lanes which were supposed to re-open after construction never did, and that the construction impact was a 5 mile corridor around the route.

**Anthony Del Tufo** spoke on behalf of Bluespace Thinking referring to their existing report.

#### 6. Press contacts

Both the Bucks Herald and Bucks Free Press were present throughout and I made contact with the journalists. BFP have already published an article. For information, they are:

BH	Adam King	01296 019764	<a href="mailto:adam.king@jpress.co.uk">adam.king@jpress.co.uk</a>
BFP	Andy Carswell	01494 755084	<a href="mailto:acarswell@london.newsquest.co.uk">acarswell@london.newsquest.co.uk</a>