

Department for Transport
High Speed Rail - note of meeting with MPs
21 November 2011

Panellists:

Natascha Engel MP (Chair)

The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, Transport Secretary

The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, Transport Minister

Martin Capstick, Department for Transport

Natascha Engel

Shall we make a start? What we thought we would do was to let Justine say a few words and then, after Justine has finished, if we could have a show of hands of who is here to speak, and also if there is anybody who urgently needs to leave, because we are going to do a drop-in/drop-out. Since it is a one-line whip, it may be a much shorter meeting than we had anticipated. The emphasis today will be on brevity. Obviously, we want to hear everything that you have to say, but as briefly as possible would be fantastic. I will hand over to Justine.

Justine Greening

Thank you. First of all, I would like to thank you all for coming to this event today, and a particular thank you to Natascha for being prepared to chair and moderate it. I just wanted to explain briefly why I called this meeting. As many of you know, since I came into the role of Secretary of State for Transport, a lot of MPs, including many people here, have asked if they can have meetings with me regarding HS2. The challenge has been that we are at a stage in the decision-making process on High Speed Two where the consultation has closed, so you will be aware of the arguments for high-speed rail that were put forward by the Government in the consultation document and I do not intend to rehearse those today again.

My key priority in the days and weeks ahead is to decide what the right way forward should be, and that is something that I intend to do by the end of the year. Of course, with the consultation closed, due process means that I will not be able to respond today to any substantive points that might be made at this meeting, in order to not pre-empt my decision. The Department received about 55,000 responses to the consultation. These are being analysed and I am being provided with extensive evidence on all the issues that will affect my decision. It would not be in anybody's interest if the due process which will lead to that decision gets disrupted.

The object of this event, which was something I decided I wanted to do, is really for me to hear from you as elected representatives directly about what your views on HS2 are, and therefore it was open to all Parliamentarians to come, whatever their views. I am, as it were, in listening mode, which means that this time is your time to put your points to me. I will hear all of those points that you put today. The time when I respond to them, though, will be at the point of my decision when I communicate that final decision, so this time is for you.

Just to be clear, I will be making a transcript available as a public record of proceedings today. Of course, I am also aware that there will be some Members of Parliament who are keen to put their

point across and who have been unable to get to today's meeting, perhaps due to constituency commitments, and I have said that I am happy for any MP to make a written representation in the same way that you are able to make a verbal one to me today. With that, I am going to hand over to Natascha, who has agreed to run the meeting. She will then take contributions in turn, which I will sit and listen to.

Natascha Engel

The other thing that would be very helpful would be your name and the name of your constituency, so that it can all be written down very precisely.

Brian Donohoe

Brian Donohoe, Member of Parliament for Central Ayrshire in sunny Scotland. I am one that has to use planes that keep delaying me to get here. The Minister of State knows all about that after last week. Anyway, on the subject of High Speed Two, I just wonder, at some point, while your consultations are at this stage being gathered up and you have to look at what the likely response is that you make to them, what you are taking into account as far as the situation north of the border is concerned. Of course, with the devolved Parliament in Scotland, they are making a case that they say is worthy of some consideration on the question of them starting the process very much earlier than what was originally proposed.

I know, from having been in your department as a lowly PPS, having had to listen to the Secretary of State in our Government – in the Labour Government – a keen advocate of it starting in London and moving north gradually, that there was no case whatsoever being made for there to be any of the work being undertaken north of the border. Is that likely to be the same solution as you find? I am convinced of the fact that we could use it – and I do not see any Nationalists here – to our political advantage if we were to say to them that you will go on with it. My understanding – if I am mistaken, you should tell me – is that the rolling stock that will be used in High Speed Two is able to run on conventional lines. As a consequence, that means that, if there were to be the upgrading of rail network north of the border or to the border, you could speed up the process of having rolling stock in place that would make the difference in time, where the time is of an essence, and be more likely to be attractive against air traffic.

Justine Greening

I am not going to be able to respond in detail to those sorts of questions during today. It is really just for me to hear about what your thoughts are. That has been helpful. I will set out the next steps as and when my decision is made, including any steps related to the devolved authorities.

Natascha Engel

Can we take Michael Fabricant next?

Michael Fabricant

Thank you very much, Natascha. I am Michael Fabricant, and I am the Member of Parliament for Lichfield. I want to thank the Secretary of State for coming today – I think it is a very useful exercise. It is just a shame that so few people have been able to turn up. I want to just draw the Secretary of State's attention to my letter of 8 November, which I sent following the Transport

Select Committee's inquiry into High Speed Rail. I wanted to raise, in addition to all the matters that we have discussed during the consultation, was a number of issues that really came up from the Transport Select Committee.

First of all, – and I shall speak as a chartered engineer, though not anything to do with railway lines – I am concerned that the Transport Committee found out that ultra-high-speed or very high-speed rail is not very effective in Europe, or elsewhere, come to that, because of the amount of wear on the line and the wheels. The consequence of that is there is a huge amount of downtime for maintenance. I believe on all routes – certainly in France – where there are very high-speed rails, they are now running trains at 180 mph, which is normal high-speed speed, because that is far more reliable. I would ask whether that might be possible here in the UK, firstly because it would enable the route to be more flexible and, secondly, as I say, to reduce the amount of downtime and the amount of pollution from noise and vibration, which is a consequence with very high-speed rail. That is number one.

Number two – and I wrote this letter, I will just reemphasise, on 8 November, and this does not follow from Maria Eagle's rather unusual email that came out to all of us today – I do ask, if we are going to run at normal high speed rather than very high speed, whether we ought to be thinking again of minimising the effects on parts of the country which are not scarred by existing roads or rail, because part of the furore from all this is because HS2 is going through virgin countryside. The idea is not lost on me that, when we were in opposition and Theresa was the Shadow Secretary of State, we supported Arup's original proposal, which would have taken it direct up – virtually following motorway – existing transport corridors. That would minimise the effect on virgin countryside, and that was a point made by the Transport Select Committee.

The other issue that many of my constituents have said to me – and I have considerable sympathy with them, because the line, at the moment, ends in my constituency – is, 'Well, what happens next?' In fact, on the Parliamentary boundary change, if it goes ahead, I lose one ward and gain another ward, through which, I rather suspect, the line is going to end up going through on the way to Manchester. So a *cri de coeur*, not only from my heart but also from those of my constituents, is it would really be helpful to know precisely what the whole of the Y route is going to be before the Government makes its final decision of whether to go ahead or not.

I have made various other points but they are contained in my letter of 8 November. I have helpfully put it on my website. I will just end with what I said at the very beginning, which is I hope that we do think again, not necessarily about whether we want high-speed rail, but think again about the route it should take in order to be Conservative and conserve the countryside.

Jeremy Wright

Jeremy Wright, Kenilworth and Southam. The line cuts from the south-eastern corner to the north-western corner of my seat. The first thing I want to say is to make a distinction, which I think, sadly, has not been made often enough in the course of the debate on this subject, and that is between high-speed rail and HS2. HS2 is a variety of high-speed rail and they are not synonymous but they are often used in that way, which is unfortunate. The reason I want to make that point first is there are three things I want to highlight. You have asked, Secretary of State, for what our constituents are telling us, and there are three things in addition to what I have already said in my consultation response and I think it is worth highlighting them today.

The first is my constituents will require clear proof that if we are proceeding with high-speed rail that we have also picked the very best way of delivering high-speed rail. There are a number of

alternative ways of delivering high-speed rail, which, if the Government is going to dismiss, it needs to explain clearly why it has done so. There are two obvious ways in which there could be alternative methods of delivering high-speed rail. One is to use the existing transport network; in other words, to use an upgrading of the existing line – the West Coast Main Line, for example.

I have to say, from a personal perspective, I entirely understand the arguments on resilience, on the opportunities to be using more freight on the West Coast Main Line that a wholly separate line gives us, but there are some very sensible and cogent arguments being made by the campaign groups as to how, if all you are interested in is capacity, you can get extra capacity by upgrading existing lines. If that is not to be a route that the Government follows, we need to have some very clear explanation as to why that is the case.

The second way in which you can pursue alternatives is to, of course, as Michael has just said, pursue alternative routes. As you know, I have always been of the view that we should pursue an alternative that uses existing transport corridors more than this particular route does. If that is not going to happen, we need to understand why. So far, it would seem that the determining factor for choice of route has been the capacity of a new route for the 250 mph speeds of the trains that travel on it. If that is the only determining factor, we need, again, I am afraid, a rather better argument than we have had so far as to why 250 mph is required as opposed to slightly slower speeds, which would still, I think, by anyone's standards, be considered to be high speed.

The second point is about the effect on the rest of the network. Quite a lot of my constituents will not use HS2, if it is built. The line will go near them but the stations will not be very near them and they will not use it. What they will continue to do, in order to get to London, is travel on the West Coast Main Line or even the Chiltern Line. If they travel on the West Coast Main Line, the majority of them will travel from Coventry, so they are interested to know what will happen to the service from Coventry if and when HS2 comes into being. In terms of what has been given to them so far, there are very mixed messages, which are hard to understand. What is said in the technical appendix to HS2 Ltd's report of 2009 is that they expect – and this is only anticipation, which I understand – the service from Coventry to London direct to drop from three trains an hour, which is what it is now, to one train an hour. That is, obviously, not an improvement in service.

On the other hand, your predecessor, Secretary of State, said on, I think, 20 December last year, in an oral statement to the House, that, 'Releasing capacity on the West Coast Main Line would offer the possibility of commuter-frequency fast services to London from places like Coventry'. Those two statements are not compatible, and we need to understand rather more clearly, if the Government decides to proceed with HS2, what the effect is going to be on places like Coventry, because the messages at the moment are very mixed indeed.

The last thing I want to say is about compensation. I understand there will be a further consultation process on compensation, but it seems to me crucial that, if we are to proceed with this project on the current proposed route, those who suffer as a result need to be properly and fully compensated. It cannot be acceptable to ask them to bear any share of the economic burden of this line, if it is considered to be in the nation's best interests.

Can I simply urge you, when you come to consider compensation arrangements, not to consider implementing any form of Big Brother of the Exceptional Hardship Scheme? The Exceptional Hardship Scheme, where it may be sensible for a short-term fill-in, is not an acceptable way of going about, I would suggest, compensation for the long term. If you are going to compensate people for the effects of HS2, you cannot do so by saying, 'You will only get compensation if you need to move for a series of reasons that we approve of'. It has to be a much broader system of

compensation, and it seems to me a guarantee-based scheme is the more sensible of the available options. I hope that, though you will consider compensation in the future again separately, you will think about that at this stage also.

Natascha Engel

Thank you very much. Tony Lloyd, did you want to come in?

Tony Lloyd

Thanks, Natascha. Forgive me, because I have to leave as well just after three. Thank you, Justine, very much for this opportunity. If I could raise two separate issues, the first, obviously, is from... Did I say Tony Lloyd, Manchester Central? If I could then make the point that, from a northern perspective, one of the concerns about this is because, as things stand, while, in fairness, the commitment has always been that the process only makes sense if it is the whole scheme and not simply parts of it, nevertheless recognising that all governments come under financial pressures at different times, the concern inevitably from a northern point of view is we end up with the London-to-Birmingham route completed and we do not see the rest of the system in operation because it will be late or whatever. I think it is very important that there is as clear a signal as possible that it will be the whole thing, if the system generates support in the north of England.

A second and separate point, although it is connected, is as follows: if we are looking at capital rationing over some time, it is not always immediately obviously that HS2 or, in any case, high speed is the only way of delivering the economic returns of rail investment. In particular, if you were to look, for example, at the northern economy and look at the enormous difficulties there are at the moment in travelling across different parts of the north – if I want to travel, say, to Newcastle from Manchester, the journey is worse than the journey from Manchester to London, despite the fact that the distance is, I would say, very comparable – there is clearly a need to connect the large northern cities together.

In that sense, I suppose there are two points: one is whether high speed is the only way of making economic sense, but if it does make economic sense, and if it makes more economic sense than other parts of investment in the infrastructure, can we have a guarantee – and I think the answer will be ‘no’ – that we will not see capital rationing which will prevent investment in rail interconnectivity in the north of England?

Tony Baldry

Secretary of State, Tony Baldry, Banbury. I am not going to say everything I want to say in four minutes. I have prepared a written submission, which I shall hand in, and there is then no doubt about what I want to say. I would like to echo one point that Jeremy has made, and make two other points that I do not think have yet been made.

Before I came to the House, and after I came to the House, I was President of the M40 action group. The M40 from Oxford to Birmingham had been planned to be built in 1960 and was not built until the mid 1980s. The reason for that was, on at least two occasions, although the government of the day had a firm commitment to build the M40 extension, when it came to the day, the Treasury did not have the funds. When this HS2 was mooted after the general election, Philip Hammond, then Secretary of State, said he believed that, by 2015, the economic circumstances would be different and we could afford HS2.

I just think that, if you decide to move forward to a hybrid bill, the Treasury, given this will all be funded by the taxpayer and the Government, should put at least £15 billion into escrow; otherwise, we do run the risk of having the worst of all possible worlds of the maximum disruption and blight, and then running the risk that, come the day, the Treasury does not have the money either to build the whole route, so we end up, as Tony Lloyd just said, with only part of HS2 being built, or having part of the planning process done and then nothing happen. If the Government is going to decide to go ahead with HS2, it must make it very clear that it has the funds available to do so.

Secondly, Jeremy is right to comment about compensation. When the M40 was built, property prices, in the first instance, fell near the M40, but they soon corrected themselves because, of course, there were a lot of people who found it advantageous living near the M40. That is not going to be the case with HS2. There is no benefit to people living along the route of HS2 and almost certainly property prices are going to fall. The Land Compensation Act is not fit for purpose for this particular exercise, and I think that everyone needs to know what the Government's intention is in respect of HS2 to replace the Land Compensation Act so far as this is concerned.

The third and last point: it sounds very good talking about existing transport corridors, but if you are going to consider existing transport corridors, I think you do have to consult on alternative routes. One of the existing transport corridors that are talked about is a possible route along the M40, but I have yet to see an actual route mapped out on the ground. One has to bear in mind the M40 goes very close to both Banbury and Bicester, which are two of the fastest growing towns in the country. I think it is very difficult to see how, in practical terms, you could put HS2 along that existing corridor without causing serious disruption to a very large number of properties.

Natascha Engel

Thank you very much for keeping it so brief – that is fantastic. Julian, would you like to go and then we will just go down that line?

Julian Smith

Julian Smith, Skipton and Ripon. I am really keen to get across the enthusiasm from Yorkshire, playing to the Secretary of State's Yorkshire roots. It is going to make a massive difference to the rebalancing of the British economy and I think that we should be pushing ahead as quickly as possible. 'Can we clarify the Leeds and the northern element as early as possible?' would be one question that people are asking me, because we have lots of investment that would go ahead if we could do that. I think, finally, if you are doing a lot of business travel around Europe, the hubbing of European high speed makes a massive difference going into airports and making sure those transport nodes are well coordinated. I would just urge you to ensure that, if Heathrow is going to continue or if we have other opportunities, that we do follow those as much as possible.

Craig Whittaker

Craig Whittaker from Calder Valley in West Yorkshire. Just to clarify what Julian has just said, businesspeople in the Calder Valley are absolutely in favour of High Speed Two, and they feel that this is the one single project above anything else that will help towards readdressing the north/south divide. Obviously, it is not the only thing but it will go a long way to doing that. Ministers will have heard me say on more than one occasion that the business leaders of two foreign capitals can get to access our business markets in our capital far more quickly than our business leaders in

West Yorkshire can, and that is a point that is always addressed quite strongly. Yes, we do feel very strongly in Yorkshire that we do need High Speed Two, and it is not just a case of us wanting it: we need it. All we ask for is a level playing field.

The only negative that has come out of what people have said to me is the timescale. Going back to what Brian and Julian said, if anything, can we not look at perhaps maybe even starting from the top and working down, as well as working from London to go to the Midlands, if only on one of the legs of the Y, because Manchester, for us in West Yorkshire, is accessible as Leeds is as well, so either of those two legs would be of great benefit to our businesspeople.

Angie Bray

Angie Bray, Ealing Central and Acton. For me and for my constituents, Heathrow was really the issue at the last election and has been an issue for west London for a very long time. The prospect of a 'train not plane' was really important and still remains very important if we are to avoid Heathrow getting pressured to build up again. I do think that not enough has been done about emphasising the Heathrow aspect of this High Speed Two train. It seems to me that that is one of the absolutely key issues as far as my constituents are concerned.

I think part of the problem is that quite a few do not seem to realise that there is going to be a station at Heathrow, because phase I does not include it, and it is only going to come in, as I understand it, on a spur in phase II. Again, I do not think enough is made to say that Heathrow will be included once the trains go further north than Birmingham, because we all know that, at the moment, there are no planes from Birmingham to Heathrow. It is not relevant at the moment but it becomes very relevant once we move to phase II.

I have to say I agree with some other people who have said today in this room that, frankly, the Arup route, in many ways, would have made a great deal more sense to my constituents, not least because of the fact that it would have had Heathrow on the main route, which would have immediately put it centrally to the whole issue, and I think that they would have understood it much better in that respect. Also, there would have been a tunnel right through most of Ealing and Acton, removing some of the local problems about inconvenience and proximity of people who find themselves next to these trains. The other thing is that I think that the Arup route would have put the Heathrow station right across a lot of other train routes coming in from the west of England and the south-west of England, which I thought would have made a great deal of sense in the longer run if we are going to try to encourage more traffic off our motorways and get people to travel to Heathrow on trains.

Locally, there is quite a lot of opposition right across the political spectrum to this. It is partly about inconvenience during the building phase, which I think is something which is up to people locally – the council and TfL – to try to deal with, but there is an issue for some who will find themselves living next to very fast trains, and some communities and schools. We do need much stronger messages – and I would like to reiterate what colleagues have said – about proper compensation for those people and frankly, also, because it is talked about sometimes, state-of-the-art measures for containing noise. I do not think enough has been talked about what can be done to make the noise much less intrusive, and that might also help persuade people.

Steve Baker

Steve Baker, Wycombe. I would just say thank you very much for putting on this meeting, and also convey apologies from my friend for Aylesbury, David Lidington, who, unfortunately, could

not make it today. I think my concerns are fairly comprehensively on the record, both in speeches and in my amendments to the Transport Committee Report. I just want to say that I have written to Maria Eagle asking what the Labour Party's position is on the route, because it seems that they have proposed a route which would now come through my constituency. My constituents are already opposed to HS2, and that level of opposition would certainly step up were the constituency to be directly affected. The M40 already blights my constituency and I cannot imagine HS2 following the route above the surface as the M40 winds through the Chiltern Hills, so I am very interested in the route; in particular, the strategic route and the degree of tunnelling, should the Government change the route. Finally, I would like to ask the Secretary of State when we might have a response to the Transport Committee's inquiry report.

Justine Greening

'Shortly' is the answer.

Christopher Pincher

Thanks, Natascha, and thanks very much for chairing this meeting, and to the Secretary of State for coming along to listen to our points of view. I am Chris Pincher; I am the Member of Parliament for Tamworth. The villages in my constituency which are affected are Drayton Bassett, Hints, Weeford, Freeford, Packington and, to a degree, a village called Hopwas. I agree very much with what my neighbour Michael Fabricant has said, and also Jeremy Wright, but there are four further points that I would like to make. They are points which my constituents make to me and I agree with them.

The first is that the business case for a brand-new transport corridor for HS2 as opposed to high-speed rail does not seem to stack up, and that we seem to be relying for it on a catchily entitled *Passenger Demand Forecasting Handbook 4.1*, which has a rather short-term elastic model of demand that even Sir Rod Eddington says is questionable. What I would like to see is us use the later version of that handbook, which is 5.0, which projects a much more reasonable uplift on demand on the West Coast Main Line over the next 20 or 30 years. I do not understand why we are not using that handbook. I would like to understand why we are not.

The second point, which I think has already been mentioned, is about mitigation. We were told that we would have a very good description of what mitigations were going to be at the road-shows that took place over the summer. I have to say that the road-shows that I saw in Lichfield were very two-dimensional. We did not really learn much about them and, as a result of that, Dan Byles and myself went down to HS1 to listen for ourselves what sort of noise high-speed rail actually makes. We found that that railway down there in Kent is demonstrably louder than the sound projections that we were given during the summer road-shows. The other mitigation point I would make in respect of Tamworth specifically is that change in the curvature of the line to help residents further north than Lichfield actually puts more stress and noise pressure onto the line, which means the villagers of Hints will get more noise pollution than they might have had if the line had not been changed somewhat.

The third point is around compensation, which has already been mentioned. I think that EHS just is not working. It seems a very random system whereby some people who live quite a distance from the proposed track are compensated, while those who live much closer and have an equally deserving need to move and be compensated are not. The whole cost of blight does not seem to be included in the business case. If you are wiping 20-40% off the values of properties in villages

because of the prospect of HS2, that means that the revenues which the Exchequer will get through stamp duty, if the properties can be sold, are reduced. That is not in the business case; nor is the reduced buying power of people trying to sell their homes so that they can invest in their future. That is not in the business case. I think that needs to be put in the business case so we understand the proper costs of it and we, as I think Michael Fabricant and Tony Baldry have said, properly compensate those who are affected.

The last point I would quickly make relates to people in Tamworth town specifically. Right now, you can get to London from Tamworth in an hour and eight minutes on Virgin Pendolino trains; it is almost as quick, I think, from Lichfield. The fear among many people is that, if HS2 is built, we will have more trains on the West Coast Main Line but they will be stopping trains, and it will therefore take much longer to get, on the classic routes, from London to Tamworth and vice versa. That will push people on to HS2, and I think that will cost them more. To get from Tamworth to Birmingham to get on to HS2 means your door-to-door journey to London will take longer than it currently does. I would urge the Secretary of State to look very closely at the responses that she has received, to think again about the HS2 business case, and not to build a brand-new transport corridor.

Dominic Grieve

I think it is well known to the Secretary of State from the response from the local authorities in the area that I represent that there is widespread hostility to the proposals that are being put forward. That centres on the business case; it centres on the environmental impact, and particularly the impact of the line going through the Chilterns. It is noteworthy, I think, that, in the context of my own constituency, if one looks at the map, the current projected route of HS2 cuts through a very small corner of the north-eastern part of my constituency. It is probably notable that, although one cannot gauge opposition or support precisely as there has been no opinion-polling of the local community, the objections to it are far more widespread than those people that are directly affected. Indeed, the majority of, certainly, letters I have on the subject have been from people who will not be directly affected by the construction of this line at all, and I think that is a fact that the Secretary of State is going to want to consider carefully when looking at the business case for the line.

There are two very specific points I think I would just like to raise in relation to the proposals. The first one relates to the actual impact of noise pollution if the line were to be built. During the course of the consultation, there was some modelling about noise pollution, but it is certainly a feature of the point where the railway line enters my constituency that it is going to run on a viaduct over still water. It does not need much imagination to see that that is a rather different footprint from running through a cutting. At the moment, I simply point out that I think a lot of the anxiety that may be generated about the noise impact comes from a lack of modelling, as far as I am aware, of this particular aspect of the matter, because it has, I would have thought, at least the potential, unless the mitigation is correct, for it to affect a wider area than the immediate vicinity of the line itself. It is a valley with hills on either side. It would also apply to, I think, Nick Hurd, who is the Member for Ruislip, on the other side of the river where it crosses.

The other point which I think I would just like to stress about planning blight is that one of the features of the proposal is the possibility that the Heathrow spur may be built at some later date. Of course, it is possible that no Heathrow spur will ever be built, even if the existing line is routed up in this direction, because it might turn out that the interchange at Old Oak Common in fact satisfies the need for an exchange going down to Heathrow, and it is deemed that that is not the model that we want to follow. It is also possible, of course, that the Heathrow tunnels will be used for a loop

off the Great Western Line and may not lend themselves so easily to one coming down from HS2. These are all rather complicated issues.

In the meantime, we certainly have a situation where we have three or four alternative routes on various maps, which can be Googled by individuals, showing where the Heathrow spur might run through what is a fairly densely built-up area of village communities, but pretty closely packed together, and there is, therefore, great uncertainty as to what the future might hold. If I can just simply make the suggestion, I think that that is an unfortunate aspect of this matter, because it is likely to generate planning blight over a prolonged period, with no certainty of compensation, no certainty that the spur is, in fact, going to be built, and people finding it difficult to sell their homes or, indeed, to decide how to plan their future. As I say, the fact that there are a number of different routes shown on different people's plans adds to that, and this is not an aspect that has been consulted upon. It might, I think, be helpful if the Secretary of State could focus on that in making her decisions as to whether this is, in fact, an area that has been sufficiently well covered.

John McDonnell

John McDonnell, Hayes and Harlington. Just to follow on from what Dominic has said, I might have missed it because I was late, and I apologise for that, but I just want to know the specific time when consultation is starting on the Heathrow links.

Martin Vickers

Martin Vickers, Cleethorpes, which clearly is not on the direct line of the High Speed link and, therefore, I can look at it perhaps slightly more objectively, in one sense. I think it is essential that we do, as a country, develop a high-speed rail network. Clearly, as my colleagues have said, the potential is to revive the northern economy, which, hopefully, will have some ripple effect in my own area.

I think the concern I have – as indeed do many others who represent areas that are not directly affected – is: could we miss out on various improvements needed in the rest of the network because of the project sucking in all the capital funding that is available? My own constituency desperately needs a direct service to London, and the problem is the capacity on the East Coast Main Line. I think that is one point I would like some reassurance on.

The other is that one way in which my constituents could benefit is through the supply chain in construction and so on. Many of my constituents work at Tata Steel in Scunthorpe, for example, which produces a lot of rail. I know of all the problems with European procurement etc, but we could do absolutely everything to ensure that our own industry benefits from the project?

Natascha Engel

Stuart, did you want to add anything?

Stuart Andrew

Not really. I think I have contributed to every debate that has happened. I am a huge advocate of HS2. Particularly for my constituency and the city of Leeds, I think the Y route is extremely welcome. I do not believe that this is a panacea, but if we do not start tackling the issues that we face, particularly on the West Coast Main Line first, but then very rapidly behind it the East Coast

Main Line... As somebody who travels on that every week, there are times when you are lucky if you can get a seat between here and Peterborough. It is getting and worse, and it has been happening increasingly now outside of rush-hour time as well.

Natascha Engel

John Redwood, did you want to come in?

John Redwood

Thank you, madam chairman. I do not think we can afford this project now, and I would urge the Government to defer it for at least five years. I think the priority, as colleagues have been saying, is to increase the capacity and improve the service quality on the existing West Coast Main Line – a scheme which will be both cheaper and more rewarding than this very elaborate HS2.

The business case set forward for HS2 does not make good reading. The rate of return is disappointing, even allowing for the very high value placed on time, which people think can be used on the train suitably by those travelling. Clearly, the railway will be heavily loss-making, which would add to the burden on railway financing, were the project to be completed, and the taxpayer would have to stand behind it.

When the Government announced its budgets for the five years in June 2010, they said that they were planning to borrow £451 billion over the five years. They increased that by £34 billion in March 2011 to £485 billion, and I fear that, when we see the Autumn Statement figures, we are going to be over £500 billion, because there will clearly need to be further increases reflecting lower-than-forecast tax revenues and lower growth. I really do not see how, with that amount of borrowing, this is a serious prospect to get behind such a large and expensive project at this stage in our fortunes. I think the time to look at these very elaborate and expensive projects is once the deficit has been well and truly tamed, once the economy is clearly much stronger and once taxpayers might have a bit more capacity to pay the losses on such a project.

I have a lot of sympathy with colleagues who have constituencies along the line of route; I am, fortunately, not in that position. I think it is particularly worrying for them, because they will have all of the construction disruption, all the noise and all the environmental damage from the coming of the tracks and the trains, if the project goes ahead. However their constituents will not be able to use them, because this is meant to be a very fast railway, just from London to Birmingham in the first instance, and so all the people along the line of route will not be able to make any use of it, because they would have a long journey by car or slow train to get into a centre at either end of the track to get on it.

The Government thinks that this railway would be wonderful for improving the north and rebalancing the economy. In that case, why does the train not start from Leeds or Manchester to start with? Why are they just looking at London-Birmingham? Does the Government not concede that, given the relative proximity of Birmingham already to London, and the speeding-up of journey time by an amount, were this to go ahead, it is just as likely that many more businesspeople in Birmingham would want to use the train to come and get jobs or contracts in London as the other way round, and it could very easily turn out to be a magnet for London rather than a magnet for Birmingham and the West Midlands?

These trains will have to go in both directions, and it may be that the pulling power of London, with the higher contract fees and the higher salaries that are quite common in the capital, might be

the ones that sustain the cost of travelling on this train rather more easily than the salaries and contract fees in the West Midlands being an inducement to people currently with London jobs or with London-based business. I do not really see how the main economic case makes any sense at all, and I think more fast trains going to London probably strengthens London rather than places they come from.

I am also a bit surprised about some of the statements about the demand for or a need for this kind of capacity. If you look at the business case, much of forecast demand for the train comes from people already travelling on pretty fast trains on the existing service, so it is not creating new demand for fast train travel; it is substituting. That means that I think the Secretary of State should be even more critical about the costs, because if it is just another way for the same people to travel by train between London and Birmingham, it could be a very expensive way of doing that. It is clearly not the cheapest way of adding capacity between London and Birmingham and all the intermediate stations, and there is a better case for more capacity for the intermediate stations than there is for capacity on the single route with no stops. I do hope, madam chairman, that the Secretary of State will think again and, at the very least, defer the scheme. I am very grateful to you and to the Committee for letting me intervene.

Graham Evans

Thank you. I am sorry that I was a bit late for this meeting – I do apologise. I would just like to add briefly that, if you go along with what has just been suggested by my right honourable friend, another five years, as it stands now Manchester would not receive a High Speed Two station until 2028, so it is just putting it back another five years to 2035. I am not sure I will be around then, but my children certainly will be. The reason why I argue for High Speed Two is thinking of children who live outside the London area and their future and their job prospects other than in the south-east.

The costs are spread over a significant period of time – 15-20 years. I agree that we are in an economically dire situation at the moment, but that does not mean to say that we do not have to plan ahead. The Victorians built the railway lines that we currently rely on without necessarily looking at the business case, but that totally transformed this country, both in social and economic areas. There is essentially cross-party support here. All three major parties have it in their manifestos, and it is not just about getting to London more quickly. You are quite right: I get to Euston from Macclesfield in an hour and 40 minutes, but on a Wednesday night, a Thursday night and – dare I say – a Friday night, you are not always guaranteed to get a seat. As I go standard class these days, MPs end up standing in the corridors, so there is a serious capacity issue. When people talk about investment on the West Coast Line, they seriously do need to look at the facts, because the facts are that there is not much more upgrade of the West Coast Line that can go ahead.

Finally, it is not just about the north getting to London more quickly; it is about access to Europe and European markets so that people living in Scotland, Newcastle, Yorkshire, North Wales or the north-west of England can do business from outside of the London area, and getting access to those European markets without necessarily having to go just through London. Thank you.

Natascha Engel

Thank you. Nia, did you want to add anything?

Nia Griffith

No. I am really here because I would be interested in North Wales. It is very new to me and so I am just taking in what everyone has said.

Natascha Engel

I am just going to ask Theresa Villiers to go through some of the timelines for us before I ask Justine to wrap up, unless somebody else arrives.

Theresa Villiers

It is very peculiar not to be able to respond substantively to the many points that have been made today, but you will appreciate we have to take a great deal of care to make sure the process is an entirely fair one, which is why the procedure is as it is today.

Just in response to the factual question posed by John McDonnell in particular, the timeline for the Heathrow spur and phase II would be that, if the Secretary of State decides to go ahead, outline engineering, design and draft, and environmental impact assessment work would begin. In March 2012, HS2 Ltd would report to ministers on proposals for routes to Leeds and Manchester, and we would expect that to include the Heathrow spur as part of phase II as well. In March 2012 as well, the Government will respond to HS2 Ltd's proposals for routes to Leeds and Manchester. Mid-2012, informal consultation on Leeds and Manchester routes and the Heathrow spur would begin. A formal public consultation on Leeds and Manchester and the Heathrow spur would be expected to begin in January 2014. In short, if Justine decides to go ahead, work on routes, including Heathrow spur, would start fairly promptly, but we would not expect the formal consultation to start before January 2014.

Natascha Engel

Thank you very much.

Christopher Pincher

Just one quick point, if I may: last week, I think, *The Guardian* reported that, of the 55,000 responses the Secretary of State has said you have, a DfT spokesperson said that they were largely favourable. Given that we are in purdah and that sort of information should not, surely, be trickling out, can you confirm that that is not an accurate statement and that we will find out what the responses are at the appropriate time?

Justine Greening

We will make a fulsome response when we finally come out with the results of the consultation. I think, in advance of that, it is probably not correct to sum any of it up at this point so soon. If I could just finish by saying a massive thank you to all of you for taking the time –

Natascha Engel

Stephen Timms has just arrived. We are just about to wrap up, but if you would like to make a point briefly, you are more than welcome to.

Stephen Timms

I am very grateful to you and I apologise for running so late. I just wanted, if I may, to put on the table the opportunity around Stratford in east London, the area that I represent, and the adjoining constituency to me, where about £450 million has been invested to make it a successful international station. It may say Stratford International on the outside, but there are not yet any international trains stopping there. Hopefully, in due course, there will be. The station itself has had about £210 million spent on it to equip it for international trains, and the Docklands Light Railway has been extended to Stratford International at a cost of £240 million.

What I have always hoped – and I think a lot of people have always hoped – is that, ultimately, when high-speed rail connections to Birmingham and to the north were in place, through services from Paris and Brussels to those destinations would have Stratford as their London stop. The HS2 proposals as they stand at the moment have identified Old Oak Common as the international station and, as I understand it, that would involve people having to change trains at Old Oak Common from High Speed Two onto High Speed One. What I would hope is that, if we take a longer-term view, we could look forward to a proper high-standard connection between High Speed One and High Speed Two, which would then open up the possibility for through services, which, at that point, it would make sense for Stratford to be the international stop on those services.

I think that Greengauge 21 has argued that, if you use Stratford, which is already there and which has already had a lot of investment in it, instead of Old Oak Common, you could save about £1 billion of investment. The difficulty, I know, is the quite high cost of a sufficiently high-standard connection between High Speed One and High Speed Two, but it seems to me, in the end, that is going to have to be provided anyway. I was anxious to put that point, and thank you, chair, very much for giving me the opportunity to do so.

Natascha Engel

That is brilliant – you managed to slip in just in time. Thank you. We are joined by Meg Munn, but unless you wanted to say something, we will get Justine to wrap up. If you wanted to say a few words, you are more than welcome to.

Meg Munn

Can we have it now?

Natascha Engel

Thank you – nice and brief. Thank you. I will ask Justine to wrap up. I am sure that Justine and the Department are more than willing to take any other representation in any other form, but this, I think, has been very helpful. If I could just ask Justine to finish off.

Justine Greening

Really, just briefly to say thank you to people for coming today; I think it was a good chance for all Members to come and represent their communities on this issue, whatever the position they took. I am very grateful for the fact that you took the time to do that. It has been very helpful to hear what you have had to say and, as I said at the beginning, I think, if there are any MPs who have not been able to come today, I am sure they can also communicate with me in written form. In the mean time, thank you for that, and I think I achieved what I wanted to with the meeting, which was to have an open meeting for you to represent your communities to me. Thanks.

Natascha Engel

Thank you very much.

POINTS TAKEN FROM NICK HURD, MP FOR RUISLIP, NORTHWOOD AND PINNER

There are three points I wanted to get across – I'm not going to repeat my response to the consultation. The first thing I wanted to get across, which I think your predecessor at the Department actually under-estimated is the problem in my constituency, and the opposition to it [the proposal]. It isn't a case of a few people who are directly affected or, whose view is affected. It's a much wider groundswell of opposition. It is about blight. It is also about choice of route and impact on the Chilterns which aren't that far away, and which people care about. The bigger point is around value for money and affordability, and the degree to which alternatives have been looked at in a sufficiently robust way, also the business case. The premise about the productivity of business people's time on a train goes completely against the grain of what most people experience. The problems as I had suggested before to your predecessor had probably been under-estimated. This is multidimensional and it goes very wide – it's absolutely the single biggest problem for me in the constituency.

The second, the second thing, is around the route. My sense is that there isn't deeply set opposition to the principle of High Speed Rail, but the route is a problem. My reading of it is that the route is dictated by the desire to make a link with Heathrow, which intuitively feels right. I was very disappointed by what seemed to be a lack of a very serious attempt to make a business case for this link. I think your team said today it would be in March before we got some clarity on what was actually being thought of, in terms of any spur or link. People ask the question: if this route is being dictated by Heathrow, they could have actually put on the table what they were proposing and what the business case for it was. The other point linked to this that is being made, not least by Ray Puddifoot, the Leader of the Council, is that people are noticing that the debate appears, on the surface, to be being reopened about airport capacity and the need to increase it, the location of it. The question is shouldn't, all this be thought through in an integrated way, before taking such big decisions, on rail and airport infrastructure?

My third and final point is around judicial review. Hillingdon and other Councils are all set for a judicial review if the decision goes ahead as they expect. You'll have planned for that. Judicial reviews are slightly uncertain things to plan for. The message is: why not take a little bit more time to respond and be seen to respond the reservations people have, that they express in quite a passionate way, which have been reflected in large part by some of the reservations of the Select Committee? Why not take a bit of time to respond to those reservations before effectively triggering an antagonistic process, the outcome of which is uncertain and is likely to cause some frustration.

POINTS TAKEN FROM TONY BALDRY, MP FOR NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

In the play “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead” there are early scenes of the two courtiers ruminating on why they are on their way to see Hamlet and they recall that it was as a consequence of someone early one morning banging on their shutters demanding their attention.

Likewise for a number of us as Members of Parliament we had to start to pay attention to this issue as a consequence of a line being drawn in a map across our constituencies.

I hope that you and officials will resist any temptation to think, so far as our submissions are concerned, that

“they would say that wouldn’t they”.

The reality is that because of a constituency interest we have been obliged to give this issue detailed and continuous consideration and I hope as a consequence that our submissions are well considered.

Given its geographical location my constituency is no stranger to transport infrastructure

- the Oxford Canal and the M40 motorway.

Indeed before I was elected to the House of Commons and for some time afterward I was President of the M40 Support Group which campaigned for the completion of the M40 motorway from Oxford to Birmingham.

As with any infrastructure development the M40 has an impact on the environment and on the lives of some villages and a number of people.

However, there was a recognition that whatever disturbance was caused by the M40 was more than offset by the benefits to local people and local communities in being able to access the M40 motorway network and in being able to maximise the potential and geographical location of North Oxfordshire.

As I am sure you will appreciate, there is an important distinction with HS2 in that HS2 will bring no specific or particular benefit to local communities.

It is not surprising that Lord Adonis observed that with HS2 everyone wants the stations and no one wants the track.

In so far that HS2 may bring some benefit to the UK as a whole and my constituents who are affected by HS2 are citizens of the UK, it is only to that extent they may benefit.

So far as people living along the route of HS2 are concerned, for them there will only be disturbance, environmental impact and a barrier across the countryside.

The Transport Select Committee have proposed that the Revised Business Plan for HS2 should take account of the Government’s new approach to the economic appraisal which places a monetary value on natural capital.

I understand that HS2 Ltd. have already undertaken “indicative” assessment for the landscape cost of HS2 which puts them that cost at £4.5 billion. Presumably this assessment can go some way to address impacts of HS2 which cannot be monetised, such as the damage to landscape and biodiversity.

I think it is interesting to note that your Department has indicated that at present you are not minded to support Chiltern Railways upgrading of existing rail line between Oxford and Bicester – which hopefully will become part of the East-West Rail Route – simply because of concerns over a handful of bats at Wolvercote Tunnel and the possibility that upgrading and improving the existing Oxford – Bicester railway line may disturb somewhere some Great Crested Newts.

What advice have Natural England given on the likely impact of HS2 on habitats?

There is an important point which needs to be made in respect of HS2 having regard to my constituents’ experiences of the building of the M40 motorway.

Estimates vary, but it is clear that HS2 is going to cost a substantial amount of money. The Government’s estimate is £17 billion. Others, such as the Taxpayers Alliance estimate a significantly larger sum.

The intention is that all of this funding should come from the taxpayer. From the Treasury.

When, immediately after the last General Election, the present Government committed themselves to continuing with the HS2 project, the then Secretary of State indicated that he thought that by the time construction works were due to start the country’s financial situation would be significantly improved.

I do not think that he could reasonably have foreseen the crisis in the eurozone that we are at present experiencing and, as a consequence, significantly lower levels of growth across Europe and. Inevitably, lower tax takes and lower Government revenues.

If the Government decides that it wishes to press on with HS2, I submit that the Treasury should be willing to commit at least £17 billion into an escrow account before Parliament starts consideration of a Hybrid Bill.

The M40 from London to Oxford was completed in the 1960s. It had always been the intention of successive Governments to complete the motorway to Oxford as soon thereafter as possible. However, attempts by the Labour Government later in the 1960s and again in the 1970s were thwarted because the Government of the day simply did not have the money necessary to build the M40 extension. That extension was not completed until 25 years later in the mid-1980s.

I would suggest that it would be the worst of all possible worlds if the Government were to press on with plans for HS2, with all the associated disruption and blight that such preparatory planning would cause, only to find that when it came time to start construction that the Government did not have the necessary funds to start or complete the construction. Unlike the M40, HS2 is clearly not a project that can be part built.

With HS2 it has to be all or nothing, and all does not mean simply London to Birmingham.

All clearly means London to Birmingham and then up through to the northern cities.

Whatever is spent on HS2, whether it be £17 billion or substantially more is clearly money that cannot be spent elsewhere on transport infrastructure and cannot be spend elsewhere on other public sector services. The Transport Select Committee's Report on HS2 is littered with sentences such as

“It is a clearly a potential concern that with the current economic difficulties a long term spending commitment for HS2 might impact adversely on investment and other valuable transport infrastructure projects.” (para.26)

“It will be unacceptable and counterproductive if investment in HS2 led to a diminution of investment in other parts of the rail network.” (para.26)

“And if the Government decides to go ahead with HS2, it should in announcing that decision publish a summary of the financial case, including the assumptions which persuade Ministers that the scheme will be affordable.” (para.27)

“And if the Government decides to proceed with HS2, it should in announcing that decision set out in more detail than is available in the DfT's Business Plan not only why HS2 is desirable, but how it also how it fits in with an overall transport strategy.”

The simple fact is that there are still very considerable legitimate concerns about the business case for HS2.

Everyone in the country is going to be paying taxes, and potentially significant taxes, for this particular train service if it goes ahead. And within the context of the costs of HS2 there is a particular issue that I am not as yet confident has been fully addressed.

At present houses and properties that are seriously blighted by the proposed route of HS2 can claim compensation under the Exceptional Hardship Scheme. What is not clear is what system of compensation will be in place if and when HS2 is constructed.

When the M40 motorway was built there were some properties where initially values fell and I suspect that chartered surveyors would confirm that over time property prices rebalanced as people found it convenient to be living near the motorway.

This, however, will not be the case with HS2. There is going to be no local upside whatsoever for people living near the HS2 route. So it is not simply going to be those properties immediately on the line of route that are going to be affected, but I suspect properties within a not insignificant distance of the line of route are likely to be blighted.

Can I suggest that the Land Compensation Act is inadequate statutory remedy in these circumstances. Indeed, the Government by having introduced the Exceptional Hardship Scheme fully recognises that the Land Compensation Act is inadequate for these purposes but I think in fairness to those who may be affected the Government should set out the compensation proposals that it intends to apply.

Lastly, at this stage I think the Government and Ministers should be focusing their attention on the business case for HS2. I do not think there is any particular benefit in trying to argue for or against any particular line of route. I am, however, conscious that the Shadow Minister for Transport has suggested that the route of HS2 should go along the M40. This may be a convenient soundbite “of existing transport corridors” but I note that Maria Eagle has not actually published a

map. I am not sure whether Maria has looked at the map because I think that in fairness if she had done, she would have seen that this is not a practical proposition.

Tony Baldry
21st November 2011

POINTS TAKEN FROM LILIAN GREENWOOD, MP FOR NOTTINGHAM SOUTH

My colleagues, at Nottingham City Council and I would strongly support HS2 – subject to Nottingham being a station stop, and part of the route.

- We firmly believe the Secretary of State should commit to a whole Y route, including an eastern leg.
- An East Midlands stop would be vital to any route and the importance of Nottingham as a ‘regional capital’ should be recognised.
- The Eastern leg and an East Midlands stop need to be seen as an essential part of HS2 business case.
- Links with West Midlands and northern cities are important to us as well as London and we feel the benefits/potential of this has been underplayed by HS2.
- HS2 need to demonstrate wider benefits through released capacity on classic network to the places not currently directly served - which could create jobs, improve leisure/ business travel opportunities, increase economic activity and freight capacity - potentially reducing road emissions and congestion.

POINTS TAKEN FROM RT HON CHERYL GILLAN, MP FOR CHESHAM AND AMERSHAM

I must start by emphasising that, in twenty years as Member of Parliament for Chesham and Amersham, I have never encountered an issue which has summoned up such opposition and caused so much distress as the proposed route for High Speed 2. I sent in over 700 responses from constituents to the consultation of which 3 were in favour. It is safe to assume that the majority are Conservative or Lib Dem voters.

So thank you for personally hearing the objections of my constituents in this fashion.

If it weren't for the limited time I have to speak to you, this list would be significantly longer, so this is just a summary.

The proposed HS2 route cuts straight through the Chilterns AONB. This will leave a deep scar on the stunning, fragile and unique British countryside and the lack of a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment has hampered proper evaluation, but running the line through an AONB defeats the object of its classification.

My constituents, far from being NIMBYs, feel as I have always done that it is our duty to protect the land, not only for local people but the many visitors who enjoy the wildlife and the Chiltern Hills, both today and for future generations.

Experts have now established it is also far from a carbon neutral project.

Transport experts living locally have produced evidence that the business case does not add up. The focus on speed in the forecast modelling does not take into account changing work patterns or productivity during journeys or the upgrades to the Chiltern Line. The supposed need for speed is the sole premise on which the current route is justified and has therefore caused concern.

Work patterns are changing and technological advances such as broadband networks are creating new methods of communications and changing travel demands – many of my own staff teleconference rather than travel.

Rather than bridging the North-South divide, evidence has been presented that HS2 may simply draw more people to London, exacerbating rather than alleviating the divide.

Other parts of the country will be blighted as the line attracts business to its hinterland.

At an estimated £32 billion, and at a time of such austerity and economic bleakness, there is a large body of expert financial assessment that predicts HS2 is too large and too expensive a piece of infrastructure that cannot be justified. Evidence has also been produced to show that large numbers of the users may well be priced out of the line, making the project little more than a railway for a business or social elite.

I believe greater consideration should be given to the alternative of making Heathrow a transport hub. This would allow greater connectivity with existing lines and allow the route to follow existing transport corridors more closely, with little impact on journey times but minimising environmental damage. This could take the route out of my constituency and at the same time

deliver greater benefits. After all you know that cancelling the third runway at Heathrow led to this project and we need to maximise on Heathrow's potential to keep our competitiveness in the global markets. Also when concern is growing about inadequate airport systems we cannot afford to wait to deal with Heathrow in the second stage that might bring pressure for a third runway back again.

If the route is to proceed through Chesham and Amersham I ask that you consider greater mitigation through more tunnelling and a solution with costs and engineering has been submitted to HS2 Ltd. I have asked for a commitment from HS2 Ltd. to work with myself and local groups in Chesham and Amersham to protect the Chilterns as much as possible. I would ask for your support for this if you proceed to the next stage.

It is important that any new high speed rail infrastructure project does not come at the cost of Britain's existing rail system and I would ask that you to commit to upgrading existing networks and consider the proposals outlined in Rail Package 2 which combined with other improvements could yield better results on a more timely basis.

The current compensation scheme has caused quite a few problems and you should be aware that the departments needs to do a lot more work on this front to reassure people if the project proceeds to the next stage.

I feel that the current scheme as it has been presented in the consultation does nothing but bring enormous damage to my constituency. You can appreciate as well, and I do have to make this point as the constituency MP, that the political consequences along the line have been absolutely enormous right across the board - including for the Chairman of my county council who is leading the 51M campaign.

With these concerns in mind, please consider the possible alternatives, which I believe could offer more improvements to the rail system than HS2.

I am grateful to you for taking the time to listen to my concerns about this project and hope you will consider these points when you make your formal decision on the future of the next stage of HS2.