

DfT / HS2 Ltd Environmental NGO Forum - 5 March 2013

Room 5L, Great Minster House, Department for Transport

Note of Meeting with the Rt Hon Simon Burns MP – Minister of State for Transport

Attendees:

Rt Hon Simon Burns MP – DfT	Lee Bowerman – DfT
Ian Hepburn – Wildlife Trusts	Adam McIntee – DfT
Victoria Bankes-Price – Woodland Trust	Fozia Chughtai – DfT
Ingrid Samuel – National Trust	Ian Jordan – HS2 Ltd
Claire Graves – National Trust	Peter Miller – HS2 Ltd
Kate Pugh – Heritage Alliance	Dav Hothi – HS2 Ltd
Henry Russell – Heritage Alliance	Leonie Dubois – HS2 Ltd
Shaun Spiers – CPRE	Mark Bailey – HS2 Ltd
Eugene Suggett – Ramblers Association	Claire Downham – HS2 Ltd
Jane Thomas – Friends of the Earth	
Paul Wilkinson – Wildlife Trusts	
Stephen Joseph – Campaign for Better Transport	

Apologies:

Ralph Smyth – CPRE
Andy Atkins – Friends of the Earth

Introduction from the Minister

1. The Minister opened the meeting and thanked everyone for coming. He began by explaining that a final decision on the preferred route for Phase Two would not be taken until after the public consultation later this year – thus giving everyone a chance to have their say. A great deal of work had been done to ensure that wherever possible, the route would minimise the potential impacts on people, properties and important environmental features. The Minister said that HS2 Ltd would be working to integrate measures into the scheme which will help lessen its environmental impacts. He reiterated that everyone should submit their views as part of the consultation process, but should be aware that not all suggested changes may be possible.
2. The Minister said he was aware that the NGOs had raised a number of queries since the announcement on 28 January. He had asked officials to ensure that these were dealt with as quickly as possible.
3. The Minister then recounted his recent visit to see the high speed network in operation in Japan. He had seen the latest bullet train technology and the wide range of innovative technologies used to reduce noise since high speed rail's introduction in Japan in 1964. He thought there were many valuable lessons that the UK could use in its plans for HS2.

HS2 Ltd presentation on Phase Two proposals

4. Dav Hothi presented a summary of the work done to date on Phase Two leading up to the announcement of the initial preferred route in January and explained the process for developing the design. The slides will be published on the HS2 Ltd website.

Q&A session

5. Shaun Spiers said CPRE was constructive about the principle of HS2. However, it was difficult to make the case for HS2 in the absence of a wider transport strategy and how it might link in with that. If taken forward within such a context, it could be seen more as part of a wider revival of railways in general.
6. The Minister said HS2 would free up capacity and allow more freight to move onto railways rather than be transported by road. Journey time improvements were important but easing capacity was more important. New lines could still open – and there is nothing to stop that continuing as HS2 develops. Where there is a need and a business case to support it, this would be a positive way for groups to move forward. There had been a dramatic increase in the number of passengers, journeys and freight in the last 60 years. High speed rail is the future. How it links to aviation would also be an important feature and will depend in the short term on the Airports Commission's report. Then we will have a better idea of how we can move forward in this respect.
7. Jane Thomas agreed with the points made by Shaun Spiers and also wanted to see the connectivity with the wider transport strategy. She hoped HS2 would help address the issue of short-haul flights. She also welcomed the comments on freight but wanted to see more information on how freight would be moved off roads. The critical factors would be place, location and pricing as well as integrated transport policies.
8. The Minister said that given journey times and the proposed links to Heathrow, as well as the proposed spur, the recommendations from the Airports Commission's report would determine how HS2 would affect flights. Integrated transport policies were all part of the plan – a good example being cycling and public transport – although there was a slight hiatus with aviation.
9. Ian Hepburn thanked the Minister for the advance notice of the announcement and said The Wildlife Trusts looked forward to the productive opportunity to engage on Phase Two. This would allow them to be better sighted on local impacts, as well as impacts on national and European sites along the route.
10. Ian Jordan stated that he expected HS2 Ltd to continue engaging fully with the NGOs.

11. The Minister stated that when he had taken up this post, he had been driven along the Phase One route and had been impressed by the mitigation changes that had been agreed since the publication of the route. He came to the conclusion that HS2 Ltd was not an organisation who suffered from the problem of thinking that they were always right but were genuinely concerned. He was sure Phase Two would be dealt with in a similar way.
12. Coming back to the issue of freight, the Minister said that it would be a challenge to get more freight onto railways but it was an important part of the HS2 package and much better for the environment.
13. Stephen Joseph also welcomed the early notice of the announcement. He also mentioned that he was surprised by the article in yesterday's Telegraph about the 'first green summit':
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/road-and-rail-transport/9908315/Transport-minister-to-hold-first-green-summit-on-high-speed-rail.html>
14. He referred to the discussion the group had had before the Minister joined the meeting. He said it had identified a need to set up a design panel sooner rather than later and to press ahead with the endowment fund. Referring to the wider strategy, he said the culmination of the National Policy Statement and the transport strategy would help to show how HS2 fitted into the overall strategy.
15. Turning to stations, he hoped the public consultation would be wide enough to allow a debate on where stations in South Yorkshire might be best placed. Shaun Spiers said he hoped that with regard to the Manchester Airport station, there could also be a debate on whether there should be such a station.
16. The Minister said they had thought long and hard about the Meadowhall station. Full consideration would be given to all consultation responses but he couldn't promise anything now. Following the announcement of the initial preferred route, discussions were taking place with various stakeholders and he was sure there would be some fine tuning and other improvements as there had been with Phase One, but he couldn't promise anything on specifics at this stage.
17. Dav Hothi explained that the advice to DfT in March 2012 (and subsequently) had provided a lot of information on the reasons for the station choices at Manchester Airport and Meadowhall. It was not just a matter of cost, there were also environmental impact issues associated with the choices.
18. Paul Wilkinson made the point that while it was good that we were visiting other parts of the world and bringing the best ideas back into the HS2 project, what would the UK's HS2 project give to the world? There

was a potential for the UK to be the exemplar for environmental mitigation.

19. The Minister responded he believed that HS2 was in the national interest. While the onus would be on minimising damage and mitigating wherever possible, (such as the commitment to plant four million trees), we have to realise that some damage may be caused to achieve the gains we are aiming for.
20. Paul Wilkinson said we should also consider the additional habitats that could be created, i.e. creating more woodland than would be lost and so getting an overall environmental gain. This would be going above and beyond the necessary and providing an exemplar for others.
21. The Minister's view was that where this was a realistic option, he had no problem with this in principle. We wanted to be helpful wherever feasible but it has to be realised that there would be times where we cannot always do what people want.
22. Stephen Joseph and Ingrid Samuel referred to the enhancements proposed in Aylesbury and said they could be used as an exemplar. There was good support for this proposal locally.
23. Peter Miller said HS2 Ltd had received presentations from a number of organisations all seeking a common ground. In certain instances, the enhancements proposed could be incorporated and thus result in a more successful outcome for HS2.
24. Claire Graves said that when the Environmental Statement is published and we see exactly what has been done in terms of mitigation, it may be a turning point in how HS2 is viewed.
25. The Minister said that when HS2 actually happens, local communities will see that it's not the end of the world. All the work being done now gives us the opportunity to minimise damage and make enhancements beyond just remedial work. This will of course involve a lot of work from everyone here. The Minister went on to say that he found these meetings invaluable and hoped they would continue.

Any Other Business

26. None.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

27. For the next meetings we will resort back to the usual separate DfT and HS2 Ltd forums. Members would be contacted with proposed dates for both meetings in due course. For the DfT forum, NGOs may have one member and one observer in attendance at the meeting.
28. Minutes of this meeting will be published on the HS2 Ltd website as before.