

MINUTES OF ORAL EVIDENCE

taken before

HIGH SPEED RAIL COMMITTEE

On the

HIGH SPEED RAIL (LONDON – WEST MIDLANDS) BILL

Wednesday 15 July 2015 (Morning)

In Committee Room 5

PRESENT:

Mr Robert Syms (Chair)
Sir Peter Bottomley
Mr Henry Bellingham
Geoffrey Clifton-Brown
Mr David Crausby
Mark Hendrick

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Timothy Mould QC, Lead Counsel, Department for Transport
Mr Timothy Straker QC, of Counsel,

Witnesses:

Ms Kath Daly, Acting Chief Officer, Chilterns AONB
Mr Peter Miller, Head of Environment and Planning, HS2 Limited

IN PUBLIC SESSION

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(at 09.30)

1. CHAIR: Order, order. Good morning, welcome to the HS2 Select Committee, where unusually, we have a full turnout first thing in the morning. Before we start, I'd just like to convey some decisions the Committee have made.

2. We heard extensive argument on the case for a Colne Valley Tunnel from Hillingdon Borough Council and from local residents and residents' groups. Notably, we heard from the council's engineering expert about tunnel engineering and estimated costs. The main arguments for a tunnel are to mitigate operational noise and community environmental impacts, and to eliminate the effects on Hillingdon Outdoor Activities Centre, a highly valued amenity. Subsidiary arguments included that a tunnel would affect the local hydrogeology less than pile-driven viaduct supports; another was that a tunnel would be less expensive to maintain than a surface route on a viaduct. Based on the evidence and cross-examination, those subsidiary arguments were not convincing.

3. Estimates of the net additional cost of a tunnel over a viaduct generally exceeded £200 million, although there was disagreement on how to arrive at an appropriate assessment. We do not direct further studies because we doubt that these would converge on a figure significantly less than £200 million. Importantly the evidence was that a tunnel would not eliminate the impact of construction works in Hillingdon and surrounding areas. It would bring its own set of construction requirements.

4. Our main concern is about the impact of construction work in this area. As the tunnel option carries its own set of construction issues, our overall view is that a convincing case for a tunnel instead of the viaduct has not been made. In our earlier statement this week, we requested a report on construction railhead options and potential haul road adjustments. When we have that, we will consider construction and traffic issues further. They need close scrutiny.

5. We need more reassurance on traffic modelling. In the meantime, we want a push, now, toward a satisfactory compromise for HOAC, including a possible staged move. We recognise that Trustees or staff are not required to carry on. The fact that the HS2 project will not be bearing the cost of a Colne Valley tunnel means that attention should now be directed toward significant further interventions in Hillingdon to mitigate the effect of the railway and its construction on the community – interventions that should

be additional to those already envisaged. We are satisfied, for instance, that the restoration of right of way amenities after construction will be effective, but during construction there will be a heavy impact on footpath amenity and on local traffic. We hope that more can be done on this and other issues. We agree that the viaduct should be of the best design. We heard suggestions of a design competition. We ask that option should be considered.

6. So that's the decision, and I hope the Clerk gets the word in the journal correct, which I can't pronounce. Mr Straker?

**Chiltern District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council, Aylesbury Vale
District Council and The Chilterns Conservation Board (Cont'd)**

7. MR STRAKER QC: Thank you very much sir. We resume, therefore, from Monday evening, and Ms Kath Daly has taken her place by my side to give the next the next tranche of evidence. Can I just observe, sir, that it's D-A-L-Y, not as advertised immediately in front of her? Her slides begin at 1190, and can we go straight to 1190(2) please? Kath Daly, I should say is the Acting Chief Officer of the Conservation Board.

8. Here we see the Board being established by Parliament, and can you just help us with the role of the Board and its Parliamentary purpose?

9. MS DALY: Thank you. The Chilterns Conservation Board was established by Act of Parliament in order to conserve and enhance the Chiltern Hills area of outstanding natural beauty as I'm sure Members are by now familiar with. We have 27 Board members, of which eight are appointed by the Secretary of State and the remainder are appointed by Parish Councils and the 13 local authorities within the AONB. We work with land managers, farmers and communities and businesses and many partners, including Natural England, to deliver on our statutory purposes of conserving and enhancing the AONB. As the final witness for the four statutory bodies, I would like to say firstly that I will be brief; and secondly that the purpose of my evidence is to step back from the technical detail and reflect on the fundamentals of the case, and invite you Members to reflect on the significance of this case for the AONB and, indeed, for the nation as a whole.

10. MR STRAKER QC: Then we go to (3) please, the request of the Select