

MINUTES OF ORAL EVIDENCE

taken before

HIGH SPEED RAIL COMMITTEE

On the

HIGH SPEED RAIL (LONDON – WEST MIDLANDS) BILL

Monday, 22 February 2016

In Committee Room 5

PRESENT:

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Timothy Mould QC, Lead Counsel, Department for Transport

IN PUBLIC SESSION

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(At 17.05)

1. CHAIR: Order, order. Welcome to the last meeting of the HS2 Select Committee. Good afternoon. This is the final session. Our Committee has sat for 160 days, nearly two years. We have just agreed our final report.
2. We have directed a number of amendments to the proposed HS2 Phase One project. Notably, we have directed a longer Chiltern bored tunnel, greater noise protection for Wendover, better construction arrangements for Hillingdon and a remodelled maintenance depot at Washwood Heath to maximise local job opportunities. We have said that there should be a coherent approach to the redevelopment of Euston. In many cases not specifically mentioned in this report we have intervened to encourage fairness, practical settlements, the giving of assurances or better mitigation. We have recommended amendments to the operation of the discretionary compensation scheme, which we believe will result in greater fairness and more functional property markets in areas near the proposed line. We have also suggested improvements to the procedure for dealing with Hybrid Bills. We trust they will help to achieve better processes for the further anticipated phases of HS2 and other similar Bills. Our work on Phase One, we believe, helps to add substantial environmental, social and design benefits to the scheme commensurate with the good use of public money and a viable engineering design.
3. The Bill is now reported to the House and will proceed shortly to Public Bill Committee for its line-on-line consideration following Report and Third Reading.
4. I would like, as Chairman, to thank the Members that have served on the Committee: initially Yasmin Qureshi, Mike Thornton and Ian Mearns, who stepped in as my deputy chairman, who brought a lot of gritty, north-east common sense. I would like to thank the Members who replaced those three Members after the general election: David Crausby, who was an excellent deputy chairman, Mark Hendrick who came up with some interesting insights, and Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, bringing a lot of his experience to the Committee.
5. My biggest thanks are to the two what I call “lifers” on the Committee, who are Sir Peter Bottomley and Sir Henry Bellingham. Henry has acted as unofficial Whip, which has both made sure that virtually every session we had was quorate but also that

on occasions some of us could drop off to do important constituency work, and Sir Peter, whose capacity both for reading the material and crafting, I think, some sensible wording for solutions, has been incredibly impressive. I have been immensely grateful, as Chairman, for his contribution to this Committee.

6. I think the Committee has worked well. We have never had a vote in the Committee and we have tried where possible to find a consensus on dealing with the issues.

7. I would like to thank particularly David Walker who has had to deal with many of the petitioners and has had, I think, a very difficult job; the petitioners, many of whom were somewhat daunted by coming before the Committee but most of whom I think gave a good account of their concerns and certainly impressed us with the way that they conducted themselves; HS2 staff and representatives who have always been pleasant and as helpful as possible, particularly those dealing with the technology, which I think we were worried about to begin with, but helped us deliberate and see where we were talking about and what we were discussing throughout the process; the doorkeepers, the Official Report and, indeed, the broadcasters all of whom haven't always been sure when we were going to finish in terms of our arrangements.

8. Lastly I would like to thank the Clerk and his assistant, Miguel. This is a highly unusual Bill for a Clerk. Mostly, Clerks deal internally with Members of Parliament and the internal workings of Parliament. When you are dealing with 2,500 petitioners, lawyers, barristers, businesses and farms you have to actually deal with very much the outside world and with people who are sometimes very concerned about their prospects, their family's prospects, their business's prospects and their community prospects. Neil has handled that in a calm and professional manner. He has dealt with petitioners very well. I think he has dealt with HS2 and with all the Members in a professional manner so I cannot speak too highly of the service he has given the Committee. Thank you very much for that. He has made our job a lot easier and, to add to that, he actually volunteered, which I am not sure any of the rest of us did. So, with those few words, Mr Mould, do you want to make any final comments?

9. MR MOULD QC (DfT): All I would say, sir, in response to that is that speaking for myself and I know for others within my team and within HS2, the sheer length of

time that you and your Committee have sat is quite remarkable. I am not sure whether it is unprecedented in the modern life of Parliament but it must be one of the longest Select Committees that there has been in modern times. What I think has impressed all of us has been the unfailing courtesy and perceptiveness with which the Committee has gone about its work.

10. There were some concerns raised during the course of the judicial review proceedings that were ultimately heard by the Supreme Court as to whether the Parliamentary procedures would be able to deliver the standards of fairness and inquiry into the issues raised by petitioners that might, perhaps, have come, for example, from a public inquiry. I think, if I may say, the work of the Committee and the degree of care and consideration that the Committee has given to the cases raised by the petitioners before you over the course of the last more than 18 months has laid those concerns very resoundingly to rest. Whatever may be the outcome in your report and during the course of the hearings, I don't think that anybody who has come before you can say that they have had other than a careful, considerate and fair hearing of their case. I hope you will allow me to pay tribute to the Committee's work in that respect.

11. CHAIR: Thank you very much. My last thanks are to the other Members of Parliament who have engaged – well over 20 Members of Parliament – some of whom are in the room today. It has been terribly difficult for constituency MPs. They have had to take on staff and deal with a major project that affects many of their communities. Clearly, they may not always be pleased with the decisions of the Committee but I think we have done our best to actually take into account their views and the views of their constituents.

12. So, with those words, unless there are any other comments, I would just like to say Order, Order.

13. SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY: Can I just say than you to the Chairman, please?

14. CHAIR: Thank you. Order, order.