

Notes on the Visit to HS1, 30th July, 2010

Objective: to provide the opportunity to Councillors, Officers, and members of local interest groups to visit High Speed 1 in Kent to view for themselves the impact of the High Speed rail, to understand Kent County Council's approach to High Speed rail and to be informed of any 'lessons learnt'.



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Delegates:

Andy Carswell	Bucks Free Press
Adam King	Bucks Herald
Richard Duggan (Photographer)	Bucks Herald
Shirley Judges	Chilterns Conservation Board
Heather Lewis	Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust
Marilyn Fletcher	Chiltern Countryside Group
Gill Gowing	Chiltern District Council
Elizabeth Stacey	Chiltern District Council
Cllr Mimi Harker	Chiltern District Council
Cllr Julie Burton	Chiltern District Council
Cllr Peter Jones	Chiltern District Council
Cllr Nigel Shepherd	Chiltern District Council
Cllr Val Letheren	Buckinghamshire County Council
Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire County Council
Cllr Marion Clayton	Buckinghamshire County Council
Tim Bellamy	Transport for Buckinghamshire
Hannah Battye	Transport for Buckinghamshire
Richard Ward	Transport for Buckinghamshire
Chris Kenneford	Buckinghamshire County Council
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Sandy Kidd	Buckinghamshire County Council
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Tracey Aldworth	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Cllr Andrew Cole	Aylesbury Vale District Council

Cllr Tim Mills
Cllr Steve Lambert
Penny Gaines
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Aylesbury Vale District Council
Aylesbury Vale District Council
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Although there are significant differences in the circumstances, geography and attitude towards High Speed 1 and the High Speed 2 proposals it was felt appropriate to try and learn some key lessons.

Our guide on the day was Mr Chris Waite who was the Chief Planning Officer at Kent County Council during the time that HS1 was built. Please note that after undertaking their own study Kent County Council (KCC) supported the principles of HS1 *provided* economic impacts for Kent would be maximised and environmental impacts minimised. The 14 main criteria were outlined in the circulated handout

Despite the general support for HS1 (or Channel Tunnel Rail Link as it was then known), Kent County Council opposed the route for the western section; fighting for intermediate stations (they had the Government on their side for this, in view of Thames Gateway redevelopment); insisting on links into the local train network; requesting additional tunnels and alternative vertical alignments; and arguing that it was not adequate to only consider mitigation within the corridor as some effects happen beyond this. They won on a large part of this – sometimes because they had Government on their side. As a result of the trip the County Council and partners have learnt much from the way KCC and their partners approached fighting the proposals.

Ebbsfleet International railway station



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Built in an old quarry, Ebbsfleet International railway station is an interchange situated between Swanscombe and Northfleet. It is a part of the Thames Gateway urban regeneration, a project of national importance. It is sited on the High Speed 1 rail line, just

400 yards east of Northfleet railway station. The station lies off the A2 trunk road, close to its junction with the M25 motorway. Two platforms serve international Eurostar services and four platforms serve Southeastern domestic services.

The landtake for Ebbsfleet was considerable. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) Act allows a total of 9,000 car parking spaces to be constructed, with an initial 6,000 built. The car parks are in a number of geographical locations around the station. When we visited the vast majority of the parking spaces remained empty (please note that this was on a Friday and in the summer holidays). It cost £13.50 per day for a parking space.

Singlewell Infrastructure Depot



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Demand for a maintenance depot to be situated at Singlewell (half way along the route) 'surprised' KCC. The land is located in greenbelt and KCC wanted the depot to be sited either in Ashford (a 'railway town' with skilled labour) or Rainham (derelict land). There is very little landscaping at the depot, it is quite intrusive. However despite being greenbelt the surroundings are not pristine countryside. There were suggestions that the impact of any equivalent depot would be worse with the HS2 proposals. There were houses within approx 100-150 metres of the rail line. On being questioned, a resident in one of the houses said that they were not too disturbed by the quieter local trains (the javelin service); however they could hear/feel the longer, noisier Eurostar trains.

Shorne Wood County Park

Much of the work at Shorne Wood had been undertaken on the back of funding that had arisen as a result of HS1 (the Rail Link Countryside Initiative).

Chris Waite gave us an extremely interesting talk whilst we were at Shorne Wood Country Park <N:\Transportation\Strategic Transport\Policy & Performance\High Speed 2\HS1 visit\HS1 visit CW notes.pdf> Points of particular interest included:

Chris's advice to the group if HS2 goes ahead:

- Speak with 'one voice' across all Authorities and interest groups

- Divide the task across Authorities and interest groups so as to separate strategic from detailed issues (with the County Council taking the more strategic role); so as to share expertise and the (huge) costs of officer support.
- Gaining the *authority* for works (via the Bill/Act) does not commit the promoter to *build* those works – so if you think you have negotiated and won ‘Planning gain’ by getting things in the Act, think again. [Ashford International Station is apparently an example of this so with Ebbsfleet they bargained harder – ‘rail not to operate without the completion of Ebbsfleet’].
- You must commit the promoter, through an undertaking, to specific phasing. KCC were worried about what would happen ‘if the money runs out half way?’ – and they were right, it did, but they had at least got to a stage that could provide useable rail. Committing through ‘assurances’ is not adequate as legally these are only ‘intentions’ and not commitments.
- The HS1 Act does not die – at any later point any remaining works could be re-commenced if they were not done initially – it ‘hangs over’ the Authority.
- Mitigation lessons learned included that first priority must be the route selection – get that right; then argue for tunnels; cuttings; embankments as respectively having more mitigation impact. The third priority is then to get good design for bridges and for the reinstatement of roads. Use the Rail Link Countryside Initiative (RLCI) as the precedent for additional mitigation.
- HS1 was extremely costly for KCC: consultants, Parliamentary agents, Counsel. KCC immediately voted through £1million and spent it all. The advice is to share costs between Authorities and interest groups.
- HS1 caused a very heavy demand on staff – needed to put dedicated officers in post who should work across departmental boundaries.
- Scheme changes can suddenly come forward. For example the demand for greenbelt land for the maintenance depot / demand for passing loops with intrusive gantries / and the demand for construction lay down areas; or changes because of geology or archaeology. These demands for changes can be outside of the ‘limits of deviation’ (LOD) and outside the agreed Limits of Land to be Acquired or Used (LLAU).
- Do your own studies on environmental and social impacts
- To deliver HS2 there would need to be a special planning regime set up. After the Act, there are very limited powers for Authorities – some chance to discuss details of what things look like and small shifts of where they go, but cannot stop the route. KCC learnt that you only get 8 weeks to issue a decision and often need to undertake lots of work before that decision.
- It is crucial to understand the timings of the Select Committee – including the site visits of that committee – and the sort of lobbying that could/must take place around that. Chris Waite cited an example where a village put up very effective signage prior to a site visit and they won their case for a wide ‘cut and cover’ tunnel. The Select Committee gives close attention to local details so these have to be in place before they visit – need partnership with Districts and Parishes to achieve this. Select Committee might be persuaded to hold meetings at local venues; however it is difficult to lobby Select Committee members.
- KCC had ‘2 goes’ at lobbying – once in House of Commons and once at House of Lords. They decided that if they lost something in House of Commons, they would not fight for it again at House of Lords but go for different issues there.
- Beware of schemes where train company buys up large number of houses (in lieu of mitigation) – they bought up half a village that was in the ‘right range’. The community within the village collapsed as these houses lay empty– there was a huge social cost and social services had to be called in.

- The advice was to look at precedents set in the London Crossrail scheme as possibly more helpful than HS1.
- The impact of the construction phase for HS1 was far worse than even the professionals had thought: the extent of additional land take (access roads, trackside facilities, lay down areas); the daily problems of monitoring the construction companies (whatever the agreements made with them); the powers that construction companies have to vary a scheme without further negotiation (e.g. remodel the vertical route, phasing and access routes); the regular requests for run- ons and night time work; concern that the land taken for construction would not be handed back, properly restored, and as soon as it was no longer needed.

Blue Bell Hill Tunnel Portal



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There are not that many tunnels on the route of HS1, although those that do exist have significant portals. The tunnel portal at Blue Bell Hill (near the A229) is a round tunnel portal with the track approaching through a cutting. The noise of the train was louder where there were structures for it to deflect off (e.g. tunnel entrances/exits, stations). The bridge over the train line allowing the Pilgrims Way (a public right of way) to be continued was not in keeping with the surroundings as it was of a corporate design (white concrete and stainless steel). The same design of bridge was used at Ebbsfleet which is a modern 'glass and steel' box of a building.

Maidstone Motorway Service Area/Harrietsham



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The visits to these two sites demonstrated the proximity of an existing transport corridor (M20) to the HS1. The noise from the M20 went a long way to disguise the noise from the rail line and the impacts were seen to be less where the line was placed in an existing blight corridor. This may have led to what the group observed as 'minimal' noise mitigation measures in these locations. At Harrietsham there were new houses in close proximity to the rail line - after an embankment they were between 50-75 metres from the rail line. The 'snow shed' structure (looking like a bridge in the picture above) was to prevent any of Harrietsham village sliding onto the track.

Conclusion

The trip fulfilled the objectives set out. The information provided by Chris Waite was most helpful and will help to inform the approach to the HS2 proposals going forward. To summarise the key points from Chris Waite's talk:

- Separate organisations cannot hope to do much alone; have a strong single voice and share costs, resources and roles between interested parties.
- Thoroughly investigate the legal process so that you can fully understand the timetable for decisions and can use it to your advantage, but also so that you can keep companies (both promoters and contractors) to their undertakings.
- There is not only a great environmental and financial cost to such an infrastructure project, but also a social one as well. This should be investigated independently.
- If HS2 was to go ahead Authorities and interest groups must be extremely vigilant over the period of construction as there was a huge negative impact during this time.
- Do your own studies on environmental and social impacts
- A difference can be made by efficient campaigning

There were mixed views on whether the impact of the line itself was as great as expected. It was a shame that during the trip there was not the opportunity to see viaducts (there was minimum use of viaducts in HS1) as they form a significant part of the HS2 proposals. Other differences between HS1 and the HS2 proposals such as the prevalence of the track running parallel to existing transport corridors and the agreement to the proposals by the County Council are pertinent. However they do not diminish the usefulness of learning lessons from KCC and HS1.

