

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30 June 2011

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair)
Councillor Sarah Boad
Councillor Richard Chattaway
Councillor Michael Doody
Councillor Mike Gittus
Councillor Barry Lobbett
Councillor Barry Longden (substituting for Councillor Ray Sweet)
Councillor Tilly May
Councillor Martin Shaw (substituting for Councillor Chris Saint)
Councillor Helen Walton

Other County Councillors

Councillor Alan Cockburn, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities
Councillor Peter Butlin, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways
Councillor Richard Hobbs, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety
Councillor Bob Stevens, Deputy Leader
Councillor David Johnston

Officers

David Abbott, Democratic Services Officer
Paul Hooper, Substance Misuse Strategy Team Manager
Michelle McHugh, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Gary Phillips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mandy Walker, Regeneration Projects & Funding Sustainable Communities

Also in attendance

Martin Capstick, Department for Transport
Miranda Carter, High Speed Two Ltd
Sandy Tricketts, Representative for Dan Byles MP
Graham Long, Ladbroke HS2 Action Group

Two members of the public attended the meeting.

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Sarah Boad, seconded by Councillor Martin Shaw, moved and it was then unanimously resolved that Councillor John Whitehouse take the position of Chair.

2. Election of Vice Chair

Councillor Mike Gittus, seconded by Councillor Helen Walton, moved and it was then unanimously resolved that Councillor Chris Saint take the position of Vice Chair.

3. General

(1) Apologies

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Richard Hobbs (Portfolio Holder Community Safety) for the morning session.

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Alan Cockburn (Portfolio Holder Sustainable Communities) and Councillor Helen Walton for the afternoon session.

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Chris Saint and Councillor Ray Sweet.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Councillor Michael Doody declared a personal interest as an executive board member of 51M and as lead member on Warwick District Council.

(3) Minutes of the meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 April 2011

Under 'Attendance' Councillor Clive Rickhards should be replaced with Councillor David Johnston.

With the correction noted above, the minutes of the meeting of the Communities O&S Committee held on 28 April 2011 were moved as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

(4) Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded members that a special meeting of the Communities O&S Committee will be held on the 11 July 2011 at 9.30 am to scrutinise the report, 'Changing Times – a new chapter for Warwickshire Library and Information Service'.

4. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

5. HS2

The Chair welcomed Martin Capstick, Department for Transport (DfT) Director responsible for High Speed Rail, and Miranda Carter, High Speed Two Limited (HS2 Ltd) Director of Communications, to the Committee.

Martin Capstick and Miranda Carter then participated in a question and answer session with elected Members. The questions were grouped into seven themes. The Chair read out the lead question then invited follow-up questions from members on that theme.

The full transcript of the question and answer session is attached to the minutes.

The Chair thanked Martin Capstick and Miranda Carter for addressing the committee.

6. HS2 Draft Response to Consultation

The Committee considered the draft response to the HS2 consultation, which will be considered by Cabinet on 14 July.

Mandy Walker, Regeneration Projects & Funding Sustainable Communities Group Manager, presented the report and noted the following:

- The Committee had previously considered at the proposal for HS2 at its meeting on November 3rd 2010, this meeting and subsequent discussion at Full Council on 14th December 2010, had informed the draft response to the consultation
- The concerns for Warwickshire haven't changed significantly since that meeting.
- There were still concerns that Rail Package 2 hasn't been fully and comparably considered.
- Warwickshire won't feel the benefits.
- There were a plethora of local issues such as farm severance.
- There was insufficient detail around sustainability.
- The report highlighted that Warwickshire remained to be convinced that the benefits of HS2 outweigh the costs, both economically and socially.
- The response is scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 14 July.

Councillors discussed the draft response and made the following points:

- It should be made clear that Warwickshire County Council is not opposed to high speed rail as a concept.
- The flawed economic case is a key point and should be highlighted.
- It should be made clear what information was missing from the 1000 page sustainability study.
- The Council would like to see investment that supports economic development for the people of Warwickshire within a national context.
- It was noted that the business case is dependent upon a section of the route which has had little analysis done on it.
- It was suggested that the proposed improvements to the line that Virgin has planned should be included.
- It was suggested that a contextual response was put forward in the form of a covering letter.
- Councillors need to work closely with their respective political organisations to lobby Central Government and this document should be a platform to do that from.
- Local members were advised to put in their own responses to the consultation.

The Chair, on behalf of the Communities O&S Committee, commended the work of the officers involved in the response to consultation document.

Resolved

That the draft response be amended to reflect the issues highlighted by the Committee and submitted to Cabinet on the 14th July.

7. Questions to the Portfolio Holders

Councillor Peter Butlin

Councillor Richard Chattaway stated that due to an ongoing Tesco development in Bedworth there have been concerns from residents about parking spaces in front of a row of nearby shops.
The Portfolio Holder agreed there was a problem and said that it was being looked into.

Councillor Barry Lobbett asked the Portfolio Holder what was happening to the money in a fund previously allocated for work on the A444 slip-roads now that it is unallocated.
The Portfolio Holder had no knowledge of the funding but agreed to raise the issue with Officers.

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder what Warwickshire is doing to relax its policy on setting speed limits following the recently announced changes to the framework to allow 20 mph limits.

The Portfolio Holder advised that Officers are waiting until the changes are formally made but noted that the Police have no intention of enforcing 20mph speed limits.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked that the Portfolio Holder to look into why recent road safety statistics show a significant increase in fatalities in Nuneaton and Bedworth.
Councillor Richard Chattaway also raised the issue of road markings being worn out, and signage being unclear on Haunchwood road, Tomkinson road and Whittlefield road.
The Portfolio Holder agreed to look into both issues.

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder for clarity about the Council's policy of notifying residents about road surface works.
The Portfolio Holder said that it is an issue that Officers are looking into.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked the Portfolio Holder if the Council is getting the same standard of work from the new highways contractor – noting that complaints have been received from residents in Nuneaton about the quality of road patching.
The Portfolio Holder advised the Committee that there are regular board meetings with the new contractors and if Councillors submit queries or complaints to him, he will raise the issues with them at the meetings.

Councillor Barry Longden asked the Portfolio Holder how long it takes for road marking work to be completed after resurfacing work is done.
The Portfolio Holder agreed to respond to the Committee in writing.

Councillor Colin Hayfield

Councillor Martin Shaw asked the Portfolio Holder what will happen to the Rowan Centre on the corner of Radcliff road and Moore Street, as it is paid for by public subscription.
The Portfolio Holder will provide a written response.

Councillor Richard Hobbs

The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the Council is producing a DVD of the Fire & Rescue Service's domestic sprinkler presentation that will be sent out to all members.

The Chair congratulated the work of Gary Philips and his team for their work promoting the domestic sprinkler system.

8. Fire Protection - The enforcement role of the Fire and Rescue Service

Gary Philips, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented the report and noted the following points:

- FLARE will now be delivered by Community Development Officers instead of specialist officers.
- The domestic sprinkler agenda is being pursued with residential care homes.
- Fire & Rescue are working closer with the observatory to manage risk.

Councillors discussed the report and made the following points:

- There were concerns over the impact of reducing the service's capacity to carry out inspections.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked Gary Phillips the following questions:

- How many high risk inspections are there across the County?
- How many low risk inspections are there across the County?
- What is the total number of inspections for the following four years?
- What is the capacity of the Fire & Rescue Service to deliver this?

Gary Phillips agreed to consult with Officers and bring the information back to the Committee.

Gary Phillips noted the following points:

- A refreshed three year strategic Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) will go before the Fire Authority. The focus will be on business safety, home fire safety and targeting the most vulnerable.
- The work of both the Anti-Social Behaviour Intervention Team (ASBIT) and the Anti-Social Fire Intervention Team (ASFIT) has been very successful and will continue.
- Capital money from Central Government has been invested in electronic systems designed to cut down on paperwork.

Councillor Richard Hobbs advised members that an all party working group will be set up to look at the IRMP.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair), seconded by Councillor Martin Shaw, moved and it was resolved as set out below:

Resolved

That the IRMP working group reconvene at the earliest possible opportunity to work with Portfolio Holders and Officers and that the revised IRMP goes to

Full Council and includes full consideration of all of the issues covered in the minutes above.

9. Alcohol Implementation Plan: Progress Report

Paul Hooper, Substance Misuse Strategy Team Manager, presented the report and noted the following points:

- The graph on page one of the report showed a significant increase in the instances of liver disease – due in large part to alcohol abuse.
- There has been a concerted effort to work with health partners.
- Where crucial partners are having problems because of reduced resources the service has been working collaboratively to mitigate the effects to frontline services.
- With the resources available, the service is not able to reverse the trend but aims to stem the rate of increase.

Councillors discussed the report and made the following points:

- The report presented worrying statistics and should be sent on to Cabinet or the Adult Social Care and Health O&S Committee to draw their attention to it.
- It was suggested that Cabinet could look at the impact that reductions in services have on other areas of the Council's work. The outcomes of the Drug and Alcohol team can be affected by the work of the Youth and Community Service for example.
- It was highlighted that point 8.9 of the report; the targeted intervention project in Nuneaton, showed that targeted investment in intervention had saved money in other areas.
- Gary Phillips noted that alcohol is a big contributor to house fires.

Resolved

That the Alcohol Implementation Plan: Progress Report be referred to Cabinet and the Adult Health & Social Care O&S Committee.

10. Any Other Items

None.

The Committee rose at 15.57pm

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Chair

Transcript of the Question and Answer Session with representatives from the Department for Transport and High Speed Two Limited

The Chair welcomed Martin Capstick, Department for Transport (DfT) Director responsible for High Speed Rail, and Miranda Carter, High Speed Two Limited (HS2 ltd) Director of Communications, to the Committee.

Martin Capstick and Miranda Carter then participated in a question and answer session with elected Members. The questions were grouped into seven themes. The Chair read out the lead question then invited follow-up questions from members on that theme.

Q1. Economic Case for HS2

Lead Question:

HS2 and its strategic alternatives are compared against the same “Do Minimum” scenario based on investments to 2015 already approved. In the case of RP2 this is justifiable because it could be delivered incrementally from 2015 onwards, but is the comparison justifiable for HS2? Is it realistic to assume that there would be no further developments/capacity increases of the WCML or Chiltern Line to meet increasing demand between 2015 and when HS2 would be delivered (earliest 2026)? If not, how much does this undermine the economic case for HS2?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We used a common base case for the investment appraisal.

We wanted to compare like with like which is why we used the same due minimum. It is a standard appraisal technique.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

The base case for HS2 and RP2 appears to be different. In the base case for RP2 it is assumed that the fleet will be expanded whereas the base case for HS2 does not. Could you clarify why there is a difference in the base cases?

The base case also assumes that no improvement work will be done to the existing lines between 2016 and 2026? Doesn't this undermine the base case?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The recent improvements to the West Coast Main Line (longer trains and other actions to increase capacity) are not a long term solution.

Would investment in the meantime reduce the case for HS2? Clearly it would, but it wouldn't undermine it.

I have not been personally involved in the base case analysis work. There are some minor differences in the technical details of the base case but they would not have a material impact on the value for money. .

Councillor Sarah Boad:

There has been no mention of Chiltern Railways who are currently upgrading their line to London. It is a big investment that will result in a faster service to London. How does that impact the case for HS2?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The improvements to the Chiltern Rail service are welcome but it doesn't provide the major urban connectivity that HS2 will bring.

Councillor Sarah Boad:

A lot of people here use the London to Birmingham line to commute. Warwickshire residents won't use HS2 to get to London.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

Most people take inter-city routes to Birmingham. It is unlikely that people will use the Chiltern line as part of a major inter-urban service. At a national strategic level it is not a significant alternative.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

How accurate are the estimates of cost?

Could you tell us what the economic benefits of HS2 are? How can you demonstrate these benefits?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

There is a substantial optimism bias included in these figures. Quite often when large schemes are first proposed the cost is underestimated. The figure of £32 billion for the total cost of network includes a 60% inflation of the actual cost. If major problems are avoided during construction then it may even be cheaper. There are a lot of contingencies built in; this follows government guidelines and good practice for a project of this scale and scope.

Miranda Carter (HS2):

The current cost is based on the proposed route. That route is subject to consultation so the alignment of the route may change.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

At what stage will the route be finalised?

Miranda Carter (HS2):

A decision will be made at end of this year about the engineering design and the environmental assessment. The engineering designs will be frozen at that stage.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

To come back to the economic benefits of HS2 – the main benefit will become apparent when people seize the opportunities that high speed rail will offer. I can't tell you who that will be or how they will do it.

A growing number of people are using rail because they see a benefit from it. It's not the job of Government to tell people how to use and benefit from it. High speed rail will help the UK continue to be economically competitive.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

How can you demonstrate the economic benefits?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We have used tried and tested modelling techniques to forecast the likely economic benefits to the UK. Users of high speed rail will get a more efficient service and have access to more opportunities.

It is understandable for there to be a degree of scepticism, but there's no evidence that the Government is wrong here. The line will be opening in 2026; the government can't, and shouldn't, specify the shape of the country fifteen years from now.

Councillor Sarah Boad:

This railway won't benefit much of Warwickshire because there are no connection points in the county. The residents of Warwickshire won't get the benefit of using it.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

HS2 will have an impact in places where residents aren't users of the service. While it's true that not every individual will feel the benefits, the line will result in significant benefits for the UK as a whole and keep the country internationally competitive. The potential impacts are widespread but we couldn't, for example, do a piece of analysis showing the benefits to a company in Leamington Spa.

Councillor Barry Longden:

There will be no benefit for my constituents and no tangible benefits for Warwickshire.

Sandy Tricketts (representative for Dan Byles MP):

The comparison with motorways is misleading because HS2 won't be transporting any freight and passengers aren't able to get off where they like.

In North Warwickshire a number of houses have disappeared from the map included in the materials on the HS2 website. These are houses that would have to have been bought using compulsory purchase orders. If this is multiplied across the country doesn't that bite into the optimism bias?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

It is true that HS2 will be passengers only, but the existing West Coast Main Line is a mix of freight, passenger and cross country journeys. Rail operators would like to use freight far more than they currently can. High speed rail for passengers would free up the West Coast Main Line for freight and would provide an economic benefit.

The Chair suggested that the details of the query about the houses in North Warwickshire missing from the newest HS2 Ltd maps were clarified after the meeting.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We try to be as accurate as possible but the factors you are describing wouldn't change the outcome of such a large scale project. We are aiming to be accurate though and we will look in to this problem of houses missing from the route map.

Graham Long (Ladbroke Action Group):

You seem to be happy with the cost projections but uncertain of the projections of the economic benefits.

RP2 is a viable alternative that could be implemented much quicker and at a lower cost.

HS2 requires all of the money to be spent before any of the benefits are felt. How does this factor into your risk strategy?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

When we undertook the demand forecasting we used good practice and assumed caution. We assumed lower growth than we have experienced on similar projects. Actual growth could well be higher than we are forecasting.

We have used well tested methodologies but we can't clearly prove what the conclusions will be. There is a judgement to be made about the optimum level of risks

Graham Long (Ladbroke Action Group):

Network Rail has stated that the techniques you have used for forecasting demand are out of date and can't be used to make accurate predictions.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The detailed forecasts were done by HS2 Ltd. Forecasting into the future is difficult but we believe we are using the best method.

Councillor Michael Doody:

I am concerned that HS2 line will take passengers away from the West Coast Main Line at a time when the region is already economically vulnerable.

What would be the cost of the tickets on the new line? Would they be more or less expensive than the West Coast Main Line?

Miranda Carter (HS2):

The HS2 project supports Birmingham City Council's aspirations for the regeneration of Birmingham's west side.

The ticket cost would be equivalent to travelling on the West Coast Main Line; there will be a range of tickets. We are not arguing that it is a premium service.

Councillor Barry Longden:

Could we have some clarity over the figures for the total cost of the project? The cost has been referred to as £34 billion, £32 billion etc.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The figures depend on whether you calculate in real terms or present value terms. The figure that we put in the document at launch of consultation is for capital costs of £30.4 billion in 2009 present value prices. If you update those figures to 2011 present value prices that figure will change. The total cost depends on the cost base you take.

Councillor Tilly May:

The evidence from High Speed 1 (HS1) shows that there is a premium on the cost of tickets. The travel experience for commuters in Kent has gotten markedly worse since HS1 opened. That service now experiences the same speed as it did in 1927.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The Government has not decided on the cost of tickets yet.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

There has recently been a big change to the cost of the Heathrow link. Could you confirm what we were told verbally by Alison Munroe at the Kenilworth road-show, that there will be an updated version of the business case for the minister in time for the bill?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

When we present the report to the Secretary of State we are expecting an updated business case. We want the minister to have the latest information.

Regarding the cost of the Heathrow link; we are waiting for the Government's decision and we can't comment on speculation.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

As far as I understand it a range of alternatives are under consideration which are all considerably more expensive than the consultation document states.

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

We are working on the second phase that includes the Heathrow link. We are awaiting the finished report.

Q2. Rail Package 2 (RP2)

Lead question:

What assurances can you provide that RP2 has been examined objectively as a strategic alternative to HS2, and evaluated on exactly the same basis as HS2? In particular, why does the HS2 evaluation include wider economic impacts (WEIs) of £4.0 billion when WEIs were omitted from the RP2 evaluation? Can you confirm that inclusion of RP2 WEIs would increase its benefit to cost ratio (BCR) to 2.0, the same as HS2 (London to West Midlands)?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We haven't done the same amount of detailed work on RP2 that we have done on HS2 but we have enough evidence that it is not as attractive a proposal to Government.

We accept our report on RP2 shows a cost-benefit-ratio (CBR) of 1.9 but if you added contingency minutes to that then you'd end up with a lower CBR. When including going up to Manchester and Leeds the CBR drops to 1.4.

We think the wider economic benefits of RP2 are substantially smaller than HS2.

Supplementary question from Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

HS2 is dependant on a set of untried and untested technologies whereas RP2 is 'more of the same'. In light of this, is it fair to have built the same level of optimism bias into both proposals?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We think it is. HS2 is new line so we will have total control over the construction. RP2 is a range of works on an extremely busy line that has gotten busier since the last major set of works. There are risks with using an existing line.

Councillor David Johnston:

RP2 would deliver the same benefits as HS2 but faster and cheaper.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

RP2 doesn't provide the long term solution that the country needs.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

We have been told that there is a lower cost, quicker solution; does the department dispute that it is a serious alternative?

There is a big opportunity here to solve the short term problem and give us more time to decide on the longer term solution.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The actions taken on West Coast Main Line have already delivered improvements at the busiest times of the day. Longer trains and other improvements would help in the middle of the day but not at peak times. HS2 would provide greater capacity when it is needed most. The Government thinks it produces a different outcome for the future.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

Where does demand management come into this? There are artificial peaks because of the current fare structures. Has that been factored in?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The issue of artificial passenger peaks was identified in the McNulty report and it is a problem that needs addressing.

The two different packages would provide different levels of capacity. There's a risk of not allowing the country grow but then there's also a risk of building a project that is over-engineered for its purpose.

Graham Long (Ladbroke Action Group):

More intensive passenger management is needed but the Department for Transport doesn't seem to want to invest in this; the funding will run out by 2015. Between 2015 and 2026 the train system will creak and groan – how is the department going to manage this?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

Following the McNulty review we are looking to the industry to take the lead. We are currently in discussion with operators to take that forward. I personally can't tell you when but there will be announcements in due course. It will enable the industry to reduce costs which is more in line with what passengers need.

Councillor Barry Longden:

From the perspective of a resident of Nuneaton - why would I get a train from Nuneaton to Birmingham then get over to New Street Station to take a high speed train to London?

Why are the other options, such as RP2, not being considered?

What practical outcomes will there be for me and the people I represent?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We are spending large amounts of money on the Thames link; people here won't benefit but you wouldn't dispute that it's of benefit to the UK. It is possible that the project is not good for some people but is good for the UK as a whole.

Councillor Tilly May:

This is supposedly a national consultation but those of us that live along the route have been referred to by the Secretary of State as 'NIMBY's and luddites'. It sounds as though there is a huge bias against us. Many people don't even know they will be affected yet. If it truly is a national consultation, what have you done to raise awareness?

Miranda Carter (HS2):

This has been a national consultation. We have raised awareness in a variety of ways; the website, road-shows, regional seminars, and off route leafleting.

170,000 letters have been sent to people living within one kilometre of the route. Many people have used the website and written letters to us. We have featured in magazine articles and national and local newspapers.

Councillor Tilly May:

Is it true that the regional seminars have only taken place in areas where there will be stations?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

Seminars have had a range of representatives from places not directly served by stations. The Secretary of State is keen to raise awareness of it, evidenced by his willingness to take interviews on the subject.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

The Y-route is fundamental to high speed rail. Where will the second stage of the route go?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

It would have been possible for the Government to have waited until the project had a fully mapped out the Y-route before putting it to consultation. The Government thinks it is important to have an early debate on the principle of high speed rail and the detail of the first stage of the route. With consultation on the second stage following.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

Which route will give the greatest economic benefits?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

HS2 limited is working on a more detailed report for the Manchester and Leeds section of the route which includes a number of different possibilities for stations and lines. A report will go to the Secretary of State later this year but I can't speculate on the details.

Sandy Tricketts (representative for Dan Byles MP):

We were told that tunnelling under Water Orton couldn't be done but we have learnt that the majority of the Y-route will be tunnelled and in cuttings. Why can Water Orton not be tunnelled under?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

We have a route between London and Birmingham for consultation at the moment. There is not the level of detail for the vertical or horizontal alignment of the Y-route. A report will go to the Secretary of State for his consideration.

Sandy Tricketts (representative for Dan Byles MP):

It's a different story when we talk to different representatives. How can we make a decision if we don't know the facts?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

The route is out for consultation, the details are being worked on. I can't speculate on it.

Councillor Peter Fowler:

There will be a new car park and railway station at Packington with 10,000 car parking spaces and space for more. Is the expectation that people who live in the south would need to drive to the north to get to the new station?

Are we able to get someone to attend a meeting in Coleshill to explain the effect of HS2 on the local residents? The residents of Coleshill do not understand the impact on them.

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

Residents of Coleshill should be aware of the line. Anyone within 1km of the proposed route received a letter. Not everyone went to the road-show in their vicinity but a number of Coleshill residents came to the Water Orton event.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

Can we get a message to the minister through Martin that we are deeply insulted by the NIMBY label; the residents of Burton Green have looked into the HS2 proposal in great detail.

The Government seems to be using the tactics of 'divide and rule'. There have been adverts on northern buses portraying objectors as NIMBYs and fat-cats which is insulting to the people of Warwickshire who have genuine concerns.

Q3. Speed

Lead question:

Lord Adonis has stated that the case for HS2 is about capacity rather than speed. Many people have questioned the need for a design speed of up to 250 mph in our small crowded island, based on the current connection times between our major cities and the existing opportunities for improving these via upgrades to conventional rail services. Lower design speeds would allow more route flexibility including greater opportunity to follow an existing transport corridor. Why are you adhering to 250 mph?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

Speed is not a fetish for the Department for Transport. We looked at the best ways of providing the transport infrastructure that the country needs. Fast services do provide significant benefits to people. There are more benefits at a relatively low additional cost. We think the HS2 proposal gives good value for money. The line provides high speeds but is also environmentally acceptable.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

Because of the relatively short distances between stops, the trains will not be able to reach their top speeds. Why are we building to a design standard that won't be able to travel at the potential top speed?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We think that the scheme is well considered and well designed. Individuals can put forward suggestions for improvements; if they think we can do something differently that would provide a material benefit then we would consider those suggestions.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

Why do we need a new line built, why not improve what's already there?

Councillor Helen Walton:

What other high speed rail networks travel at the proposed speed?
Is it not true that the carriages proposed for HS2 are more environmentally unfriendly due to the speed they are going and their size?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

There are similar high speed trains currently being tested in France and China.
Overall the environmental impact was pretty similar to a conventional line.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

In the UK conventional rail carriages are smaller because the UK gauge is smaller.
High speed rail uses the larger European size gauge so the carriages are also bigger.

Councillor Bob Stevens:

Why does the HS2 line not go along the existing transport corridors?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

It is not necessarily the case that existing transport corridors are the best options for a new line. The Government thinks that the line chosen is the best route but we are happy to take other submissions through consultation.

Sandy Tricketts (representative for Dan Byles MP):

The current route is not the preferred route of the engineers.

Miranda Carter (HS2):

I would dispute that.

Sandy Tricketts (representative for Dan Byles MP):

The 400 km/h figure was just thought up; they are actually being tested at 350 km/h.
China is testing nearer to 400 km/h but they are also looking at tilting trains. Why are you not considering tilting trains?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

We were asked to solve a capacity problem; the department looked at alternatives to high speed rail. With the same environmental and economic costs high speed rail provides a better cost benefit ratio.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

It is an entirely reasonable question to put forward as a response to consultation. We welcome your response.

Sandy Tricketts (representative for Dan Byles MP):

The 400 km/h speed reduces the opportunities for mitigation. For example; it is harder to tunnel because of the straightness of the line needed to achieve the high speeds.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We are happy to read whatever material is submitted.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

Whose preferred route is it?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

Arup, the design and engineering company contracted to deliver HS2, must agree that the proposals put forward are ones that they support.

Miranda Carter (HS2):

As far as we're concerned they [Arup's engineers] support the proposed route.

Councillor Barry Longden:

Other countries have the space for this kind of line but we don't. Who are these people that need to get to London ten minutes earlier?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

The passenger figures are based on a model of 40% business passengers and 60% leisure passengers. People attach value to time, often paying more to get to their destination quicker. It's not just a question of shaving ten minutes off a journey; it is significantly more than that.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

People value time.

Q4. Environmental Impact

Lead question:

Why wasn't more detailed environmental analysis undertaken to inform this stage of the process and the consultation?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

If the project goes forward there will be a detailed environmental assessment to accompany the hybrid bill.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

We are being consulted on the route but officers are not able to give us the information we need to make a judgement because there is so little information available. Is it fair to expect us to make a decision without the relevant facts?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

I can't agree that the information isn't available. There is sufficient detail available in the 1,000 page Sustainability document available on our website.

Graham Long (Ladbroke Action Group):

In a small rural community like the village of Ladbroke, noise is a key concern. What we are most concerned about is that in your reports we are given the average noise rather than the pass-by noise.

Could we have an assurance that you will reconsider the appropriate measurement and noise level?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

Noise is obviously a key concern to residents. At the road-shows we tried to convey the reality of the noise level by using sound booths.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

Different people perceive noise differently. We think the LEQ method is best because it matches most people's experience.

Graham Long (Ladbroke Action Group):

Are you aware that the Federal Board of the USA uses pass-by noise?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

I agree that my American colleagues do a lot of research.

Miranda Carter (HS2):

Noise means different things to different people – an unacceptable level hasn't been set yet as far as I know. There will be further discussion with people in villages near to the line to solidify this measure for the hybrid bill.

Sandy Tricketts (representative for Dan Byles MP):

Alison Munroe was asked if the sound booths at the regional road-shows would reflect the sound in that area. She said yes, but the sound was the same at every one.

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

There were sound booths for different geographical areas – suburban, urban, and rural. We tried to use the one most appropriate to the area of the road-show. There was also a selection of the other booths for people who came from different geographical areas.

Q5. Existing highway network

Lead question:

How far has the impact of HS2 on the existing highway network been looked at?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

HS2 Ltd has looked at the impact on highways but not in any significant detail. If the project moves forward we will have to have more detailed discussions with the relevant highway authorities. Further detail and more consultation will happen at the environmental impact assessment stage.

Councillor David Johnston:

Is the 40/60 split between business and leisure passengers because of travellers from Birmingham International Airport?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

I'm not aware of any modelling specific to Birmingham Airport.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The split is similar to most intercity rail services, the airport doesn't factor into those figures.

Councillor David Johnston:

I'd like to see a more detailed breakdown of those figures.

I am unconvinced that HS2 will prove attractive to business people across the West Midlands who will have long journey times to reach Curzon Street. RP2 offers better connectivity to points across the Midlands than HS2, which seems only to offer a link to Birmingham as the fifth London Airport.

Councillor Richard Chattaway:

Are you factoring in the cost to Local Authorities?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

Road diversions would be part of the cost of the project.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

Can you talk about the carbon impact of HS2?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

Our environmental consultants put forward two different modelling scenarios (point 2.13); one which includes an increase in flights and one that does not.

There is uncertainty around the levels of carbon dioxide. The impact will be affected by the actions of airport authorities and power generation but HS2 won't significantly increase levels of carbon dioxide. Rail is a relatively carbon efficient mode of transport.

Martin Capstick (DfT):

In strategic terms the Government is looking to achieve its carbon budget while still making the UK prosperous and competitive. As electricity is de-carbonised this scheme can help us reach our goals for carbon reduction.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair):

Should a project of this scale not make a considerable contribution to carbon reduction?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

We think that by being better than the alternatives it does make a big impact. People won't have to fly for example. This project is part of a coherent low carbon economy strategy.

Councillor Barry Longden:

What about the construction phase, will this not have implications for the carbon figures?

Miranda Carter (HS2 Ltd):

Construction will have implications for carbon but the scheme will be broadly carbon neutral.

Councillor Tilly May:

Could you tell the Secretary of State that because this is a hybrid bill, that therefore has no statutory requirement for consultation; people think the whole consultation process is a sham?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

For people that are passionately opposed to HS2 they will always believe the consultation process was a sham.

Councillor Tilly May:

What is the tipping point for the project?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

Changes to the project will only come about through careful consideration of analysis.

Graham Long (Ladbroke Action Group):

Following the Prime Minister's recent statement that, 'the Government is committed to HS2', how can we have any confidence that the principle is up for debate?

Martin Capstick (DfT):

The Government has strong beliefs about high speed rail but the project needs to be undertaken in a reasonable and justifiable way.

The Chair thanked Martin Capstick and Miranda Carter for coming to address the committee and answer questions.