COUNCIL SEMINAR
29th May, 2013

Present:- Councillor Smith (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Barron, Beaumont, Beck, Buckley, Clark, Gilding, Gosling, Goulty, Hoddinott, Kaye, Middleton, Pickering, Read, Smith, Swift, Wallis and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor Foden) and from Councillors The Mayor (Councillor John Foden), Astbury, Dalton, Doyle, Ellis, Falvey, Godfrey, Jepson, McNeely, Roche, Sims, Watson, Tweed, Whelbourn, Whysall and Wootton.

HIGH SPEED RAILWAY HS2 - "ENGINE FOR GROWTH"

Members received a presentation from three representatives of the company HS2 Limited, Stephen McFarlane, Alasdair Hassan and Rachel Blake, about the proposed high speed railway (HS2) which will link London, the West Midlands and Manchester and also travel through South Yorkshire to Wakefield and Leeds.

During the presentation, it was explained that a Government-led examination had initially been undertaken of whether the long term demand on the rail network could be satisfied by the development of a new high speed line. It was clear that by the middle of next decade (2020s), the existing Inter City rail network, including both East and West coast mainlines will be stretched to capacity. The High Speed 2 company was therefore created to examine how to develop new railway lines and to “bring the Midlands and northern cities closer to London”.

Phase 1 of the high speed rail network (London to Birmingham) is well advanced and it is expected that Parliament will shortly grant consent to allow construction work to begin during 2016/17.

Details of Phase 2 of the high speed rail network have been published, showing the rail links from Birmingham and the Midlands to Manchester and the North-West of England (and to Scotland) and also the link from Birmingham to the East Midlands, South Yorkshire, Wakefield, Leeds and also to York and the North East of England.

The new rail network will have high speed, high capacity and high reliability and will be a major engine for economic growth in the United Kingdom, by shrinking the economic geography of the country and bringing the main cities closer together (by reducing the journey times between them). Construction of this rail network will be the largest infrastructure development in Western Europe. It is projected that Phase 1 (London to Birmingham and the West Midlands) will be in operation for passenger travel by 2026, with the Phase 2 sections opening in 2033. The new trains will be at the cutting edge of rail technology and will travel at speeds of up to a maximum of 225 mph.

Studies have shown that Inter City rail demand has doubled in the last fifteen years and will double again in the next twenty years. By the mid-2020s, the Southern main rail lines will be full to capacity and the East Coast and Midland mainlines will be over-crowded and over-capacity. HS2 meets that demand and changes the way the rail network operates; HS2 will improve transport connections between cities in the Midlands and the north of England. The creation of the high speed lines and the transfer of Inter-City passenger services onto those new lines will create space on the existing regional lines, for both regional passenger services and for rail freight.

The construction of the high speed railway and of new and refurbished stations will create upwards of 100,000 new jobs. A new station will be constructed at Euston and there will be a new link from the high speed rail network to the cross rail (Heathrow Express) at Old Oak Common, to assist in easing the flow of transport across London. New stations will be constructed at Birmingham, at Toton sidings (Derbyshire), at Meadowhall and in Leeds. From Leeds, the HS2 line will connect to the existing rail network serving York, Newcastle and the North-East of England. Construction work on Phase 2 is expected to begin during the middle of the next decade.

The preparations for Phase 2 began in 2010 and HS2 Ltd has been given the task of ensuring the construction of the railway stations and railway lines. There continues to be lengthy discussions with local authorities about the way the construction work will affect their areas. Many options were considered for the location of the high speed line and the stations.

Locally for South and West Yorkshire, the high speed railway route will follow a line almost parallel to the M1 motorway, moving north from the new infrastructure main depot to be constructed at Staveley, near Chesterfield. The high speed line will be routed at elevated levels from the Rother Valley, via Beighton/Catcliffe/Orgreave/Waverley, to the new station at Meadowhall, constructed at a similar height to the upper deck of the adjacent Tinsley viaduct. To the north of M1 Junction 35 (Thorpe Hesley), the high speed line crosses the M1 via a tunnel beneath the motorway (200 metres length) and across Hoyland (tunnel of two kilometres length) to the more suitable, flatter terrain to the East of Barnsley. Passing between Normanton and Pontefract, in the Wakefield area, the high speed line eventually reaches the new station near to the Leeds city centre. An additional spur will link Leeds to York, via Garforth.

The route around Meadowhall has implications for a number of specialist businesses, such as Firth Rixon. The high speed line will have a connection to existing rail services at the Meadowhall transport interchange and station platforms will be lengthened from 100 metres to 300 metres. An additional tram stop will be built, providing a connection from that service into the HS2 network.

After the presentation, Members asked various questions and raised the following issues:-

(1) Property blight and arrangements for compensation

It was noted that Phase 1 of the high speed line has a safeguarded construction route measured 60 metres either side of the centre line of the rail line, affecting the rural areas through which the line passes. A further detailed study is taking place in respect of urban areas. To date, there is not yet any set width of rail corridor for blighted properties and their possible entitlement to compensation. After the Government announcement of the preferred railway route, there will be public consultation during 2013 and 2014 about possible compensation for owners and occupiers of properties affected by the construction of the high speed railway. There is current legislation affecting property blight and the Government has put in place a national compensation code.

(2) Construction of the railway tunnel beneath Hoyland, Barnsley

The shorter tunnel is to be constructed to allow the railway line to pass beneath the M1 motorway to the north of Thorpe Hesley; the longer tunnel (2 kilometres) is to be constructed beneath Hoyland. Twin-bore tunnels are to be constructed to allow trains to pass each other at high speed.

(3) Other countries (eg: France, Japan) complete similar, large-scale construction and engineering projects in a much shorter time than the United Kingdom; will the railway infrastructure be developed in stages, in advance of the eventual opening of the network to passengers in 2033 ?

HS2 (Phase 2) construction will probably begin in 2024, with lines to Leeds and to Manchester being built simultaneously during a period of eight years. The development of stations and tunnels are significant factors. The Parliamentary process will dictate the timescales for construction work and much depends also on the workforce skills and capacity existing in the United Kingdom for this type of large-scale construction and engineering work.

(4) Recent statement issued by the National Audit Office, saying that the economic benefits of the high speed rail network are unclear; will local firms and labour be used ? South Yorkshire has a low wage economy, therefore would it be more beneficial to invest this public money in the local economy ?

The National Audit is very proficient at uncovering gaps or weaknesses in any economic argument or case. The Government is convinced of the economic benefits and value for money of this type of investment, in terms of the transport case. There are likely to be other wider benefits, not yet identified, perhaps by reducing the north-south economic divide. The use of local labour and suppliers is a priority for the developing procurement strategy for HS2. Other transport projects, such as the London cross-rail

system, will not suffer because of the inception of HS2. It is imperative that the high speed rail system should link seamlessly to the international rail network in London, facilitating access by rail to Europe.

(5) 18 trains per hour is a very intensive use of the railway; are the trains dedicated to the high speed network, or are they capable of transferring onto other, regional tracks ? What is the balance between the number of passenger trains and freight trains using HS2 ?

The section of the HS2 rail network local to South Yorkshire will accommodate ten services per hour in each direction. Other areas, such as the Thames Link in London will be upgraded to 24 services per hour. By comparison, the London underground network accommodates 32 trains per hour on its busiest lines. The railway technology is available and sufficient to support these frequencies of train service.

Some rolling stock will travel only on the high speed lines, whilst others (known as 'classic compatible') serving the North-West and North-East of England will be capable of re-joining the existing mainline tracks. The high speed network carries only passenger rail services, in order to achieve high standards of service reliability, but will not carry freight trains.

(6) The impact of the high speed railway line on the village of Catcliffe (where some residents may be eligible for compensation for property blight) and the nearby developing community of Waverley; is there to be meaningful public compensation about the route of the railway line ?

The high speed rail route has cross-party support in Parliament and the preferred route ultimately will be constructed. Businesses and home-owners should make their views known during the public consultation exercise, in order that appropriate action may be taken to try and mitigate the impact of the rail project on their properties and homes.

(7) The new development at Waverley will absorb some of the Borough Council's Local Plan housing allocation; if this development had to be reduced in size, it may lead to other areas of the Rotherham Borough having to accommodate new housing, perhaps with building on land in the green belt

The HS2 Limited company is already involved in discussions with local authorities, businesses, property developers and other interested parties. It is important that the full impact of the construction of the high speed rail network is understood by everyone.

(8) Several Members reiterated their concerns about the economic benefits for the South Yorkshire region (in an era which already has many sophisticated means of communication), compensation for home-owners and the environmental and noise impact of trains travelling at high speeds

The high speed rail network is needed because existing rail networks are being stretched beyond capacity. It is important that the economy and businesses benefit from this public investment in transport. The economic case is a robust one for the achievement of shorter journey times between this country's major cities. Research shows that people do appreciate and value shorter, reliable journey times. Experience in other countries (eg: Lille and Lyon in France) has proved that regions will benefit from the improved economy and rail network, not just the large and capital cities.

(9) Concerns about local connections to and from the high speed rail station at Meadowhall, by rail, bus, tram and road – does the existing transport network around Meadowhall have sufficient capacity to cope with additional people and traffic congestion ?

These issues ought to be raised within the public consultation exercise and also in discussions with the local authorities. It is important that the local road system, car parks, bus, tram and regional rail services are properly in place and operating in a reliable way.

The achievement of these aims may require further investment by HS2 to improve the local highway and transport connections, to ensure that the economic benefits are to the advantage of the region.

Members noted the constraints of the existing transport infrastructure in South Yorkshire and that improvements may take several years to achieve. The public consultation exercise, locally, should help to make the case for the necessary improvements to be delivered, either as part of HS2 or in advance of the railway system opening. Rotherham will benefit from the new tram-train link to be constructed from Meadowhall South to Parkgate, although further improvements will be needed to link this transport system to the HS2 station. In addition, the improvement of the railway line at Holmes Chord from single track to two-way operation is an imperative.

(10) Funding of the high speed rail network and ownership of the rolling stock

The project is entirely financed by public funds. A decision has not yet been made about the future ownership of the rolling stock.

(11) M1 corridor near to Catcliffe and Tinsley already has severe difficulties in terms of poor air quality

This issue has already been identified in preparation of the high speed rail network and mitigating action will be planned as part of the construction phase.

(12) Will the public consultation process be worthwhile and successful ?

It is envisaged that the process will be open and transparent.

Members thanked Stephen McFarlane, Alasdair Hassan and Rachel Blake for their interesting and informative presentation.