

News on HS2 Project from Andrea Leadsom

Dear All

I am writing to provide you with a thorough update on my work as your representative with regard to the HS2 project in the run up to the 'Paving Bill' that comes before Parliament in a week's time.

The Government is showing no signs of reconsidering the commitment to HS2, and I also understand the Opposition is fully behind this project. Personally, as you know, I remain very concerned that this is not a good project for the taxpayer, and is devastating for our beautiful countryside.

I remain optimistic that the Hybrid Bill process will enable a rethink of the route, as well as of the project itself, but I also think it is important to be realistic. Whilst I oppose HS2, if this project is to go ahead, I am determined to achieve fair compensation and good mitigation for my constituents.

I wanted to share with you what I have been able to do so far in Parliament and the Constituency as the campaign against HS2 has progressed. I hope that this will give you confidence that your views are being put forward at every possible opportunity - and I am doing all I can to defend your property and environment:

In Parliament:

- I have set up the 'HS2 Compensation and Mitigation Forum' following the announcement to proceed with HS2 in 2012. The group was established for affected MPs from up and down the line to meet to discuss constituency issues of compensation, mitigation as well as the project in general.

Since the group was founded we have met with HS2 Ltd. officials, including Alison Munro, Chief Executive of HS2 Ltd. on a number of occasions. We have also met with the former Secretary of State, Justine Greening, representatives of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, land agents, 51M, HS2 Action Alliance and representatives of many other action groups.

- In February I met with the Prime Minister (I also met with him with Justine Greening when she was the Secretary of State) to discuss fair and comprehensive compensation arrangements and in particular, a property bond.
- Before Christmas I met with Simon Burns, the Rail Minister and in April this year I had a productive meeting with the new Secretary of State, Patrick McLoughlin. In both meetings I stressed how important good compensation was and made clear that I support a property bond which would give confidence to the housing market.
- I have responded on behalf of my constituents to all consultations which the Department for Transport have held: on the general principle of HS2, on property and compensation and also on safeguarding. I have also responded to the HS2 Phase Two consultation and next month I will have submitted my response to the Draft Environmental Statement consultation.
- I have taken the opportunity to raise HS2 in the House of Commons Chamber whenever possible. I led a full debate on the principle of HS2 during the original consultation, I have

raised the issue at Transport Questions and most recently I spoke in the Queen's Speech debate again raising my objections to HS2 and calling for good compensation and mitigation.

- I have continued to table Written Parliamentary Questions asking a variety of questions of the Department for Transport on all aspects of HS2.

In the Constituency:

- My aim is always to keep you up to date on HS2 related matters as much as I can. When the HS2 Roadshows were taking place in the constituency I attended each one at Greatworth, Upper Boddington, Chipping Warden and Brackley to support those affected in their discussions with HS2.
- I have arranged several public meetings in the constituency, in Greatworth, Brackley and Boddington.
- I have taken part in several of the Community Forums in our area, as well as the roadshow at Brackley to discuss the Draft Environmental Statement consultation.
- I have arranged various meetings with HS2 Ltd. officials and individual parish representatives to discuss specific issues. So far I have held meetings between HS2 Ltd. and the communities of Greatworth, Boddington, Brackley, Culworth and Thorpe Mandeville.
- Over the last three years I have sent hundreds of letters to the Department for Transport raising the individual concerns of constituents and I continue to do so. As well as the general concerns residents have about the project I have represented a number of families applying to the Exceptional Hardship Scheme who have had an urgent need to sell but who have become trapped by HS2.

Going forward:

- The negotiations for good compensation for those affected and for better mitigation for individual areas continues.
- On Wednesday 26 June the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill, also known as the Paving Bill, will come before Parliament.
- The HS2 Hybrid Bill was also included in the Queen's Speech this year and is scheduled to come before Parliament by the end of this year.
- There will be more consultations to respond to and I will be doing so.
- I will be holding public meetings as and when necessary and will continue to try and attend those organised by HS2 Ltd.
- I continue to encourage communities and individual families to write to me and the Department for Transport to raise your concerns and individual issues you may have relating to this project.

I want to now comment on two particular issues which I know are important to constituents – a property bond and the Paving Bill.

My view is that a property bond would restore confidence in the market and allow the housing market to function more normally, which would allow those currently trapped in their homes to be able to sell their homes and move on with their lives.

HS2 Action Alliance have proposed a property bond scheme which essentially would mean that the Government would be required to buy a property at the pre blight value from those who find themselves in the situation where HS2 is affecting the sale of their home. Whilst this would be the preference of many constituents, indications given by the Government are that they unlikely to support this particular scheme.

I have put forward an alternative suggestion which would mean that each property that was affected by HS2 would be eligible for a property bond which, on completion of the line and for one year after the operation of HS2, would entitle the then owner of the property to compensation or the Government to buy the property at the pre blight value, if it could be proved that the operational HS2 was negatively affecting the value.

During the interim period between now and when the line was operational, the existence of the bond guaranteeing the pre blight value (plus or minus house price movements in the intervening years) would enable the market to operate as normal enabling property to be bought, sold, remortgaged and equity realised. As an added incentive to the normal functioning of the market, I have suggested that properties with a property bond should be exempt from stamp duty. The already proposed compensation schemes of the compulsory purchase zone, advanced purchase zone and the long term hardship scheme should operate alongside the property bond.

The Government are going to reconsult on a compensation scheme and this will give the opportunity for the principle of a property bond to be considered again. Whilst I do want the very best compensation for my constituents I am concerned that if the HS2 Action Alliance property bond is not successful then there needs to be a workable alternative 'waiting in the wings', as I believe that any property bond is better than no property bond at all!

I have been told that my version of a property bond is not welcome by HS2AA and other action groups and I am, of course, perfectly willing to accept this. However, I would warn against all our eggs being placed in one basket. My opinion is that if the HS2AA bond is not adopted, then a bond of some kind which helped restore confidence in the market and help people trapped in their homes would be better than nothing. Your views on this would be very welcome.

Secondly, on the Paving Bill, some have asked which way I am going to vote. My honest answer is that I am still deliberating this point at the moment. Colleagues have been making the case that the Paving Bill will allow for compensation to be paid to constituents. Whilst the EHS will still exist after the Paving Bill, I have been told that the Paving Bill allows for the long term compensation schemes to be implemented. The EHS was only designed to be temporary.

Having said that, I want to make clear my opposition to the project, so for this reason I would consider voting against the Paving Bill. I will continue to discuss this matter with Colleagues and take into account the views of my constituents as I come to a decision. I will also make clear my reasons for my decision when I have made it.

This has been a rather epic catch up! I will do my best to send out an HS2 Newsletter on a more regular basis to keep you updated on progress. However, please do take a look at my website at www.andrealeadsom.com as I regularly post blogs and updates on there. There is a dedicated HS2 tab under 'Local Issues'.

This is a long campaign but I can assure you I will keep fighting for South Northamptonshire.

With best wishes

Andrea

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