

REPORT ON CROSSRAIL TALK

Wednesday 20th June 2007

The presentation by Simon Bennett, Consultations and Petitions Manager for Cross London Rail Links proved very popular, as shown by the good attendance. Unfortunately Mark Houghton, who is responsible for the Western part of the Crossrail scheme was unable to be present.

Simon spoke very informatively about the need, the design, the route selected and the Parliamentary process to be gone through, in order to achieve this ambitious project of Cross Rail Links from east to west of our capital city. The aim of the project is to help to de-congest rail travel. The Mayor of London foresees 8 million people to be moving around London in 5 to 6 years, therefore rail capacity will require an increase of 20%. The new links will be time saving, cost saving with improved comfort. The proposed route, terminating at Shenfield, in the east, and Maidenhead will be electrified across four tracks. There will be 21 new stations, 28 stations will be upgraded, shafts will be sunk and there will be new signalling and new rolling stock.

The impact on Maidenhead is still under discussion with RBWM. Further consent is needed before going ahead with proposals for the station and surrounds. The widening of Shoppenhangers Road, during construction, is now considered to be no longer necessary. This must be of some comfort to us all after the recent upheaval in that area of the town. Guards Club Park will not be used for storage of materials. These will be stored on alternative land belonging to Railtrack, under the viaduct arches. Equipment will be delivered by rail for the alterations to Maidenhead Railway Bridge. With the coming of the Olympics, it is hoped to work on some areas with urgency. Stratford Station should be completed for 2012.

The Hybrid Bill is still going through Parliament. 466 Petitions were lodged, a third of which have been heard by the Select Committee. The rest have been withdrawn after agreements with the Official Undertaker – Crossrail. The final Report should go to the Lords in January 2008 and it is hoped that the Assent of Parliament will be given in May 2008 enabling construction to begin in late 2008 or early 2009. It will take 6 to 7 years to build so should be completed in 2015, so providing us with improved links and allowing London to remain competitive with other cities.

Most questions from the audience, were addressing the issues of the access into London for Maidenhead commuters. There is a worry about the time spent travelling into Paddington, as it is clear that Crossrail will be a slow service, using two dedicated lines, with trains stopping at most stations en route, taking 45-50 minutes. Are we going to have alternative choices? It seems it is dependent on the operators who share the other lines. This is an issue that requires some clarification and some definite answers. The coming of Crossrail should not make access from Maidenhead into a longer journey than at present. We still need fast trains into London.

The thorny question of parking was also raised. Simon said they were increasing the number of parking spaces by 100 but that it was the responsibility of the local authority to fund this. This conflicted with press reports which indicated that Crossrail would make some contribution to the increase in parking spaces. On speaking to Mark Houghton recently, he confirmed that the matter is still under discussion with RBWM. It is possible that, if they can agree the terms, there will be some funding from Crossrail for a number of car parking spaces in the vicinity of the station.

Although there are still unanswered questions about this project, the talk proved to be most interesting and clearly presented. It was helpful to be able to seek information and Simon was an accomplished speaker whose justification for the project was somewhat appealing. We wait now for the publication of Register of Undertakings and Assurances for the Crossrail Hybrid Bill and will follow closely its journey through the House of Lords.