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Rail consultation ‘a sham’ as objections are mislaid

Mark Hookham, *Political Correspondent* Published: 22 July
2012

A BOTCHED public consultation on the HS2 high-speed rail project could leave it mired in legal challenges. Justine Greening, the transport secretary, has admitted that more than 400 submissions were mislaid and not taken into account before the government gave the green light to the scheme this year.

They include a 150-page report by the HS2 Action Alliance, an umbrella organisation representing 73 campaign groups opposed to the project, the submissions of six councils and a string of papers from environmental, heritage and business groups.

Opponents of the £32 billion project have branded the five-month consultation a “sham” and called on ministers to “go back to the drawing board”.

Hilary Wharf, a director of HS2 Action Alliance, said: “We have now spoken to our lawyers . . . it seems that even basic processes were not properly followed and the consultation needs to be re-run in a fully compliant manner.”

Steve Costello, a director of Heathrow Hub which is campaigning for HS2 to be connected to a rail interchange at Heathrow, said the consultation, held between February and July of last year, was “flawed and unsafe”.

The scheme, initially for a 225mph rail link from London to Birmingham and later for lines to Leeds and Manchester, is already facing five legal challenges.

Dialogue by Design, a consultancy firm, was responsible for analysing responses and producing a summary for ministers. Officials discovered 413 responses had not been noted, including 407 emailed to the Department for Transport but not forwarded to Dialogue by Design. The remaining six had been wrongly marked as duplicates.

Greening said the 413 overlooked responses amounted to less than 1% of the 55,322 submissions received and Dialogue by Design’s analysis had been “just one of the elements” supporting her decision.

Dialogue by Design carried out a supplementary analysis of the overlooked submissions and concluded that they did not provide any new information.

Those whose submissions were overlooked learnt of the error on Friday in an email from Martin

Capstick, a director of HS2, the quango that manages the project.

Simon Morris, a director of the Chiltern Ridges Action Group, which opposes HS2, said: "We took the consultation extremely seriously and I am dismayed and concerned by the shoddy fashion in which our efforts have been dealt with."

Sidetracked consultation

More than 400 submissions from people and groups about the HS2 scheme were overlooked



**Justine
Greening
faces a legal
challenge**