

# HS2

## HS2 Mental Health and Wellbeing Progress Report

December 2022

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# Executive Summary

This report sets out:

1. The directions of the Phase 2a Select Committee on mental health and wellbeing:
  - a) to gather more data; and
  - b) to provide an additional support service;
2. High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd's commitments in response to these directions; and
3. The ways in which these and any additional commitments are currently being met.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing Assessment for Major Infrastructure Schemes Scoping Report

The Phase 2a Hybrid Bill Select Committee in 2018 requested that Government consider what could be done to better understand the relationship between mental health and wellbeing and major infrastructure projects.

[The scoping report](#) outlined the work already undertaken and suggested further actions, discussed below.

### Data gathering

#### Phase 2a Commitments

In their [second Special Report](#) (July 2019,) in response to the scoping report, the Phase 2a Select Committee directed HS2 Ltd to gather more data, including by commissioning an ongoing epidemiological report to assess community health and wellbeing.

In [response](#), HS2 Ltd committed to increasing evidence of the effects of large-scale infrastructure projects on mental health and wellbeing by:

1. conducting a qualitative assessment of responses to the Phase 2b community consultation to identify stress and anxiety impacts;
2. commissioning a large-scale, quantitative epidemiological study; and
3. commissioning a survey on health impacts on Euston residents from HS2 construction noise.

HS2 Ltd noted all this was in addition to the standard health assessment and mitigation work already undertaken for the project.

In their [third Special Report](#) (June 2019) the Select Committee restated their interest in these studies and HS2 Ltd [recommitted to undertaking them](#).

## Current situation

### Qualitative Assessment of Consultation Responses

HS2 Ltd examined the responses collected during the 2017 route and property, the 2018 working draft Environmental Statement and the 2020 Design Refinement consultations. The assessors looked for the use of words such as 'stressed', 'upset' or 'worried' within the responses and found that mental wellbeing was mentioned by consultees in association with the perceived environmental, social and economic impacts of the Proposed Scheme. The following issues were identified in the [Phase 2b Environmental Statement Volume 3](#) Section 7.5:

1. **Planning blight and a reduction in property values.** Some residents reported feelings of anxiety associated with the value of their properties. Others stated that financial uncertainty had led to changes in their lifestyle, or that concerns about property values had deterred them from moving, affecting their quality of life. Residents also reported stress relating to difficulties in understanding their entitlements under the compensation schemes.
2. **Loss of access to green spaces, tranquil areas and woodland.** Respondents expressed negative feelings about the direct and indirect impact on their local areas of green space and highlighted the value of these places to their physical and mental wellbeing.
3. **Construction noise and air emissions.** People indicated that they were worried about noise and emissions affecting their quality of life and health. Health effects from emissions were a particular source of concern. Issues affecting particular groups of people such as children, older people and people with health conditions were raised frequently.
4. **Construction traffic.** People expressed anxiety about road safety, particularly in relation to HGVs, and were concerned about the stress and frustration that may be caused by traffic congestion. Some people described being worried about getting to work, or about the viability of their businesses.
5. **Severance and social isolation.** Respondents expressed negative feelings about the severance of villages by the Proposed Scheme and that its impacts on amenities could deter visitors. Some people were worried that traffic congestion would increase social isolation.

### Large-scale quantitative epidemiological study

Following a collaborative, open and independent tendering process carried out with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), HS2 Ltd started a contract with RAND Europe in June 2021 in order to deliver a £2m, ten-year epidemiological health study, as requested by the Phase 2a Commons Select Committee. The aim of [the study](#) is to better understand the mental health and wellbeing effects associated with the planning and construction of HS2, to inform future infrastructure projects. Although the main geographical scope for the study will

be the Phase Two route, the study will collect data from all the community areas on the project so that it includes evidence from different stages of development. Research findings and updates will be shared on the project's website: <https://wish2.org>.

Broadly, RAND Europe will do three things:

- **Survey people.** Ask questions about their physical and mental health and wellbeing, including things that may affect this like having a job or good relationships with friends and family.
- **Host group meetings and interviews.** Speak to people who complete the survey, as well as local GPs and nursing staff, to discuss the issues raised in more detail.
- **Analyse anonymous information that GP practices provide to the government about the health and wellbeing of their patients.** This information will show whether the mental health and wellbeing of people living near HS2 changes over time. It will be compared to changes in other communities that are very similar, but unaffected by the construction of HS2.

The scope of the study was reviewed following Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) changes to the Eastern Leg of Phase 2b. The Ministerial Direction since then has been to retain the original geographical scope of the study, which includes the original Y network to Manchester and Leeds. If the IRP changes are implemented this means that two different groups will be present – those impacted by planning and construction of HS2 (i.e. those on the Western Leg and the proposed reduced extent of the Eastern Leg), and those impacted by the planning of the HS2 programme (i.e., those taken out of the scope of the Eastern Leg). RAND Europe and NIHR are currently reviewing the full research scope to determine how best to incorporate this decision.

Over time, the intervention experienced by people living along the 'cancelled' part of the route will diverge substantially from those living along the parts of the route that are going ahead. The 'cancelled' part of the route includes the elements of the original Y network not included in the current HS2 Phase 2b Bill scheme, between the West Midlands and Leeds, and the spurs joining HS2 to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) and East Coast Main Line (ECML). To capture this, RAND Europe will need to develop another logic model and separate data collection instruments for the survey and the focus groups and interviews, adding cost implications to the Ministerial decision.

### **Euston SCS Study**

In addition, HS2 Ltd and Skanska, Costain and STRABAG (SCS) are funding Imperial College to undertake the Euston area mental health impact [evaluation](#). To establish a baseline, in 2019, an initial survey was posted to just over 15,000 addresses, of which just over 500 responded. Due to COVID-19, the second survey was only sent out in mid-July 2022. The questions cover subjects including health perception and emotions, sleep patterns, and relationships and

personal connections. The surveys are approved by stakeholders such as Camden Council and Public Health England and HS2 Ltd will receive anonymised data only, which will be used to review impact mitigation policies.

## CPA Study

In addition to the data-gathering exercises committed to in response to the 2a Select Committee directions, HS2 Ltd staff are part of the Compulsory Purchase Association Working Group. The CPA Working Group was established to consider the impact of compulsory purchase on those affected and to consider suitable recommendations for reforms and best practice for CPO practitioners.

The first step was to undertake a comprehensive survey of CPA members and other professional member organisations to gain deeper insight into the industry's understanding of the effects of compulsory purchase on the mental health and wellbeing of those affected. This was the first time such a survey focused exclusively on assessing health and wellbeing outcomes in relation to the compulsory purchase process. It was completed by compulsory purchase professionals, not claimants (whose property is purchased). The perceived principal contributors to a claimant's anxiety include a feeling of lack of control over events, uncertainty as to when compensations payments become payable, and misunderstandings giving rise to unrealistic expectations.

Some of the recommended changes to the process have already been put in place by HS2 Ltd, such as making clear, public information available to the claimant. In addition, over the last few years, HS2 Ltd has undertaken lessons learned exercises, and refined and improved a range of Land & Property policies, outlined below. HS2 Ltd staff continue to form part of the CPA Working Group and will be able to share next steps and outcomes as they develop.

## Support for people with additional needs

### Phase 2a Commitments

In their [second Special Report](#), the Phase 2a Select Committee directed HS2 Ltd to provide, fund and integrate an additional mental health service.

In [response](#), HS2 Ltd committed to engaging appropriately with vulnerable stakeholders by putting a framework of services in place to provide its staff with expert advice and assistance in supporting vulnerable people, including an independent advocacy, support, and wellbeing service. The services would provide:

- help with applying for the various HS2 property schemes;
- help with understanding HS2 legal notices;
- additional or extended support to individuals with learning, physical, sensory or multiple disabilities whose disability affects their ability to self-advocate;



- additional or extended support to individuals who, through frailty, deteriorating health, affected mental functioning or other circumstances, find their ability to self-advocate effectively is impaired;
- additional support for individuals who are part of a minority ethnic community whose needs are not readily understood by HS2 Ltd because of cultural differences.

In their [third Special Report](#), the Phase 2a Select Committee expressed the hope that the procurement and operation of the new advice service for staff proves successful and is taken through into Phase 2b so that both staff and communities benefit.

In [response](#), HS2 Ltd recommitted to launching a support service that is able to provide expert advice to those members of the workforce who are engaging with communities, as well as helping to manage and support those individuals who are deemed to be vulnerable. It also committed to making this independent support service available along the whole line of the new railway route. Key areas of focus include:

- providing face-to-face or telephone consultations with individuals deemed vulnerable, ensuring support is tailored to their specific needs;
- assisting people in understanding and responding to HS2 Ltd documentation;
- signposting individuals or HS2 Ltd workforce to the relevant organisation for additional support; and
- assisting HS2 Ltd with case management of those individuals who may become vulnerable due to HS2 activity.

In addition, HS2 Ltd committed to delivering specific training for frontline staff to ensure they can identify and communicate with those individuals who may be vulnerable.

### **Current situation**

HS2 Ltd commissioned an independent advocacy and support service to help people who may be disproportionately affected by HS2's work due to a long-term medical condition or disability which could worsen during construction. The service, currently provided by POhWER who have this year been successful in securing the contract to deliver this service for another three years, provides independent, free, and targeted support to people whose personal circumstances, disability, or long-term medical condition impact their ability to self-advocate. It provides advice to help people understand HS2-related documents and complete paperwork.

So far, over 60 people have been supported, many with complex issues. The majority live on the Phase One route, with the highest concentration in Camden. The service has continued to operate throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This means that those already referred to the service have still been supported, and new referrals are still being made.

HS2 Ltd's Community Engagement and Land and Property teams have all been trained in the purpose of the service, how to access it and how to refer vulnerable members of the public to the service for direct support. Support to the public can be provided over the telephone, or face-to-face – whatever is most appropriate for the individual.

In addition, HS2 Ltd now offers translation and interpreter services through the HS2 Help Desk team. There is a statement on HS2 documentation which encourages people to make contact if they would like to receive a free copy of the document in large print, Braille, audio or 'easy read' format, as well as in different languages.

## 2a Scoping Report Commitments

### Phase 2a Commitments

In the Mental Health and Wellbeing Assessment for Major Infrastructure Schemes Scoping Report, the following suggestions for further actions were made:

1. Department for Transport officials to continue to explore the issue of mental health and wellbeing related to infrastructure schemes and consider whether the current approach, i.e. by assessing the effects in environmental impact assessments, is adequate.
2. HS2 Ltd to conduct a qualitative assessment of consultation responses to identify the stress and anxiety impacts of Phase 2b of HS2, and identify possible further steps for community engagement and mitigation; and
3. HS2 Ltd to undertake a lessons learned exercise to examine whether further improvements could be made to consultation and engagement for future schemes to avoid or reduce mental health impacts.

### Current situation

#### DfT Evaluation of Environmental Impact Assessments

DfT is funding £1.2m of the RAND Europe study, the results of which will be used to evaluate whether environmental impact assessments adequately cover mental health.

#### HS2 Ltd Qualitative Assessment

This has been covered as part of the data gathering section.

#### HS2 Ltd Lessons Learned

HS2 Ltd is determined to pursue continuous learning and look for improvements in the way that they engage with stakeholders. With that in mind, in October 2021 [a refreshed version](#) of the September 2017 Community Engagement Strategy was published with a particular focus on

respecting people and respecting places. HS2 Ltd listened to concerns and feedback and introduced several developments during 2021-2022, including faster response times for urgent queries. It has published improvements to their complaint's procedure and the accompanying Plain English Campaign-accredited booklet. It has also introduced a single management system for community engagement and complaints handling across both HS2 Ltd and their supply chain. This means there is a consistent record for all organisations working in a location, which allows them to respond more effectively. In the last year, HS2 Ltd carried out over 2,670 engagement activities, reaching more than 19,500 people. Since 2018, the organisation has engaged with more than 92,000 people at 8,390 engagement activities and there have been over 703,000 visits to 18 local community websites across the route.

HS2 Ltd has streamlined its complaints procedures. It is receiving more calls about construction-related issues that are having an immediate effect on people, which need to be resolved quicker than the organisation's standard target of 20 working days. HS2 Ltd is now committed to resolving all urgent construction enquiries and complaints in two working days. There were 324 urgent construction enquiries and complaints last year and in 94% of cases HS2 Ltd responded in two working days.

HS2 Ltd received 1,637 total complaints in 2021-2022. This compares with 1,877 for the same period the previous year, a decrease of 13%. HS2 Ltd resolved 97% of complaints in 20 working days or fewer and 99% were concluded at the first stage of the complaints process. No complaints were escalated to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The independent Residents' Commissioner and Construction Commissioner challenge HS2 Ltd in positive ways and have continued to hold the organisation to account.

Further to this, changes within the Stakeholder Engagement Directorate have taken place to ensure that HS2 Ltd offers the very best support possible to affected communities. The Public Response Team now lead on the provision of the HS2 advocacy and support service (offered by POhWER,) the translation and interpretation service and the Special Cases Panel. This team now work more closely with the HS2 Complaints and Help Desk teams ensuring a more joined-up approach in how HS2 Ltd responds to stakeholders and offer support where it is required. The team are currently working on the development of internal guidance accessible to HS2 Ltd staff and the wider supply chain to help them access these services, and will soon develop improved public information on the HS2 website to promote the support services available to people.

Additionally, HS2 Ltd has, for several years, provided training for HS2 Ltd and contracting staff who engage with external stakeholders, enabling them to recognise when they may be in contact with someone who has additional needs, including in relation to their mental health and wellbeing. The training also helps staff to understand the support that can be offered to individuals and where to signpost them. The Specialist Support Team is reviewing the current training offer to build on the information previously shared and the existing skills of the engagement teams to ensure that it is still fit for purpose, provides all the information staff

need and ensures that HS2 Ltd is responding to issues raised in the internal staff surveys and stakeholders.

Targeted engagement has been, and will continue to be, undertaken with community stakeholders, particularly those close to the Proposed Scheme. These stakeholders include educational establishments, organisations with specialist interests or those catering to the needs of vulnerable people within the community. This has informed the assessment of community and health impacts in the Environmental Statements and Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) for all phases of HS2.

Furthermore, the Special Cases Panel (the Panel) was set up in response to commitments made in the Phase One E23 (*Control of Construction Noise and Vibration*) information paper. The same commitments have been extended to cover Phase 2b in information paper E13. The Panel regularly reflects on the cases presented and the solutions reached, which has led to quicker responses over time and in some instances, the ability to be more proactive and therefore provide mitigation before the reported effects are felt by the individuals concerned.

Examples of the types of special cases considered include:

- people with a medical condition who are seriously affected by our construction activity;
- those living in homes where noise insulation does not work, for example, houseboats and mobile homes; and
- night workers and those who need to rest during the day.

The Panel also reviews cases in which individuals may require a reasonable adjustment or additional support due to their protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010), which could be in relation to their mental health or wellbeing.

Furthermore, following the 2020 Ministerial Review, HS2 Ltd's Land and Property team is changing how compensation policies and communication with stakeholders are managed, driving greater transparency. This new approach puts people at the heart of everything it does.

The Land and Property (L&P) Review was launched in 2020, bringing together the HS2 Minister, Residents Commissioner, property professionals and L&P team to explore how HS2 Ltd could improve the experience for affected landowners and occupiers. It made 36 recommendations. Working closely with DfT, HS2 Ltd has responded to each of those recommendations. The result has been a series of measures that are designed to ensure a much more positive experience for those affected by compulsory purchase, land acquisition and temporary possession under the HS2 Acts. The Land and Property Review key changes are categorised under four headlines:

1. **Putting people at the centre of HS2 Ltd's approach to acquiring land.** The lessons learned from Phase One around delays and frustrations experienced by affected landowners and occupiers, were key to developing HS2 Ltd's new approach for Phase 2a. Now, a programme approach is used, which means that land is acquired in a single step, offering everyone greater certainty and mitigating against land being taken in a piecemeal way. It also creates greater visibility of any planned surveying activities and a much clearer process for handing land back following temporary possession.
2. **Improving communications.** In 2021, HS2 became the first acquiring authority to introduce an online portal, giving claimants instant access to information about their cases. Continuous improvements have been made which means today claimants can now communicate directly with their case manager and submit, as well as view documents. HS2 Ltd's range of 'easy read' information has been expanded, enabling 220 HS2 claimant-facing colleagues to be trained. Digital media is also being used to ensure key information is reaching diverse audiences, while MPs along the line of route have been provided with tailored briefings.
3. **Providing flexible compensation policies.** In March 2020 the Streamlined Residential Blight Scheme was launched, offering a simpler route for selling eligible property to the Secretary of State by providing a standardised valuation and offer process. In April 2021, HS2 Ltd launched the Crop Loss Expedited Payment (CLEP) scheme. This allows farmers to receive compensation as soon as land is possessed, instead of waiting until losses are incurred. Both initiatives have helped simplify negotiations and reduce the need to engage agents.
4. **Processing cases more efficiently.** Considerable improvements have been made to strengthen how HS2 Ltd integrate property schemes and management functions into one single platform (known as Firrin). This enhances HS2 Ltd's ability to monitor performance indicators and create greater transparency, where cases get stuck.

In addition to system improvements, information on HS2's website has been enhanced to include guidance on which elements of claims are eligible for compensation, advice on what to expect from the process, greater clarity on timescales and triggers for alternative dispute resolution.

## Additional commitments

### Phase 2a Commitments

In [response](#) to the second Special Report, HS2 Ltd also stated that it would enable and welcome mental health and wellbeing projects to apply to the Community and Environment Fund (CEF).

## Current situation

As of June 2022, 203 CEF and BLEF (Business and Local Economy Fund) projects worth £11.92m have been announced in the public domain. Examples of projects providing benefits to mental health and wellbeing include:

1. **Healthtrain Project, by the West Euston Partnership – Camden, London (£74,804)**. As part of this project, a Healthy Living Coordinator will work with residents to give them the skills, support and motivation to organise their own health programmes, boosting their health and wellbeing by improving mobility, activity and fitness levels, and organising training and activities that raise awareness of or address mental health issues.
2. **Harefield Healing & Peace Gardens Project, by Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust – Hillingdon, Greater London (£74,380)**. As part of the project, 'Healing and Peace' gardens will be created to enable Harefield Hospital patients, visitors and staff to relax and find moments of peace at times of extreme stress by being able to engage with nature, flora and fauna, and to provide and create new opportunities for all hospital beneficiaries to actively engage in gardening activities and learn techniques to maintain a garden space.
3. **Bikeability Project, by Alum Rock Community Forum – Birmingham Hodge Hill, West Midlands (£9,700)**. The aim of this project is to encourage healthy lifestyles by providing social and educational cycling and volunteer opportunities for local people. As part of the project, they will purchase six adult bikes and six children's bikes along with equipment such as helmets, hi-vis jackets and bike repair kits. The new bikes will be available to local people for open-access three mornings each week, one of which will be on a weekend. They will also be available to local groups outside of these open-access sessions.