

Gareth Epps

Independent HS2 Construction Commissioner

Sent by email:

gareth.epps@hs2-cc.org.uk

27 July 2018

Dear Gareth,

Thank you for your fifth report as the interim independent HS2 Construction Commissioner. Can I please also take this opportunity to thank you for all of your work in this role over the last two years in monitoring how we manage and respond to construction complaints. We are grateful for your observations and recommendations, which have been an important part of how we ensure we are delivering on our commitments to being a good neighbour to those communities who will be affected by the project.

In the first six months of this year the HS2 Helpdesk has received almost 12,000 contacts. The number of those contacts concerning construction continues to slowly increase as works increase and the impacts of the project becoming increasingly real. As you highlight in your report, the figures also indicate a steady rise in the numbers of complaints relating to construction, which is to be expected as activity begins to increase.

It is therefore positive to read your observation that HS2 Ltd has taken a number of significant steps forward in terms of how it responds to complaints and engages with the public. We acknowledge there may be occasions when people wish to complain about how we are delivering the new railway and our success will depend on our ability to listen and act upon the concerns and feedback raised.

Our new complaints process is now available on the HS2 website and a booklet has been produced to assist any individual who may wish to complain. This booklet will be available at our community engagement events and meetings. It includes a pull-out complaints form and we have also introduced a freepost address for individuals wishing to contact us in writing, alongside the existing freephone community helpline. A member of our Public Response Team will be available to guide any individual through the complaints process.

Under the new complaints process, stage two construction complaints will be referred to the Construction Commissioner and your report highlights the first formal investigation of a complaint within this remit.

In your report, you recommend that standard information should be supplied to anyone who believes they may have suffered property damage as a result of HS2 activities. I can confirm that a 'guide to damage claims' leaflet has been prepared and will be issued to anyone who reports a claim to us. This includes key information such as what is covered by our small claims scheme, how the claimant will be treated and the timescales in which they will receive a resolution. It also covers activities not covered under small claims, to ensure a consistent approach. Information will also be included on the HS2 website on what to do if you suffer damage.

You also raise complaints relating to Network Rail early works for HS2. HS2 Ltd are working closely with Network Rail to share information relating to complaints and are continuing to develop our joint working arrangements.

I was pleased to read your observation on the new HS2 website providing members of the public with more easily accessible information about the project. As we have discussed previously, our new dedicated HS2 website offers much greater functionality and an improved user experience. As you note in your report, we are seeking to continuously improve the new website and we welcome feedback from users. As you are aware, there are also 10 Phase One local community websites; across these 10 sites we have received over 25,000 views and over 1,200 subscribers since they launched.

Finally, I agree with you on the importance of HS2 Ltd and our contractors working together as one team, including in our engagement with local communities along the route of the railway.

I would again like to thank you both for your latest report and your contribution over the last two years.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Crawford', written in a cursive style.

Jim Crawford

Managing Director, Phase One
HS2 Ltd