

The Independent Construction Commissioner HS2

THIRTEENTH REPORT: Quarter One 2020

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HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner: Thirteenth Report

Introduction

This is the Thirteenth Report of the Independent Construction Commissioner HS2 (ICC) and covers the first quarter of 2020 (1st January – 31st March).

Overview

The first quarter of 2020 saw some significant developments which have had an enormous impact upon the HS2 project. The early part of the period was overshadowed by the imminent publication of the Oakervee Report which the Government had commissioned the previous summer. The later period reflects the emergence of Covid-19 and its broad implications for the construction sector.

The level of complaints to HS2 for the quarter show a very distinct rise for all three areas on the previous quarter's figures. Noise and vibration related issues continue to be prominent in Area South, particularly in the London Boroughs of Camden and Ealing, whereas further north vegetation and woodland clearance features strongly. The final weeks of the quarter were overshadowed by issues surrounding Covid-19.

In the first weeks of the year I carried out a number of visits along the line of route. Naturally, these ceased in order to comply with Government advice regarding Covid-19. However, I have continued to raise community issues with HS2 Ltd and with the Department for Transport and to pursue casework on behalf of individuals.

Representations

During the quarter, the ICC's office received 41 individual approaches (see Annex), an increase of almost 100% over the previous quarter. Of these, 14 were issues which had already been raised with HS2 Ltd but which the complainant thought the ICC should be aware of; 22 approached the ICC not having previously raised matters with HS2 Ltd and thus had their cases referred; and 5 raised general issues of policy, or other matters, which fell outside the jurisdiction of the ICC.

Small Claims Scheme (SCS)

During the first quarter of 2020, 8 new claims were lodged under the scheme. Of these 1 was approved, while 7 remain open. No monies were paid out during the period.

In total there have now been 38 requests, with 14 approved, 12 still open and 12 rejected. The total amount paid out has been £5829.73.

No claims required further action by the ICC under the Small Claims Scheme during the quarter.

Observations

Noise and noise insulation

Noise issues continue to be a sensitive matter. HS2 Ltd carried out a "lessons learned" review of the roll-out of the noise insulation scheme in the Camden area following a suggestion from the ICC. I have asked HS2 to provide me with a more detailed breakdown of their conclusions and hope that some of this might be shared with local authorities.

Public Road Use and Debris

Traffic related complaints make up the single largest item among total construction complaints made to HS2 Ltd. In my last report I highlighted the importance of contractors meeting best practice standards. I wait to see how the enforcement of these standards will operate as the volume of road traffic resulting from construction rises.

Woodland and vegetation clearance

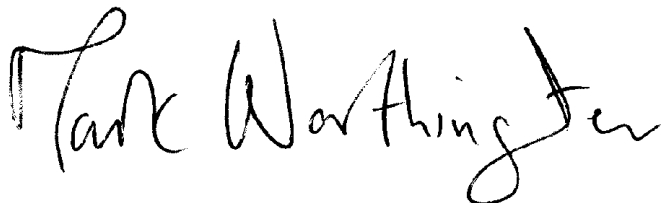
Public concern about woodland and vegetation clearance remains high. It is important that HS2 works with local communities to provide the fullest explanation of the where, when, what and why details of clearance actions.

Covid-19

The emergence of Covid-19 has created some particular challenges for HS2 Ltd. Understandably, there has been public concern over safe practice on and in the proximity of construction sites. In these serious times, with most people effected by lockdown, questions over continuing construction and the behaviour of the workforce have been voiced. I have raised with HS2 already the importance of explaining publically why work is continuing to both inform and reassure the public. HS2 should do all it can to enforce government regulations, making sure that contractors conform to all the special requirements.

With people spending much more time in their homes and working from them, HS2 needs to be even more aware of the impact their works are having on local residents. During these testing months public perception of noise, vibration and dust disturbance is at a more acute level than normal and HS2 should be alert to the higher level of sensitivity being expressed as a result.

I conclude my report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Worthington". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sir Mark Worthington OBE

Independent Construction Commissioner HS2

May 2020

Annex: Quarter 1 alerts, representations and complaints

Total construction enquiries/complaints received by HS2 Ltd for Phase One 1st Quarter 2020

	South	Central	North	Total
January	58	20	50	128
February	92	21	16	129
March	27	25	35	87
Total	177	66	101	344

Representations received by the ICC for the 1st Quarter 2020

	Alerts*	Referrals to HS2**	Not within remit	Valid complaints***
1st Quarter 2020	14	22	5	0
Total To Date	127	57	38	5

*Alerts identified to the ICC already under examination by HS2 Ltd

**Alerts not made to HS2 Ltd directly but referred to them by the ICC

***Valid complaints which fall under the ICC's remit to adjudicate