

The Independent Construction Commissioner HS2

FOURTEENTH REPORT: Quarter Two 2020

icc

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner: Fourteenth Report

Introduction

This is the Fourteenth Report of the Independent Construction Commissioner HS2 (ICC) and covers the second quarter of 2020 (1st April – 31st June).

Overview

In my previous report I covered the emergence of the Covid-19 outbreak and its impact on operations for HS2. Connected themes continued to loom large in the second quarter. Issues of working practices, social distancing, the impact of construction on households during lockdown and for those working from home, were very significant. Like many other companies, HS2 and its contractors have struggled to match ongoing working with Government safety guidelines. There have been lapses which have caused concern to the public but largely I am satisfied that where these have been identified HS2 has acted to rectify the position and to remind contractors of their obligations.

The level of complaints to HS2 for the quarter reflect that of the first. Areas South and Central have declined somewhat but area North has increased. In April issues connected to site management formed a significant proportion of the total which might have been expected given the month marked the height of the Covid-19 crisis. Since then noise and traffic issues have returned to noticeable numbers.

It was not possible to make any site visits during the quarter but video conferencing has enabled me to keep in touch with a number of communities along the line and I have continued to raise issues with HS2 Ltd and with the Department for Transport and to pursue casework on behalf of individuals. In addition to my role as ICC I was asked to take part in the Ministerial Review of HS2 Land and Property practices.

Representations

During the second quarter, the ICC's office received 44 individual approaches (see Annex). Of these, 22 were issues which had already been raised with HS2 Ltd but which the complainant thought the ICC should be aware of; 18 approached the ICC not having previously raised matters with HS2 Ltd and thus had their cases referred; and four raised general issues of policy, or other matters, which fell outside the jurisdiction of the ICC.

Small Claims Scheme (SCS)

During the second quarter of 2020, five new claims were lodged under the scheme. Of these one was approved, while two remain open and two were rejected. No monies were paid out during the period under the scheme although a contractor contributed £30 in vouchers as a gesture towards one of the claimants.

In total there have now been 43 requests, with 15 approved, 14 still open and 14 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

I remain concerned about the roll out of noise insulation and of ventilation units to those properties which have previously been identified as qualifying for support. With main construction works moving closer I would ask the company to review the state of current coverage and to work with urgency with its contractors to ensure that installation is as widespread as possible by the end of the year.

Public Road Use and Debris

Increasing works along the route since Notice to Proceed was granted have led to a subsequent increase in traffic related complaints. I shall continue to monitor how HS2 will enforce standards of best practice as the volume of road traffic movements grows. It is important that HS2 continues to work closely with local authorities and that it gives sufficient notice to local communities on matters of road closure and access.

Woodland and vegetation clearance

Woodland and vegetation clearance remains a highly sensitive issue. I hope that HS2 will continue to work with communities along the line and listen to their concerns and suggestions where alternatives might be practicable.

Covid-19

Though the incidence of Covid-19 is declining HS2 and its contractors need to remain alert to public concerns about working practices. I believe that HS2 has done what it could to address local issues and acted speedily to correct practice where lapses occurred. Many people will remain working from home during the coming months and HS2 needs to be sensitive to their requirements.

I conclude my report.

Sir Mark Worthington OBE

Independent Construction Commissioner HS2

August 2020

Annex: Quarter 2 alerts, representations and complaints

Total construction enquiries/complaints received by HS2 Ltd for Phase One 2nd Quarter 2020

	South	Central	North	Total
April	34	13	91	138
May	31	9	26	66
June	45	17	27	89
Total	110	39	144	291

In addition, I note that HS2 received 80 non-geographic complaints during the period almost all related to Covid-19 issues or to general opposition to the project.

Representations received by the ICC for the 2nd Quarter 2020

	Alerts*	Referrals to HS2**	Not within remit	Valid complaints***
2nd Quarter 2020	22	18	4	0
Total To Date	149	75	42	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