

## Sir Mark Worthington

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner

Sent by email:

[complaints@hs2-cc.org.uk](mailto:complaints@hs2-cc.org.uk)

26 February 2021

Dear Sir Mark,

Thank you for your report covering the third quarter of 2020. I would also like to thank you for the time you have taken to engage with both colleagues working across the HS2 project and the communities impacted by the new railway.

As you note in your report, your role as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner has been extended to also cover Phase 2a of the HS2 route. You will be aware that the High Speed Rail (West Midlands to Crewe) Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 11 February. This is a major milestone for the project, enabling HS2 Ltd to begin construction of the next phase of the HS2 network, extending high speed rail from Fradley in the West Midlands to Crewe in Cheshire.

HS2 will be the first major railway built in the North of England in over 100 years. The new railway will play a critical role in bringing Britain closer together and help fulfil the ambition of levelling-up the country. Phase 2a will offer direct services and connections from the south to regions across Britain, accelerating the benefits of HS2 to the Midlands, North West of England, Wales and Scotland.

Building Phase 2a will also support around 5,000 jobs, with many more created in the supply chain through thousands of contract opportunities for businesses of all sizes, from construction to catering. These contracts and the jobs they will create will play an important role in helping Britain's post-pandemic economic recovery.

Your report highlights the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges we continue to face. Our first priority has remained the health, safety and wellbeing of both our staff and the communities along the route of the railway. We have been able to operate the overwhelming majority of our sites safely and in line with the Government's guidance. We have, however, had to take the decision to postpone our face-to-face engagement events and meetings in line with continuing social distancing. As a result, we have adapted the ways we work with residents and put in place alternative ways of communicating to ensure we continue to engage.

I was pleased to read your comments about how the HS2 engagement teams have responded to this challenge. As you note, the development of new and innovative digital tools has helped ensure the public are kept informed about both project-wide and local construction activities. This has, for example, included a new programme of publicly accessible webinars, covering topics from design development to archaeology findings, from how local businesses can get involved with the project to how local community groups can access funding.

I know you are also using digital engagement to maintain contact with communities and local stakeholders along the route. I would like to thank you for your ongoing work with communities throughout this difficult period.

Your report details the representations you have received during the third quarter of 2020, noting an increase in both the works taking place as we move into main construction and the level of enquiries and complaints received. This is also reflected in our most recent report documenting our progress in aspiring to be a good neighbour and delivering our community commitments<sup>1</sup>. This report shows that we received 782 complaints between January and June 2020, compared with 295 over the same period in 2019. The increase in complaints has come from people living between London and Birmingham where, as you note, the impacts of construction are becoming more noticeable. Of these 782 complaints, 97% were resolved within a maximum of 20 working days, as set out in our community commitments, and all were concluded at the first stage of the complaints process.

In your report you share a number of observations and challenges relating to noise insulation, working hours, public road use, road closures and recent concerns raised in the Warwickshire area.

I know you are receiving regular updates on the roll out of noise insulation and ventilation units in the Euston area and I was pleased to read your comments on the efforts being made by HS2 and our contractors. You will be aware that we successfully completed the first stage of noise insulation installations in November 2020 and we are on track to complete the remaining stage by April 2021 in properties where residents have granted access and consent. We are continuing to engage with residents using a variety of different channels, including direct contact, leaflets available in multiple languages and through community groups, to try and achieve the highest level of uptake of noise insulation. We also continue to work with both the London Borough of Camden and the Department for Transport, both to minimise the disruption of construction activity in the area and to find effective solutions to the concerns raised by residents and the Council.

In relation to working hours, our standard hours are set out in the Code of Construction Practice, which HS2 and our contractors comply with. There are some occasions where it is necessary or beneficial to carry out activities outside of these standard working hours, for example where there is a technical requirement for continuous or extended working, such as concrete pouring, or where works have been intentionally programmed to take place to reduce

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<sup>1</sup> HS2 Community Engagement Progress Report: January to June 2020, <https://www.hs2.org.uk/documents/community-engagement-progress-report-january-to-june-2020/>

disruption to the local community, such as night-time working in order that roads can remain open during the day. On these occasions we will always gain the appropriate consents from the relevant local authority and, once received, proactively notify the community through engagement channels tailored to the local area and the impact of the works.

We recognise that, as we progress into main works construction, there will be increasing local concerns about the impacts of construction traffic and road closures. In your report you raise the examples of Hillingdon, where you have received a number of representations about debris on local roads, and Burton Green and Southam in Warwickshire, where concerns have been raised regarding the planning and engagement for road closures in the area.

Our contractors are obligated to ensure both their vehicles and the public roads they use are kept clean, and we take reports of mud on the road seriously. In response to the concerns raised in Hillingdon, a detailed review has been undertaken at all the HS2 construction sites in the borough to assess what additional control measures are needed, including improving wheel washing methods, pausing activities at certain sites until additional measures are in place and providing additional briefings to the staff on these sites. We are carrying out regular assurance checks to quickly identify and rectify any issues with mud on the road and we have responded to residents' complaints to apologise for these instances. We are also notifying residents about additional measures that have been put in place and will continue to keep them informed about our programme of works and the mitigation measures we have in place, using our tailored local engagement channels including advance notifications, community meetings and virtual drop-in events.

As you will be aware, we are committed to providing two weeks' notice to those affected by our works, as set out in the Code of Construction Practice. Although we met this commitment for the road closures in Warwickshire, we appreciate and understand that the community would have valued earlier notification of these works. We know that we haven't always got it right on communicating relevant road and traffic information and, as you suggest, we need to learn the lessons from these experiences. We are working across the business and with our contractors to improve how road closures are planned and delivered, including how we communicate information about impacts to the local community as early and effectively as possible. We have been working closely with stakeholders in Warwickshire to progress their concerns, and I know you have also been closely involved. We will continue to talk regularly with communities, local authorities, local MPs and other stakeholders to understand their concerns and ensure we factor their feedback into how we further improve local communications and engagement.

As part of this approach, you will be aware that we have organised the Phase One route into geographical areas, in which the work of HS2's specialist teams and contractors is being coordinated and assured by local integrated delivery units. These delivery units are mostly led by senior project managers who assure work in their areas and act as internal escalation points for major issues. This way of working is designed to ensure our delivery activities happen in a coordinated way, ensuring that the delivery of the project is as effective and integrated as possible, while minimising our impact on local communities. We are ensuring lessons learned,

for example from the road closures in Warwickshire, are being embedded into the development of these delivery units.

We recognise there is still more to do, and I appreciate your ongoing advice and guidance as we strive to be a good neighbour to those living and working along the route.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Bennett', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Bennett  
Delivery Director  
HS2 Ltd