

Sir Mark Worthington

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner

Sent by email:

complaints@hs2-cc.org.uk

21 February 2022

Dear Sir Mark,

Thank you for your reports as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner covering the second and third quarters of 2021. Thank you also for taking the time to meet with colleagues working across the HS2 project and your ongoing guidance on how we respond to construction complaints and engage with those communities impacted by the construction of the railway.

I know you have also been able to recommence visits to local areas along the route during this period, taking the opportunity to visit sites and meet in person with community representatives. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic we have had to adapt our approach to the ways we engage with communities impacted by the project. We have been able to gradually reintroduce face-to-face events and engagement as government guidance has developed, and we appreciate your taking the time to join us at some of those events. We look forward to more face-to-face engagement with communities and local stakeholders as Covid-19 restrictions lift. The health, safety and wellbeing of communities and our staff will remain our top priority.

We first published our Community Engagement Strategy in 2017. The project has progressed significantly since then. On Phase One, main works construction is now well underway. In December we launched 'Dorothy', our third Tunnel Boring Machine on the project. The machine is currently digging the first bore of a one-mile tunnel in Warwickshire, preserving the Long Itchington Wood above. On Phase 2a, enabling works have commenced following parliamentary approval last year to extend the HS2 network from the West Midlands to Crewe. On Phase 2b, last month the Government introduced the High Speed Rail (Crewe – Manchester) Bill into Parliament to seek the powers to build and operate the next section of the HS2 route up to Manchester, with a connection to the West Coast Main Line to serve stations in Scotland and the North West.

There are now over 20,000 jobs supported by HS2, including 825 apprenticeships on the project to date. At the end of last year we awarded the contracts to build the HS2 trains to a joint venture of Hitachi and Alstom. The trains will be entirely designed, manufactured and assembled in the UK at existing sites in County Durham, Derby and Crewe, and maintained at

a new HS2 depot at Washwood Heath in Birmingham. These contracts, which are worth around £2bn, will support 2,500 jobs across the UK, including opportunities for apprenticeships and graduates.

Over the last four years we have engaged with over 91,000 people, handled over 154,000 enquiries and introduced tailored ways to communicate with individual communities including through local area engagement plans, events, community websites and works notifications. We recognise, however, that we still have more to do.

Reflecting how the project has changed over the last four years and having listened to feedback from communities, we have – as you highlight in your report – recently refreshed our Community Engagement Strategy. Our refreshed strategy, 'Respecting People, Respecting Places', in particular reflects on the start of main works construction and the very real impact the project is now having on people's lives as construction activity increases.

We recognise that the planning and building of the new railway disrupts the lives of those people living and working along the route. This refreshed strategy outlines our commitments to minimising that disruption, engaging with communities, and doing our best to put things right if we get something wrong.

Your reports outline both the representations you have received as the Independent Construction Commissioner, as well as the construction complaints received by HS2 Ltd. We have identified that as main works construction gathers pace, we are receiving queries and concerns about construction issues that are having a more immediate impact on individuals and communities. Recognising this, we have shortened our response times, committing to resolving urgent construction enquiries and complaints within two working days. Since the start of this commitment in October 2021 we have received 241 urgent construction enquiries and complaints, of which 92% were responded to within two working days (up to January 2022).

In your reports you outline a number of observations relating to the use of public roads, construction traffic, signage, site management and noise disturbance, as well as specific local concerns raised in areas including Old Oak, Euston and Hints, Staffordshire.

We understand that traffic and transport management during our construction work is a key concern for local communities. We recognise that our work will lead to more vehicles being on the roads in some locations. I agree with you on the importance of engaging effectively with those communities impacted and carefully planning how we construct the railway, including the way that we transport machinery, materials and our workforce, to and from our sites. In your reports you share some examples of good practice, and I was pleased to read your observations about how we responded to local concerns about the closure of the A425 in Warwickshire. You also highlight some particular local areas where concerns have been raised, including around Old Oak Common.

We are aware that the management of traffic in the Old Oak Common area is a significant concern for residents living locally. We have put in place a process for coordination across our three contractors working in this area and collectively we are working closely with the local

authorities to try to keep disruption to a minimum as far as possible. Responding to resident concerns, we have also stationed additional operatives to manually operate traffic management and installed local signage to encourage better driver behaviour. We continue to engage with the community on how we are working to improve the traffic management in the area, holding regular meetings with community representatives to discuss our planned schedule of works, the traffic management that will be required and mitigation measures that will be put in place.

In this area, we are also constructing a conveyor system to move excavated materials from the Old Oak Common Station and Victoria Road Crossover Box sites to our logistics hub near Willesden Junction, helping reduce construction traffic on local roads whilst we build the railway. After being processed at our logistics hub, the excavated materials will be taken by train to three locations across the UK where it will put to beneficial reuse, filling voids which will then be used as a basis for redevelopment, such as house building. Our logistics hub will also receive over 100,000 pre-cast tunnel segment rings which will be used to form the walls of the London tunnels, delivered by rail from UK manufacturing sites. At peak operation, eight trains per day will depart and arrive at the logistics hub, maximising the use of rail freight in the construction of HS2 in London and resulting in one million lorry movements not going on UK roads.

In relation to vehicle movements, your report also references the complaint regarding Hints in Staffordshire, which was referred to you for consideration having been investigated through step one of our construction complaints process. Following your adjudication of this complaint, we have acknowledged your observations and will continue to monitor how we operate where the use of rural roads is concerned. We have also updated the HS2 Phase One and 2a Route-wide Traffic Management Plan so that, as appropriate, new and updated Local Traffic Management Plans should specifically consider the use of narrow local rural roads through communities, setting out controls on the use of such roads, timing of movements and other relevant matters following appropriate community engagement.

You also raise the importance of clear street signage, regular cleaning of vehicle wheels and roads close to construction sites, and the use and positioning of lighting on site. The Route-wide Traffic Management Plan sets out the requirements and specifications for various forms of signage related to HS2 works, including advanced warning signing and direction signing. It also outlines HS2's Code of Practice for Streetworks, which contractors undertaking highway works and streetworks are required to follow in urban areas, and as appropriate for rural areas. This includes the requirements to always explain what's happening through detailed, clear and consistent signage and to be tidy and safe with a clutter-free site so it is safe for pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.

Our contractors are also 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. I know you have raised this issue previously and are aware of the measures we have put in place to respond to residents' concerns, including improved wheel washing methods and additional road sweeping. We will

continue to carry out regular assurance checks to quickly identify and rectify any issues that arise.

In relation to site lighting, we recognise concerns raised by some residents about the impact of lighting used on our sites. As you highlight, this lighting is often required, including overnight, for health, safety and security reasons. Our contractors will keep the use of lighting under review, continuing to engage with residents to see if there are safe ways to reduce disruption and taking steps such as briefing staff working on their sites about the positioning of lighting.

I know you continue to monitor the roll-out of noise insulation and ventilation measures in the Euston area and we appreciate your ongoing guidance on this matter. We are working with the London Borough of Camden to monitor ongoing progress and resolve any issues that arise in relation to the noise insulation programme. The programme remains open, including to those who have previously declined noise insulation, and we are committed to working with the Council to recontact all eligible residents who have not yet taken up the scheme.

As you may be aware, we have live noise receptors set up throughout and around the Euston area, which are regularly monitored and confirm whether the actual noise levels are matching what was previously predicted in the noise model. Where they differ considerably or spike at any point, we carry out investigations. All past triggering levels have been met and had the required noise insulation installed where access and consents have been able to be obtained.

We remain very aware of the sensitive location of our construction works around the Regents Park Estate and continuously strive to find ways to reduce the impact of these works on residents. As you recognise in your report, we are actively working with the London Borough of Camden to explore other options for those living in the Cartmel, Coniston and Langdale blocks and continue to engage with residents. We have also agreed with the Council the installation of additional noise monitoring equipment inside residential units, which will enable us to better assess, and more quickly respond to changes in, noise levels.

Finally, I would like to congratulate you on your reappointment as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner for a further three years. We look forward to continuing to work with you and welcome your ongoing support in helping to ensure that we respect the people and communities we impact and the environment in which they live.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Lyons". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mike Lyons
Civils Delivery Director
HS2 Ltd