

Sir Mark Worthington OBE

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner

Sent by email:

complaints@hs2-cc.org.uk

29 November 2022

Dear Sir Mark

Thank you for your recent reports as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner covering the final quarter of 2021 to the second quarter of 2022. Thank you also for sharing your observations in regular meetings with colleagues working across the HS2 project, as well as for spending time meeting site teams, local stakeholders and communities along the route of the new railway.

All three phases of HS2 are now live with the project entering peak construction at over 350 sites between the West Midlands and London, early works underway between Birmingham and Crewe and the Hybrid Bill to extend the line to Manchester progressing through Parliament. There are just under 30,000 people working on the project, including over 950 Apprenticeship starts and 2,200 formerly unemployed people who have been supported into work on HS2.

This year, we have reached a number of major construction milestones on the project. Last month, we launched our fourth and fifth Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) from West Ruislip in West London. The TBM "Sushila", named by local pupils after their schoolteacher, and "Caroline", named after the world's first professional female astronomer, are two of six machines that will dig over 26 miles of tunnels under London. Earlier this year, our TBM "Dorothy" completed the first tunnel bore on the project at Long Itchington Wood in Warwickshire, helping to preserve the ancient woodland above. On the Hertfordshire/Buckinghamshire border, construction has started on the Colne Valley Viaduct which, once built, will be the longest railway bridge in the UK.

With main works construction now well underway, your ongoing guidance is helping to ensure we deliver on our commitments to respect the people and places where we are working and respond effectively to complaints related to construction activity.

I was pleased to read your observations about the downward trend in complaints being received. As you highlight, we have also introduced a new way of handling those queries and concerns about construction issues that are having an immediate impact on individuals and communities. We have committed to resolving 80% of these urgent construction enquiries and complaints within two working days, and I am pleased to be able to report that 100% have been responded to within that timeframe so far this financial year.

You have regularly raised the importance of the environment and concerns raised by communities along the route. As you know, this year we have announced that every HS2 train will be powered by zero carbon energy from day one of operation and launched our Net Zero Carbon Plan, including targets to make our construction sites diesel free by 2029 and halve emissions from steel and concrete by 2030. As we design and build the railway, we are committed to protecting and, where possible, enhancing the natural environment and minimising our carbon footprint. We are making good progress towards ensuring that the project will be net zero carbon by 2035. We have also planted over 800,000 trees and shrubs and created more than 100 new wildlife habitats as part of the Green Corridor along the HS2 route.

In your reports, you outline a number of observations relating to the use of public roads, construction traffic, noise disturbance, site management and the small claims scheme, as well as specific local concerns raised in areas including Buckinghamshire, Balsall Common and West London.

Across Phase One, we are continuing to work with contractors to mitigate the impact of construction and road closures on local road users. In Balsall Common, we are working to get an agreement in place for the proposed haul road off Hallmeadow Road which will help to significantly reduce local impact. For the Adelaide Road closure, we undertook early and detailed engagement, including in-person and virtual events and door knocks. For affected residents, we provided a community drop-in facility and offered private taxis for residents whose bus journeys were no longer possible. I know the A413 remains especially impacted, as our planned works close to the Chiltern Line will see the closure of the Chiltern Railway and the main road at the same time, and we are continuing to work closely with local stakeholders to keep them informed of disruption and progress.

We also recognise the importance of providing early notice to help reduce the overall impact on local communities. We do provide at least two weeks advance notice to local communities and stakeholders, and often longer in the case of significant works. In the Calvert area, we are creating an information video detailing proposed road closures for the next three years to help explain our long-term impacts. We are continuing to hold in-person information events, issuing press releases, large-scale letter drops, signage and construction forward looks on local community websites.

Although we are continuing to make improvements across the line of route, I know we need to do more to mitigate our impact. We aim to be active members of the communities we operate in, ensuring all our site entrances and perimeters include our freephone Helpdesk number and are each numbered for easy identification. I know that working hours and the removal of redundant signage continues to be an issue, and we have recently discussed introducing an auditing process across Phase One. I look forward to continuing these discussions with you.

We are aware of issues relating to mud and debris left on the roads by our HGVs and a plan has been actioned across all of our sub-lots to identify appropriate mitigation measures, including the provision of additional road sweeper passes and additional drainage at the sites. I know you visited our Kingsbury Road Compound in North Warwickshire in March to see first-hand the wheel washing facilities that have been installed. This should help to ensure that mud is removed from HGVs leaving the compound before they travel onto the local highway network. In Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and South Warwickshire, our main works contractors have now opened their internal site access road, removing thousands of site vehicles and HGVs from local roads. The internal road is also fitted with wheel washing facilities where it meets the public highway. We hope these measures will see a reduction of overall complaints on this issue.

I know that noise disturbance remains a key issue, especially in Camden and Euston. As your report notes, breaches of noise level regulations remain rare, but we are mindful that local residents are still experiencing disturbance. We recognise the importance of timely notification and communication to mitigate these impacts. We have been implementing measures which include letter-drops, door knocking to ensure residents are aware of impacts and the options available to them, and, in some cases, where we anticipate significant disruption, we offer alternative accommodation. I am pleased that there has been a good take-up of noise and insulation measures as a result of early engagement in the Mandeville Road area.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to visit the Euston area and spending time with our contractor engagement team on the Regent's Park Estate, with the main works contractor at the Euston Tunnel Portal and the Euston Partnership Team. We continue to value your guidance in this area.

As you will be aware, HS2 Ltd, the Department for Transport and Camden Council recently agreed a funding deal, in principle, to re-house residents living in the three most impacted blocks on the Regent's Park Estate. Under the terms of the deal, council tenants and leaseholders of the three blocks will be able to sell their properties, or be re-housed through Camden's established processes and existing housing stock. This will make the process faster and more efficient for affected residents. The deal is subject to consultation, and we will continue to keep you informed as it progresses.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on the importance of site managers leaving their compounds to view the site as the community would. It is crucial for us to understand the communities which we impact and we are keen to involve communities in the work that we do. We have hosted a number of site visits, which include our "Behind the Hoardings" visits at the South Portal, Colne Valley Viaduct and vent shafts along the Chiltern Tunnel. This is a great opportunity for contractors to not only engage with communities, but also to receive and act on feedback on local impact.

Your reports include details of claims made under HS2's Small Claims Scheme. We will continue to work with our contractors to ensure they are aware of the benefits of the scheme, as you have set out, and that claims are being dealt with efficiently. Thank you for your ongoing support regarding the administration of this scheme.

Thank you again for your reports, and I look forward to continuing to work with you. We recognise that there are always going to be areas where we can improve, and welcome your constructive challenge 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 loop at the end of the last name.

Mike Lyons
Civils Delivery Director
High Speed Two (HS2) Limited