

Sir Mark Worthington OBE

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner

Sent by email:

complaints@hs2-cc.org.uk

7 February 2023

Dear Sir Mark

Thank you for your recent report as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner covering the third quarter of 2022. Thank you also for your continued engagement with HS2 Ltd colleagues, contractors, as well as local residents and stakeholders impacted by the construction of the new railway.

As you know, we place a huge importance on building trust and collaborative relationships with those impacted by the project. We remain mindful that no-one chose to live along the line of route for the new railway, and that we should continue to improve how we engage with communities. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for joining our 'Respecting People, Respecting Places' conference in November and for being a judge for the Community Inspiration awards. This important event brought together over 300 HS2 staff and contractors to reflect on the lessons we have learnt so far and reinforce our commitment to delivering the railway respectfully.

With main works construction now well underway between the West Midlands and London, we are continuing to reach key construction milestones on the programme. Over the Christmas period, we completed the world's first box 'bridge slide' over the M42 in Warwickshire; the Marston Box Bridge, an 86 metre long structure, which, if built traditionally, would have created significant disruption with around 3 months of overnight closures and 2 years of reduced lane widths and speed limits. By using a unique construction method, we were able to build the structure on land next to the motorway and use a sliding mechanism to slide the bridge into place during just a 10 day closure.

In November, the new Rail Minister, Huw Merriman MP, launched a new conveyor system at Old Oak Common, a 1.7 mile network which will move over 5 million tonnes of spoil from our sites in the area. This conveyor will remove the need for 1 million lorry movements, reducing traffic congestion and emissions in West London. We also relaunched the TBM, 'Dorothy', for the second time in November to begin its twin-tunnel bore at Long Itchington, Warwickshire, preserving the ancient woodland above.

The following week, the Secretary of State for Transport, The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP, visited the site to see the first bored tunnel, which was completed earlier in the year.

You have previously raised environmental impacts as an area of concern for communities along the route. In December, we published our second annual Environmental Sustainability Progress Report, which looks at the measures we are putting in place to realise our ambitions to cut carbon emissions and boost nature recovery on the HS2 project. One of our most ambitious targets is eradicating the use of diesel on construction sites by 2029. In the past year, we have already introduced our first 10 diesel-free sites. This has been achieved through a series of measures including the introduction of the UK's first fully electric crawler cranes, successfully trialling hydrogen electricity generators and harnessing new construction methods such as 3D concrete printing. We have now also completed 5 years of tree planting along the route; since 2017, we have planted around 845,000 trees and created 119 new habitat sites and 160 new ponds, which are now homes for wildlife.

I am pleased, as you include in your report, that the number of complaints again saw an overall fall in the third quarter of last year and that the overall downward trend continues. As we enter peak construction, it is crucial that we continue to engage and respond to impacted communities, and we continue to appreciate your ongoing guidance as we do so. Between April 2022 and December 2022, HS2 Ltd saw a decrease of 37% on the previous year, with 99% of complaints resolved in 20 working days or fewer and concluded at the first stage of the complaints process. We are receiving more calls about construction-related issues that are having an immediate effect on people. Recognising the need to resolve these enquiries quicker, we have committed to resolving all urgent construction enquiries and complaints in 2 working days. Over this same period, HS2 Ltd received 224 urgent construction enquiries and complaints and responded in 2 working days in 100% of cases.

In your report, you outline 4 key observations around public roads and traffic, noise disturbance and insulation, site management and water issues.

I know that public roads and traffic congestion remains a key issue across Phase One, and we are working with contractors to mitigate the impact of our works on local road users. In Balsall Common, we now have an agreement in place for the proposed haul road, off Hallmeadow Road, which will help to significantly reduce local impact and we anticipate that construction will take around 6 months to implement due to the utility diversions required. The A413 remains impacted, especially after planned works next to the Chiltern Line saw a series of closures of the road during the Christmas period. We are continuing to work closely with local stakeholders to keep them informed of disruption and progress as construction in this area develops. You also highlight the positive impact the spoil-conveyor will have in Old Oak Common due to the significant reduction of lorry movements. The spoil-conveyor, as of 9 January, has moved 93,993 tonnes of material from the Old Oak Common site resulting in circa 5,525 lorries being removed from the local road network.

We recognise the importance of keeping the roads clear of mud and debris from our HGVs, especially in the winter months. As you will be aware, a plan has been actioned across all of our sub-lots to mitigate this issue, including on-site wheel washers, provision of additional road sweeper passes and additional drainage. I know you have also previously raised the issue of removing road closure signage in a timely manner, and you highlight in your report the impact this is having on local businesses. We are continuing to work with our contractors, Local Authorities, utility companies and emergency services to coordinate our roadworks to limit the impacts we have on communities wherever possible.

I am pleased that breaches of noise level regulations remain rare, but, as you note in your report, there are instances of noise disturbance outside of working hours and we are working with site managers to ensure they act swiftly when this occurs. I recognise that compound lighting, especially mobile lighting, can also cause disturbance to local residents and site managers have been made aware of the importance of regulating this.

We understand the concerns of local communities about environment impacts, in particular the water environment, the Chiltern aquifer and drinking water supply. We take our environmental responsibilities seriously and all our activity is carried out with the relevant permissions. In the Colne Valley and Chilterns area, we work in close partnership with the Environment Agency and Affinity Water. We also carry out monitoring extensively, and on a regular basis.

Finally, as you will be aware, I will be leaving HS2 Ltd shortly and I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of the project and the valuable advice and feedback you have continued to provide during my tenure. I am pleased that David Speight, currently Project Client for Phase One – North (BBV IPT), has accepted the role of Civils Delivery Director and he is joined by Jackie Roe, who has recently joined the project in the role of Delivery Services Director. I know both are very much looking forward to working with you.

Thank you again for your report, and we welcome your ongoing feedback to help ensure that we are respecting 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', written in a cursive style.

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