

Sir Mark Worthington OBE

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner

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Dear Sir Mark

Thank you for your recent report as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner covering the second quarter of 2023.

I would like to thank you for your continuing work as the HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner and the commitment you show to your role. This is appreciated by the HS2 Ltd team, our suppliers and, I am sure, the communities you engage with along the route. As detailed in your report, I can see you have recently visited communities in Birmingham, Warwickshire, Colne Valley, Hillingdon, Old Oak Common and the Camden and Euston areas.

As you are aware, since your report, which covers the second quarter of this year, the Government have announced changes to the HS2 project. In the Prime Minister's speech on 4 October, accompanied by the publication of the 'Network North' Command Paper, the Government announced that they will not proceed with Phase 2a and Phase 2b of HS2 or HS2 East. The Government has reaffirmed its commitment to delivering the first phase of HS2, between London and Birmingham, including construction of the Handsacre Link to the West Coast Main Line. We are working closely with the Government to understand in detail the implications of the announcement for the project.

You have previously highlighted the uncertainty announcements like this create for those living and working along the route. We recognise that residents will have questions about what this means for them and their communities, and we will continue to keep them updated as information becomes available. We are aware that one of the key areas on which residents have questions is Land and Property. We have, therefore, published guidance to help with questions about land and property for those living along the Phase 2 route.¹ The HS2 Helpdesk continues to be available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, for any queries residents may wish to raise.

¹ www.hs2.org.uk/in-your-area/assistance-for-property-owners/project-rescoping-phase-two-cancellation/

Our focus remains on delivering the first operational phase of HS2, connecting Birmingham and Old Oak Common. Last month, as we enter our fourth year of main construction on HS2, we published our first Construction Review. This review highlights the project's achievement in construction, environment, employment and design, as well as sharing key project statistics to date. As you will see in the review, work is underway at more than 350 sites. We have reached the halfway point building the UK's longest railway viaduct at the Colne Valley and our tunnel boring machines have completed about 21 miles of their underground journeys, about a third of the total tunnelling for HS2. This construction activity continues to support thousands of jobs and benefit UK businesses of all sizes in every region of the country. Over 30,000 people are now helping to build the new high speed railway, including over 3,800 people who were formerly unemployed, and more than 1,300 Apprentices have started their career on the project.

As construction continues at pace, we are grateful for your ongoing guidance on how we handle construction enquiries and complaints. So far this year (April to October 2023), we have received 727 complaints. This compares with 646 for the same period the previous year, an increase of 13%. We have resolved 97% of complaints in 20 working days, or fewer, and all complaints have been concluded at the first stage of the complaints process. I am pleased to report that 100% of urgent construction enquiries and complaints have been responded to in 2 working days.

I am also pleased to let you know that the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman is championing HS2's community engagement approach as an example of best practice for their new UK Central Government set of standards, which sets out how all organisations providing Central Government services should approach complaint handling.

You highlight a number of key observations in your latest report, focusing on the Camden, North Warwickshire and Phase 2a areas, as well as site management over the winter months.

In relation to the Camden and Phase 2a areas, you have raised the impacts on communities of the pause in construction announced in March 2023. We have continued to work closely with communities and local stakeholders to keep them updated and respond to their questions. Along the Phase 2a route, in July we circulated a newsletter to all residential and business addresses within 1km of the route. This provided updates on a number of topics including construction activities and the land and property programme. An updated version of the Local Area Engagement Plan was also published on the HS2 website in August.

We also undertook a programme of pop-up events along the 2a route whereby we attended country shows, village fetes and other events, enabling members of the public to speak with HS2 staff about the project and ask questions about the pause in works announcement.

Moving on to works around Camden and Euston, we have provided a range of opportunities for residents and local businesses to find out more about the pause in works and what it means for them. This has included updates to community forums as well as in person drop in events. In addition, we are keeping the community informed through works notifications for ongoing works, updates to the HS2 in Camden website and newsletters. We will continue to engage with residents on the pause in works, and as further information becomes available on the plans for Euston station.

We recognise the pause has an impact on the local community and the importance of minimising these impacts as far as possible. One of the ways we are looking to mitigate the impact is through the delivery of meanwhile (temporary) uses on areas of our site where activity is paused which respond to community priorities. Engagement activities are ongoing to involve the community in the design of these spaces. Working through The Euston Partnership, this has included site walkabouts and a community workshop to share our plans for temporary uses and gain feedback on what residents would like to see happen in these areas. We have already opened a temporary garden in part of our National Temperance Hospital site and plans are underway to open further green space in Euston Square Gardens West.

This year, work has progressed in the North Warwickshire area of the Phase One route, including the launch of our first tunnel boring machine. We continue to offer a range of ways for residents to be updated and speak with us. This has included drop ins, door knocking, newsletters and notifications.

I welcome your thoughts on ensuring we provide timely reminders to our contractors, as well as limiting negative impacts such as mud on roads. This is something we consider to be extremely important, and we are writing to all our contractors to remind them of their responsibilities to the local community in managing mud on the roads from our HGVs. In Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, South Warwickshire and Hillingdon, our Main Works Contractors are operating internal site access roads, removing thousands of site vehicles and HGVs from local roads. We also operate wheel washers at our site entrances, additional drainage and regular road sweepers. We recognise that compound lighting, especially mobile lighting, can also cause disturbance to residents and site managers have been made aware of the importance of regulating this. Where we get individual complaints from residents, we review the lighting at the site and make changes to address their concerns where we can.

Thank you again for your report and your ongoing work as the Independent Construction Commissioner.

I look forward to continuing to work with you going forward.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Speight', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Speight
Civils Delivery Director
High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd