

**THIRTY- SECOND REPORT: QUARTER
FOUR 2024**

icc

HS2 Independent Construction Commissioner: Thirty-Second Report

Introduction

This is the Thirty-Second Report of the Independent Construction Commissioner HS2 (ICC) and covers the final quarter of 2024 (1st October – 31st December).

Overview

The number of complaints as registered by HS2 Ltd showed another slight fall but continue to remain steady in general.

The broad issues of public concern are again, noise, traffic, lighting, road conditions and site management.

Line of route visits during the quarter included, Birmingham, Buckinghamshire, West London and the Camden and Euston areas.

I continue to meet regularly with HS2 Ltd, its contractors and with the Department for Transport.

Representations

The ICC received 39 individual case approaches (see Annex) during the quarter. 28 were issues which had been raised with HS2 Ltd already but which the complainant thought the ICC should be aware of; a further 11 cases approached the ICC and these were referred on to HS2 Ltd for response.

During the quarter 1 case was subject to a full investigation under the Small Claims Scheme and concluded. An additional case which had been concluded previously was reopened due to new information becoming available. This case was subsequently settled by HS2 Land and Property.

Small Claims Scheme (SCS)

Under the Small Claims Scheme, 32 new claims were registered with HS2 Ltd for the quarter. 9 claims were settled and 23 claims were rejected in the period.

Since the commencement of the scheme 698 claims have been registered. Of those, 173 have been approved and 461 have been rejected.

The total amount paid out stands at £88,525.

Observations

After six-and-a-half years, this will be my last report as Independent Construction Commissioner. I am grateful to my fellow Commissioner, Lord Jackson, HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport for all their support.

In general, conditions remain challenging for HS2 Ltd as it continues with main construction works. With much of the tunnelling complete and with visible infrastructure in place, there is much to be commended. I hope that even fierce critics of the scheme will come to appreciate some of the engineering accomplishments which are being delivered. What was once dubbed “an open wound” across the countryside is beginning to achieve a definition which marks a distinct transition towards a visible railway. Perhaps the best example of this is at the Colne Valley viaduct, which in construction terms is well advanced. But there are many other points along the route where progress is very obvious now.

However, there will remain localised problems as well as broader issues which HS2 Ltd and its contractors will need to continually address and perhaps I might turn to a few of those.

Dobbins Lane, Wendover

Since late last year HS2 Ltd has been seeking to be granted planning consent to build a Spring Chamber in a field to the northwest of Wendover in Buckinghamshire. This is required to manage the water system from various brooks which have been impacted by the building of the railway. Consent for these works has been granted by the Environment Agency and there was only limited objection from the local community. However, it became apparent that the best way to access the site was through Wendover itself, along a residential street and into an existing lane which accessed the field (Dobbins Lane).

Initial reaction to this plan was hostile as assurances had been given that Wendover would be spared impact from construction traffic. I have some sympathy with local residents but I would urge the community, officials and politicians to reflect on matters. I have worked closely with HS2 Ltd as they have reviewed and adapted their plans and as they considered the alternatives, almost all of which are impractical and far from cost-effective. I hope that the community will see that HS2 has gone a long way to minimise the impact of this access. In major projects such as this time costs money. We should be just as responsible with tax-payers money as we seek to be with our own. Delay in obtaining consent could result in significant changes to the wider construction

timetable for the area as well as considerable extra costs. Locals need to weigh-up whether it is better to have a short, managed impact or more major delay which will extend the overall impact on Wendover and other communities, beyond what is necessary for the current build.

Euston

We remain a good way off having a clear outline for the new terminus at Euston. Inevitably, this will cause more uncertainty and distress for local residents. I hope that all parties involved in the decision making process will focus upon this as quickly as they can.

Recently, I visited the new Community Hub at the old Maria Fidelis school site off North Gower Street. This facility, developed by The Euston Partnership, will offer the local community a state-of-the-art centre for a range of activities and I hope that it becomes well used in the years ahead.

Canterbury Road and Adelaide Road Vent Shafts

These two sites in London NW6 and NW3, were placed on pause in October 2023. Though the Government has given the go-ahead for tunnelling to commence between Old Oak Common and Euston, currently there is no firm plan to complete the works here. This may provide a welcome, temporary respite for local residents but as I noted with Euston Station above, it adds to the uncertainty and lengthens the time that the community will be impacted.

Old Oak Common

Significant progress has been made with the station box and I am sure that over the next year local residents will begin to see major changes and that the outline of the new station will begin to emerge. However, the road and rail facilities in the area will experience significant disruption while new connections are being built. HS2 and its contractors will need to continue with their pro-active engagement to ensure that satisfactory mitigations are in place.

Delta Junction

The construction of the Delta Junction in the vicinity of Water Orton to the east of Birmingham continues to be disruptive for the community. Again, HS2 and its contractors will need to be particularly sensitive due to the considerable impact it is having. This is an area which needs to be managed carefully.

I would now like to comment on two broader issues.

Mitigation – light pollution

In the past few months I have reminded HS2 Ltd and their contractors of what I expect of them where lighting is having a significant impact on local properties. Whereas, in HS2's Environmental Statement and Code of Construction Practice, firm trigger levels for noise pollution are set out clearly, the methods governing the monitoring of light pollution is less firm. Site lighting is essential for both the operation and the safety of HS2 working areas. It is inevitable that this will have some impact. But where this impact is significant and direct, I would like to see contractors developing a route-wide strategy which standardises what can be offered. Most particularly, mitigation on direct light intrusion into residents' bedrooms should be a factor which needs to be considered. I accept that monitoring here is more difficult than with noise, but I hope that there will be both flexibility and sensitivity towards local residents' needs.

Prolonged Disruption Compensation Scheme

After much delay, HS2 Ltd is in the end stage of rolling out the new scheme. It has been a long haul and a tribute to the fortitude and perseverance of those tasked with bringing it about. I fear that it will not satisfy those who wish to see the scheme go much further, but I hope that it brings more support to some residents.

Finally, I continue to follow the various proposals looking at how to improve rail connections beyond Birmingham, from Lichfield to Crewe, Manchester and other northern cities. The cancellation of this section of the HS2 project will do nothing to resolve issues of connectivity and of capacity on the West Coast Mainline. I hope that the Government will give fair and generous hearing to the plans of how this might be delivered as part of its general rail strategy.

I submit my report.

Mark Worthington

Sir Mark Worthington OBE

Independent Construction Commissioner HS2

March 2025

Annex: Quarter Four alerts, representations and complaints

	Align	BBV	BBVS	EKFB	SCS	Euston	Non Area	2A	Total
October	2	38	0	8	9	0	0	0	57
November	7	15	0	19	19	0	0	0	60
December	3	18	1	21	10	1	0	0	54
Total	12	71	1	48	38	1	0	0	171

*Euston Station is covered by Mace Dragados.

Representations received by the ICC for the 4th Quarter 2024

	Alerts*	Referrals to HS2**	Not within remit***	In depth investigations****
4th Quarter 2024	28	11	0	1
Total To Date	660	696	104	30

*Alerts identified to the ICC already either under examination by HS2 Ltd or previously alerted to them.

**Alerts not made to HS2 Ltd directly but referred to them by the ICC.

***Alerts outside ICC remit but may have been referred to HS2 Ltd.

****In depth investigations carried out by the ICC and concluded during the quarter.