

January 2026



# **HS2 Residents' & Construction Commissioner**

**Report 1 – January 2026**

# Introduction

This is my first report since being appointed the HS2 Residents' and Construction Commissioner. Previously there were two separate roles which have now been combined. This is therefore the first combined report. It will differ slightly from the previous respective Commissioners' reports. The report will be divided into the following sections:

1. Details of the Commissioners remit and how I intend to carry out that remit;
2. A brief summary of key developments in the project which may impact my role;
3. A summary of complaints and claims to date;
4. Details of meetings and visits I have undertaken and
5. Thematic issues that I have encountered.

## 1. My remit

### The role of the Commissioner

This was clearly outlined in the specification prepared for the role to which I was appointed. It is to:

- Oversee and monitor the commitments of HS2 in relation to its treatment of residents providing independent scrutiny and report, outlining views and recommendations;
- Oversee communication standards relating to the statutory and non-statutory HS2 property schemes;
- Champion residents and others affected by HS2 and provide reassurance to individuals that they will be dealt with fairly and equitably;
- Be available to intervene in unresolved land and property disputes making recommendations focussing on timely settlement to save both parties costs - this includes determining small construction related claims of under £10000 and being chair of the panel determining special case appeals where buildings and the people who live in them may not be properly protected by HS2 policies during construction.

### How I intend to fulfil the role

In carrying out this role I believe it is important to emphasise that the Commissioner is not the first port of call for claims or complaints; that is for the HS2 helpdesk, HS2 complaints team, its land and property teams and their suppliers. Where residents believe that having made their claim or complaint, HS2 is failing to meet its commitments then that is the time to reach out to the Commissioner. To this end I monitor the HS2 Commissioners email ensuring the sender is responded to either by the HS2 team responsible or by me with my taking the issue up with the relevant HS2 personnel. In all cases where the complaint or claim is referred to HS2 I will monitor the HS2 response. I will also meet with MPs, Councillors, residents' groups and individual residents to hear their concerns about how residents and localities are being dealt with by HS2 or its contractors and where relevant follow up with HS2. I will take up direct with HS2 my thoughts on how disputes may be settled faster and with less costs and how I believe they might communicate with more clarity.

## **2.Key Developments in the project**

The key Development which impacts on my role is the Reset. HS2 Ltd CEO Mark Wild is completing his review of HS2, putting the programme in the right order with new ranges for cost and schedule. This will be provided to the government in the New Year.

The Reset is required to put the programme in order with new ranges for costs and schedule. Problems identified are - a too early start to construction without design completion, contractors not properly incentivised to build efficiently and lack of optimal structuring within HS2 Ltd itself. The Reset programme includes developing realistic cost and schedule ranges for the railway, putting construction back in the right order. It will also seek to develop new commercial agreements with contractors that will share financial risk and reward productivity improvements, change HS2 Ltd corporate structure as well as implementing all 89 changes recommended by the independent James Stewart review, including better reporting to government and Parliament and improved scrutiny.

For my work the major impact of the Reset will be the reprogramming with priority given to the core route between Old Oak Common in west London and Birmingham followed by extending HS2 to connect with the West Coast Main Line at Handsacre and bringing the railway into Euston. This reprogramming will inevitably give some residents concern that they will be experiencing further years of uncertainty and inconvenience. I shall be closely monitoring how the Reset is communicated to residents and as to how any subsequent concerns raised by them are responded.

HS2 has already informed residents that works between Curdworth in North Warwickshire and Handsacre in Staffordshire are to be deferred for a further 4 years from the deferral announced in March 2023 and that it will be undertaking impact assessments as to how individuals will be impacted. Local Councillors have raised issues with HS2 as to why these impact assessments were not taken in advance of the decision to defer and have asked for specific works and actions to be taken before the pause as well as extension of community funding to address the hardships suffered. I will be carefully monitoring HS2 Ltd response.

On the positive side I was taken to view the Colne Vally viaduct which was completed in September 2025. It is hugely impressive and is now the UK's longest railway bridge. At 2.1 miles, it carries HS2 across roads, lakes, the River Colne and the Grand Union Canal, just northwest of London. The viaduct includes specially designed noise barriers that can withstand trains travelling at 200mph, protecting the surrounding Colne Valley Regional Park. HS2's contractor Align also built a visitor centre that has welcomed over 2,500 local school pupils and community members since 2021. All excavation is now complete for the 23 miles of twin-bore tunnels between Old Oak Common in west London and Birmingham Curzon Street with the final breakthrough happening in October 2025.

DfT has announced that it will begin a programme to sell land and property no longer needed for HS2 in areas on former HS2 Phase 2b East where safeguarding is being lifted. This will start with around 550 properties along the former HS2 Phase 2b Eastern Leg between Birmingham and Leeds. I will be monitoring how it communicates and executes its plans in this regard.

### **3.Summary of complaints received**

I monitor the monthly Public Response demand analysis and performance report that HS2 prepare. Year to date there have been 20, 693 - Helpdesk enquiries with 97% responded to within 20 working days and 100% of urgent construction related enquiries responded to within 2 working days. Of the construction related complaints the most common issues related to traffic lights and road closures, noise and vibration, site lighting and personnel behaviour. Of land and property related enquiries the majority concerned property searches.

During the second quarter of 2025, the scheme registered 39 new small claims. Of these, 25 claims were rejected, and 3 claims were settled with a total value of £589. Since the scheme's inception, a total of 859 claims has been registered. Of these, 545 claims have been rejected, and 212 claims have been approved, with total settlements reaching £105,829. Since commencing my role, I have heard 2 small claims appeals. In one of those cases, I rejected the appeal and in the other case recommended increased compensation. I have also chaired two special cases appeal panel hearings.

Since I commenced the role 13 issues have been raised via the Commissioners inbox. I have passed 5 of these on to the HS2 Helpdesk, 3 on to the HS2 complaints team and 3 to the HS2 Land and Property Team. In these instances, I monitor the HS2 response to ensure that I am content the matter is dealt with appropriately. In the other 2 cases I have intervened and sought action from HS2.

### **4.Where I have been and whom I have met**

Since being appointed I have met with HS2 Ltd senior team members including the Chairman Mike Brown, the CEO Mark Wild, the Construction Delivery Director Alan Morris, the External Affairs Director James Gray the Stations and Placemaking Director Huw Edwards and many others including those with responsibilities in the areas of compensation and complaints. I have also met regularly with relevant officials within the DfT including the Director General of Major Rail Projects Group Alan Over.

I have visited the works at Curzon Street station and the Curzon approaches and toured some of the impacted areas as well as meeting with a resident farmer and his agent north of Curdworth. I have visited the Chiltern Tunnel South Portal and some of the areas impacted by those works as well as meeting with Buckinghamshire councillors at Great Missenden. I have visited the Old Oak Common Station works and impacted local areas. I have also met with South Warwickshire Farmers and their representatives to hear their concerns and toured the area with them.

I have met with Rebecca Collins, Technical and Policy Adviser at the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers to discuss issues around improving the claim settlement process.

Property Approval Group - I have attended and contributed to the vast majority of the meetings held since my appointment. At these meetings approval is sought for land and property settlements up to £10 million.

Policy Engagement and Improvement Group - I have attended the quarterly meeting the purpose of which is to evaluate engagement data and improve claimant experience.

Commissioner's Steering Group - I have attended the quarterly meetings of this group which has representatives from HS2, DfT, local authorities and impacted communities and whose purpose is to support, steer and monitor the Commissioner's performance.

## **5. Thematic Issues**

Below I highlight some of the themes I have picked up in my role so far.

I have noted concern as to the approach to compensation by HS2 with a lack of trust in the HS2 negotiators and concern at the time taken to complete settlements with suggestions that HS2 was not proactive and required endless verification by claimants.

I was told that HS2 was reluctant to use expert determination while claimants were reluctant to use mediation or independent early assessment because of the jeopardy of having to meet the costs in preparing for these types of ADR

and, should there be no resolution, then facing the costs of taking their claims to Tribunal. I have discussed these concerns both with HS2 and the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers. I will continue to work with relevant parties as they seek to close out claims in an efficient, fair and timely manner including making more use of alternative methods of resolution.

Concern has also been raised with me as to the time it takes for Deeds of Easements to be completed and the complexity of the Deeds. I have suggested HS2 provide a readily understandable guide to the Deeds and consider whether the complexity can be addressed.

As already mentioned, concern has been raised as to the timing and process of the sell back of land and property no longer required. I will be monitoring the process and progress.

Various miscellaneous issues have also been raised with me and, while I am sure HS2 is familiar with these concerns, it is important that they continue to be addressed. They include lack of short and medium term impacts when planning mitigation schemes such as planting, intrusion from site lights, lack of clarity of road signs, inadequate notice of road closures, drainage issues as a result of works, with a failure to take on board local knowledge, inadequate maintenance of land acquired and inadequate contributions to road damage caused by HS2 vehicles.