

Ian Bynoe Report on HS2 Ltd's complaint handling and community engagement:

Response from HS2 Ltd

We are grateful to Mr Bynoe for his report and will set out below how we intend to respond to each of his recommendations.

Recommendation 1: That HS2 Ltd issue instructions that mobile phone number(s) for senior staff be provided to members of the public who may need to make contact urgently. (Paragraph 3.72)

We fully understand the importance of having senior people available to talk to members of the community about any pressing concerns they might have. We have therefore provided our helpdesk with an up-to-date list of mobile numbers for senior managers on duty. The team will advise members of the public on the appropriate person to address their concern and will initiate contact.

This process needs to be managed through our helpdesk to ensure all enquiries, complaints or information requests are dealt with in the appropriate way. Our helpdesk is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and has the tools to respond promptly to a variety of enquiries. The team has been provided with mobile numbers for all our senior engagement managers and other members of the community relations team.

Recommendation 2: That Terms of Reference for community forums and bilateral meetings be altered to make explicit reference to the commitments to openness, customer focus and accountability now reflected in policy documents, company values and other materials. (Paragraph 3.73)

As the report outlines, it has been widely acknowledged across the business and by affected communities along the route that the community forums process did not always achieve the objectives it set out to. A new approach to community meetings along the line of route is being finalised and will be implemented once all the nine community engagement managers are in place and embedded within their community areas.

We will propose that a charter is developed at the start of each community meeting group, which will include the agreed meeting aims, terms of reference, role and purpose of the group and their responsibilities. It will also highlight HS2 Ltd's commitment to openness, transparency and accountability.

Recommendation 3: That the Residents' Commissioner consider the report's observations on the wording of the Residents' Charter and how it can be altered, testing proposals with members of the public before they are introduced. (Paragraph 3.74)

The Residents' Commissioner has always made clear her role is to hold HS2 Ltd accountable to the charter. In line with this recommendation, she has encouraged us to review the wording to ensure commitments made are still meaningful and relevant. Our community relations team will develop proposals and test these over the summer. We will report back on progress in the autumn.

Recommendation 4: That HS2 Ltd as soon as possible and practicable:

- **approve its strategy for community engagement;**
- **define clear milestones for the implementation of the strategy;**
- **define measurement mechanisms by which the quality and effectiveness of its community engagement activity can be monitored; and**
- **design and implement a practicable and effective system for learning and implementing lessons from less effective community engagement or any such engagement activities which have attracted justified criticism and/or complaint. (Paragraph 3.78)**

We have acknowledged that community engagement for HS2 Ltd requires a quantum leap in 2016 and beyond, to meet the concerns of affected individuals and communities. Over the last six months we have significantly increased resources within our engagement teams along the line of the Phase One route and in the next year engagement activities will be scaled up. It has been made clear that community engagement needs to be made a substantially higher priority by everyone working on this project.

In response to this, we are recruiting an experienced Director of Community Relations who will report directly to the Chief Executive and will champion community engagement.

While this rigorous recruitment process is under way, HS2 Ltd has developed a community engagement operations group including key leaders across HS2 Ltd, the Department for Transport (DfT) and Network Rail to:

- further develop and refine HS2 Ltd's community engagement principles;
- develop and test our model for engagement;
- further develop the draft community engagement strategy;
- define measurement mechanisms by which the quality and effectiveness of each community engagement activity can be monitored, such as 'attitudinal surveys'; and
- implement a system for learning lessons from less effective community engagement.

Once the Director of Community Relations is in post, their immediate priority will be to review and implement the updated community engagement strategy across the project. Once approved by the HS2 Ltd board, this strategy will be published on the HS2 Ltd section of the gov.uk website.

Recommendation 5: That the DfT amend the Development Agreement to require the company to have a strategy on community engagement and to ensure that ministers can hold the company to account for its effective delivery. (Paragraph 3.79)

The DfT is considering how the existing requirements on community engagement can be strengthened and we will work with the Department on developing this.

Recommendation 6: That the company revise and republish its Information Paper on community engagement after Recommendation 4 has been implemented, so the public may learn:

- **what the company's community engagement strategy is and how it may develop**
- **what they may reasonably expect to receive from the company by way of communication and engagement**
- **how the company will measure the effectiveness and quality of its community engagement, and**
- **how the company will learn and implement lessons where community engagement has failed or been less effective, or has been the subject of justified criticism or complaint. (Paragraph 3.80)**

We will ensure the current information paper is updated to include the above information once the Community Engagement Strategy is approved.

Recommendation 7: That HS2 Ltd's CEO commission a project that will result in the company's agreed corporate values having far greater prominence in the work environment and where the company has any interface with the public (eg website, information events and leaflets). (Paragraph 3.81)

We recognise the importance of the right working culture based on our corporate values of integrity, leadership, respect and safety.

In light of the issues addressed in this report we commit to reviewing how well our values are embedded in the work environment as part of a business transformation project. We will also review the channels and products we use to interface with the public. We will report back on this by the end of the year.

Recommendation 8: That two reported obstacles to effective and responsive communication with the public (viz. some operating practices of the helpdesk and the use of the gov.uk website for HS2 Ltd's web-based communication) be urgently examined from an independent, 'customer focused' perspective to establish whether the concerns are justified and, if they are, to recommend the necessary changes. (Paragraph 3.82)

We have recently made a number of changes to our helpdesk service, most notably ensuring there is a clear process for identifying key contacts and making sure they are accessible to the public. Our helpdesk will be carrying out regular customer satisfaction surveys so we can be confident the team is delivering a high level of service to the public.

In relation to gov.uk, anecdotal feedback we have received suggests people are looking for more tailored digital communications. Gov.uk is managed by the Government Digital Service rather than HS2 Ltd, and, as a Government body, it is mandatory for us to use it. However, we will be supplementing this channel with additional local digital channels that provide opportunities for more interaction, and will be carrying out research to understand in more detail the requirements of our customers; we already use social media channels to share information and listen to concerns.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team has commissioned Equality Impact Assessments for each community engagement area to inform the new HS2 community engagement strategy that is being developed, and is procuring support for accessible communication formats to ensure effective HS2 communications are provided for all members of affected communities.

Recommendation 9: That the company's complaints procedure be amended to reflect the need for central recording both of informal and formal complaints, and that this change in practice be promulgated throughout the organisation. (Paragraph 4.21)

We always aim to resolve complaints as promptly as possible, and, where an issue can be resolved on the spot, we encourage staff to do so. However, we recognise a clear record of all complaints needs to be maintained and staff are instructed to inform the Public Response Manager in all instances so details can be recorded on a central log. Our complaints procedure has been amended to reflect this.

Our public response team continues to provide mandatory training on complaint handling for all new starters and it is also developing training to cover wider areas of the business. We have also implemented changes to supply regular complaint reporting to the Residents' Commissioner.

Recommendation 10: That a printed leaflet be produced as soon as possible publicising the company's complaints procedure, which should be made freely available at all information events and community forums. (Paragraph 4.25)

HS2 Ltd's corporate complaints procedure leaflet has always been available electronically on our website. The leaflet has been updated to take into consideration accessibility requirements and was printed in time for the May events in Camden and Euston. It will be available at all information and community events going forward.

Recommendation 11: That the company should publicise its complaints procedure and its formal approach to dealing with public dissatisfaction at all future public information events, community forums and bilateral meetings, by having, for example, a banner or poster communicating this message. (Paragraph 4.26)

Posters detailing the complaints procedure will be displayed at all information and community events going forward.

Recommendation 12: That the Residents' Commissioner, current Independent Complaints Assessors and the Construction Commissioner, when appointed, should have an early meeting to assist them to understand their respective roles and responsibilities. (Paragraph 4.27)

The Residents' Commissioner is keen to understand more about the role of the Independent Complaints Assessors. A meeting has been scheduled for July, by which time we hope to have appointed an interim Construction Commissioner.

Recommendation 13: That the Residents' Commissioner should be supplied with regular reports on all complaints relating to her fields of responsibility, viz. communications, community engagement and the property schemes and on other cases, by request. (Paragraph 4.28)

The Residents' Commissioner has been provided with a complaints report backdated to January 2016. Going forward, the Residents' Commissioner will receive a monthly report on all complaints within her area of responsibility from the Public Response Manager. This background information will enable the Residents' Commissioner to review and uphold the standards of the Residents' Charter.

Suggestion: I suggest that there may be benefits in convening a Community Engagement Advisory Panel, drawn from those who have recent and relevant experience of community engagement work on large infrastructure schemes, both in providing and receiving it. This panel could provide a sounding board for new thinking and plans for communications and engagement.

As a relatively new organisation we acknowledge we have the opportunity to learn from projects that have gone before and to achieve higher standards. We welcome this suggestion and believe it would be a useful tool for peer review and testing our engagement approach for certain projects, areas and schemes. While we have engaged with previous projects on specific issues, the community relations team will look to formalise this process as part of our updated Community Engagement Strategy and develop a working group or advisory panel to meet quarterly (or on an as needs basis). We are determined to ensure that, when this group is established, we learn from them and improve the way that we work as a result.