

The big dig: HS2 contractor shifts enough material to fill Wembley stadium four times over

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“Large-scale earthworks on a level that hasn’t been seen before on a linear project in the UK.” That’s how EKFB’s (joint venture between Eiffage, Kier, Ferrovial Construction and BAM Nuttall) earthworks director Mark Harrington describes the news that an unprecedented 15 million cubic metres of earth has been moved in record time.

One week ahead of schedule, the milestone was reached at the end of October and at that point, one of HS2’s main contractors can confirm that the team had shifted a colossal 15,386,423m³ – enough material to fill Wembley stadium four times over. In comparison, the A14 upgrade delivered eight million cubic metres of earthworks over a three-year period.

Across the contractors 80km section of the HS2 route through Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, West Northants and South Warwickshire, EKFB will need to move approximately 53 million cubic metres of earth and rock over the next three years.

Mark said: "Moving more than 15 million cubic metres of earth in such a short timescale is a phenomenal achievement; This is large-scale earthworks on a level that hasn't been seen before on a linear project in the UK. As our earthworks programme continues to progress at pace, our success is down to teamwork and the dedication of our people. Thank you to all our earthworks teams, contractors, and partners for their unwavering commitment."

Around 99 per cent of the material excavated on site will be moved within HS2 land using a dedicated network of haul roads to minimise traffic on public roads. All excavated material is being re-used on site to build embankments, screening mounds and landscaping projects.

EKFB's managing director, Helen Samuels, said: "Congratulations to everyone who works within our Integrated Project Team on achieving this impressive milestone – this a real feat of engineering. EKFB's scope of works on HS2 is huge, requiring approximately 53 million cubic metres of earthworks, 15 viaducts, three cut and cover 'green' tunnels and 81 bridges. I'm thrilled with progress made so far and it simply wouldn't be possible without our dedicated teams, including our earthworks team, design partners ASC, and High Speed 2."

Acquiring over 1,250 pieces of plant from partners, Flannery, Plantforce, Blackwell Earthworks, Walters, Potters, The Buckingham Group, Finning and SMT, and more than 2,500 skilled operatives, the huge task is making way for a network of 47 cuttings, designed to blend the high speed railway into its surrounding landscape.

Work has already started on EKFB's longest cuttings on the central section of High Speed 2 – combined, the team will shift more than 1.9 million cubic metres of earth. Major cuttings at Turweston in Northamptonshire, Waddesdon in Bucks, and Ladbroke, in South Warwickshire, are well under way.

Photo credit: HS2 Ltd