

### Introduction by Professor Sadie Morgan

On 15 April 2020 the government issued HS2 Ltd with Notice to Proceed, marking the formal approval for the project to begin the construction of Phase One. This announcement has helped bring an end to a period of intense scrutiny and significant question marks around the future of the project. It presents an exciting opportunity to refresh HS2 and to place a stronger focus on the project's value – including design quality, sustainability, customer experience and regeneration benefits.

More recent announcements from the Government have placed a strong emphasis on the important role infrastructure projects can play in unlocking real and long term value for the nation. While questions remain to be resolved about certain aspects of HS2 – in particular, the design and delivery of Euston and Phase 2b – it is important that, particularly in these difficult times, HS2 achieves its stated aim of becoming more than a railway.

### HS2 refresh

The Hybrid Bill process places restrictions on the project, setting requirements that HS2 Ltd must deliver. However, once the Hybrid Bill process is completed the panel feels that HS2 Ltd must ensure that public value is placed at the heart of the organisation's and project's narrative and approach, throughout the long period between Royal Assent for the Act and HS2 becoming operational.

Significant events – the Oakervee Review, recent announcements from the government on infrastructure and national policy (such as the 2019 Environment Bill) and the COVID-19 pandemic – have all occurred in the past year. They have highlighted the need for HS2 Ltd to balance its commitment to meeting sponsor requirements with work to ensure the project is capable of evolving and responding to new challenges.



Curzon Street Station Schedule 17 stage design (approval granted by Birmingham City Council in April 2020), HS2 Ltd

The panel has seen compelling examples across the project demonstrating the power of HS2 as a catalyst for positive change, such as urban integration studies which are building collaborative relationships with stakeholders and identifying opportunities along the route. HS2 Ltd is also supporting innovations that could benefit the wider rail and construction industries – for example, it has invested in new ear defender technology to ensure site workers are protected from potentially damaging noises, whilst still being able to communicate with colleagues.

Project ambitions, including those for urban integration, design quality, innovation, the Green Corridor and sustainability, must be embedded in HS2 Ltd's decision making, its procurement, its community engagement and its communications to ensure the best case scenario is achieved. These ambitions must inform everyday decisions and conversations, both internally and externally, helping to challenge assumptions and hold contractors to account.

HS2 Ltd must now start to speak with confidence about the project's ambitions and achievements – from addressing climate change challenges, to enriching the UK's landscape character. This can only be done through a place-based approach that looks beyond the project 'red line' to deliver the economic, social and environmental benefits the public expects from its huge investment in HS2.

## Design assurance

Now that Notice to Proceed has been issued, Phase One civil contractors will have the certainty they need to begin setting their programme of Schedule 17 submissions to local planning authorities along the route.

Overall, the panel has been impressed with the quality of the proposals presented at Schedule 17 stage to date. It has welcomed the efforts made by design teams to respond to a number of significant challenges, including the technical demands of high speed rail, while remaining focused on achieving high quality design.

Schedule 17 stage Design Panel meetings held to date have highlighted the issue that a significant amount of design work will continue beyond Schedule 17 stage. In particular, certain aspects of proposals such as landscape design, will require separate approval processes. There are also elements of the project that will continue to evolve, including the level of noise emissions from HS2 trains, the design of Green Corridor projects along the line of route, and the influence of future designs to be developed under contracts not yet issued.

It is essential that HS2 Ltd has the multidisciplinary resources and mechanisms in place to ensure that the long-term value of the project, including design quality, remains at the top of the agenda through to the construction phase and beyond.

## COVID-19

The current pandemic is having a huge impact across the world, and everyone is having to find ways of tackling the challenges presented. HS2 Ltd are keen to ensure that the HS2 Independent Design Panel activity continues as normally as possible during the pandemic, to ensure the project continues to benefit from the panel's advice and input into the design of HS2. This has led to HS2 Independent Design Panel meetings being held online by video conference.

The delay in Notice to Proceed, as well as the pandemic, have undoubtedly had an impact on

the project and consequently on the panel's programme. However, twenty design panel meetings have so far been held online, and have generally run smoothly and effectively. This has been helped enormously by the flexible and positive attitude of all those involved, which is greatly appreciated.

## Looking ahead

In March 2020, the National Infrastructure Commission published a 'Rail Needs Assessment (HS2) call for evidence'. This will inform the government's plans for an Integrated Rail Plan for the Midlands and the north, by identifying the most effective scoping, phasing and sequencing of HS2 Phase 2b, Northern Powerhouse Rail, Midlands Rail Hub and other proposed rail investments.

All elements of the Euston redevelopment, including the HS2 station, are also currently being reviewed by the Government (with Old Oak Common due to act as the temporary London terminus for HS2 services until Euston station is complete).

The review of these aspects of HS2 will include consideration of whether new delivery bodies are needed. If this is the case, there will be an opportunity to set these organisations up in a way that helps secure strong design outcomes – with design leadership built in, in the form of board level design champions, and sufficient in-house design resources.

Ensuring lessons learned from design work on HS2 to date are fed into new delivery models will also be key. The panel would welcome an opportunity to contribute to this process, by continuing to provide design scrutiny for Euston and Phase Two, and potentially wider ambitions for High Speed North. This would allow the panel to share the wealth of knowledge it has built up over the past five years.



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