

Introduction by Professor Sadie Morgan

In March 2023, the Government announced several changes to the delivery of HS2, including a decision to pause work on Euston and to rephase construction of Phase 2a by two years.

More recently Mark Thurston, CEO of HS2 Ltd, announced that he will be stepping down, with HS2 Ltd Chairman, Sir Jon Thompson, becoming interim executive chairman from October 2023. Mark has been a powerful advocate of the panel and we wish him well for the future.

These changes undoubtedly present challenges. However, construction of Phase One is advancing well, including the elegant Colne Valley Viaduct, responding to the landscape around it.

HS2 Ltd is also applying rigorous thinking to learning lessons from Phase One to inform the design of Phase 2a. I am confident that with strong design leadership, HS2 will be a railway we can all be proud of.

Schedule 17

A significant area of the panel's involvement over the past six years has been supporting the design development of Phase One Key Design Elements – a series of structures and buildings which, as part of the HS2 Phase One Act, were agreed to have the greatest impact on the landscape and communities around them.

A key milestone during design development is the Schedule 17 stage, where HS2 Ltd submits detailed designs to the relevant local planning authority for their approval. The panel has almost finished commenting on Phase One Schedule 17 'Plans and Specifications' designs and, in recognition of this, I wanted to make a couple of key observations.

Overall, the quality of proposals has been impressive. The panel has applauded the careful consideration given to varied contexts, the



Design Panel visit to the Colne Valley in May

creative response to the complex and challenging requirements of high-speed rail, and the HS2 design and sustainability ambitions.

The panel would like to congratulate HS2 Ltd and its supply chain on the efforts made to get to this stage. The scale and complexity of the design task has been immense, and collaborative working with planning authorities along the route has been an essential part of the process.

However, a considerable amount of work is required post-Schedule 17 stage to take the proposals through to completion. It is essential that mechanisms are in place to ensure that the design quality developed to date is maintained through to construction and during operation.

Finally, there is potential for valuable lessons to be learned from the project to date. The panel has helped HS2 Ltd to reflect on these to inform future decision making across all phases. It is important that HS2 builds on its successes and strives to go further.

Learning Lessons

In July the Independent Design Panel met with HS2 Ltd to discuss how the lessons from the project are being understood and applied to Phase 2a scheme design and delivery stages.

One example is the adoption of a Design Delivery Partner (DDP) delivery mode. This should help HS2 Ltd retain greater control over design quality, and reduce 'unknowns' at the stage when civil engineering contracts are tendered, to help manage costs.

The panel is confident that by learning lessons from the design of Phase One, HS2 Ltd can achieve efficiencies in time and cost for Phase 2a, whilst continuing to meet the aspirations of the HS2 Design Vision. Improved processes, standards, data and tools will all play a role in decision making on the next phase of the project.

The success of the work will depend on how it is taken forward by the DDP, once appointed. The DDP will be responsible for the management and coordination of contracts for two tunnels, 17 viaducts, 65 bridges, a maintenance base and



EKFB footbridge, HS2 Ltd

the track. Careful thought should be given to how the work done to date is communicated to the DDP to ensure they adopt a truly place-based approach. The panel is keen to support HS2 Ltd during the onboarding process.

It will be important to ensure that HS2 Ltd has sufficient resources and governance mechanisms to hold the DDP to account. Intelligent replication should be approached judiciously and holistically, and tools will need to be used in a way that achieves the best design outcomes.

Euston pause

Earlier this year, the Government made the decision to pause work at Euston. This was to provide time to develop a more affordable scheme design that delivers for passengers, the local community and taxpayers.

In line with direction from the Government, a complex and challenging workstream has begun to explore the different options across the wider Euston campus.

The pause offers an opportunity to consider a broad range of complex issues. The panel is excited by the potential this work has to allow for the development of a single vision and strategy, encompassing plans for both the HS2 and Network Rail stations, local transport, and the wider masterplan being developed by Lendlease. Key to achieving this will be governance mechanisms that are capable of driving decision making across one integrated campus.

The panel has stressed that design is a powerful integrator, and should be an important consideration in assessing strategic options to ensure the project achieves its long-term objectives for passengers, endusers and taxpayers.

Looking ahead

The panel is preparing for the appointment of Phase 2a DDP (expected to be later this year), when detailed design on this section of the route will begin in earnest.

The panel also expects to support HS2 Ltd and the West Coast Partner as the customer experience vision is further developed. This should include its influence on aspects such as the design of trains and the total HS2 experience.

As Phase 2b continues its journey through the Hybrid Bill process, the panel is also keen to support HS2 Ltd in developing the approach for the next phase of design on Phase 2b.

While understanding that HS2 is under significant cost and programme pressures, the panel would like to support HS2 Ltd to use the design process to resolve these pressures in a way that ensures HS2 maximises the long-term benefits from the public's investment.



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