

Introduction by Professor Sadie Morgan

In October, the Government announced the cancellation of Phase Two and its intention to identify alternative delivery arrangements for Euston Station.

The panel is hugely disappointed by the decision. While recognising the increasing cost challenges, our view is that, through though a design-led process, investment in public infrastructure delivers significant social, economic and environmental benefits, way beyond their cost.

As a National Infrastructure Committee Commissioner, I am fully behind the call for the government to keep the land acquired for Phase Two for at least two or three years, while plans for rail infrastructure in the north are clarified.

Nevertheless, there is a clear brief from government to control cost across HS2. Sufficient design capability within HS2 Ltd will be essential to meeting this brief - aligning programmes, reducing costs, and delivering agreed outcomes more efficiently.

Landscape delivery

After discussing proposals for Euston Portal Headhouse in December, the panel has now commented on all Schedule 17 (Plans and Specifications) stage designs for Key Design Elements. This is an opportunity to reflect and look forward to the next phase of design work.

Overall, the quality of work is impressive, with many fantastic examples of thoughtful responses to different contexts while meeting the demanding technical requirements of high-speed rail. The panel has particularly welcomed the emphasis on understanding landscape and place to develop proposals that are cost effective, add value, help to integrate HS2 within each context and, as appropriate, include aspects that will deliver long term local benefit, such as increased public access or new amenities.



Since its inception, the panel has highlighted that the acceptability and success of HS2 proposals will depend equally on the quality of the landscapes it creates as it does on the quality of its buildings and structures. Schedule 17 Bringing into Use and Site Restoration stages will be the focus for the next phase of design work. Landscape commitments presented at Schedule 17 Plans and Specifications stage will be refined and detailed before being submitted to local decision makers for approval.

There are also other aspects of HS2 that will need to be carefully integrated into the proposals that have been developed to date, such as overhead catenary and electricity substations. There should be no justification for functional requirements preventing the delivery of the HS2 Design Vision. The approach to these elements should be led by the extensive design work done to date to deliver both function and delight.

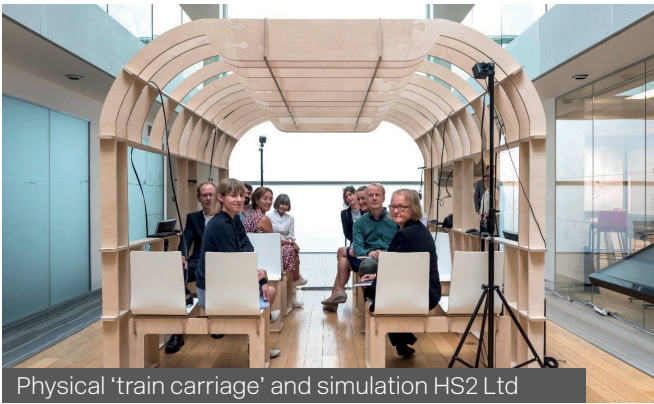
HS2 is under increased cost and programme pressure. However, the potential for saving money by reducing landscape specification is small compared to other areas of the project. Landscape plays a disproportionate role in helping to deliver wider project goals and reducing its quality will incur significant opportunity costs, for example in relation to carbon impact and water management.

It is important that the value of landscape is understood and championed, within HS2 Ltd and externally. A clear message is needed from HS2 senior leadership that it is an essential part of the project, with clear expectations for its quality and clarity on scope and responsibility for delivery.

Customer Experience

The HS2 experience will encompass all aspects of a customer's journey, from booking tickets and arriving at a station, to travelling on HS2 trains and the transition to any onward travel. Its quality will be central to the success of HS2.

The government's announcement in October will undoubtedly have implications for the HS2 experience that need to be understood. However, high quality design is not dependent on the price point at which HS2 services are aimed. With sufficient creativity and time to design, excellent solutions can be achieved with low budgets. Similarly, a generous budget would also require sufficient design time.



Physical 'train carriage' and simulation HS2 Ltd

The design and delivery of the HS2 customer experience involves a complex range of different partners, including the Department for Transport (DfT), HS2 Ltd and the West Coast Partner Development (WCPD). It is important that there is a strong sense of ownership of the HS2 customer experience vision across the different stakeholders responsible for its delivery.

HS2 will also use the wider rail network, stopping at existing stations. Careful thought must also be given to how the HS2 experience will integrate with the experience of using the wider network. This includes the potential for HS2 to help progress the government's ambition to create a simpler, better railway for everyone in Britain.

It is also important for the DfT to actively hold HS2 Ltd and WCPD accountable for delivering their HS2 Customer Experience Vision. With a

renewed focus on cost, time and programme, it is critical that the vision maintains its central role in guiding design decisions. This will help drive better and integrated customer experience outcomes, and by providing a common frame of reference to work from, help to strengthen the working relationship between HS2 and WCPD.

The panel has considerable experience in dealing with these issues from other projects and looks forward to supporting the DfT in resolving them to ensure that HS2 deliver values for money.

Euston

The government announcement in October included the decision to identify new delivery arrangements for Euston. The panel is of the view that the establishment of a Euston Development Zone has huge potential to support design coordination and efficient delivery, including how HS2 will integrate with those arrangements.

The panel includes people with experience in development corporations, such as Peter Maxwell, Design Director at London Legacy Development Corporation, who could offer valuable insight into how design governance is established for a Euston Development Zone to maximise the public benefit of the new approach.

Looking ahead

Significant work is being undertaken to understand the implications of the government announcements across HS2 Ltd, the DfT and others. At this time of change in the programme, the panel stands ready to help.

In decision-making, it is important that the potential public benefits (short, medium and long-term) are well-understood, well-communicated, and at the heart of decision making for how HS2 now progresses.

During 2024 there will continue to be a focus on construction. However, HS2 must also retain a focus on operation as this will be equally to its ultimate success.



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