



INDEPENDENT TRANSPORT COMMISSION

Britain's independent research charity for transport and land use policy

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The Spatial Impacts of High Speed Rail: Learning from Europe

Expert Panel, Arup, 17th July 2014

The Event:

The Independent Transport Commission (ITC) is running a major research project investigating the spatial effects of High Speed Rail (HSR). The current phase of this research project is exploring what we can learn from European experience about the impacts of High Speed Rail investment on cities and regions. Following a symposium in Lille in February 2014, which looked at evidence from various cities in France and the Netherlands, further study visits have been held during summer 2014. Once these have been completed a report will be compiled and launched at a symposium in the late Autumn.

As part of this phase of the project, the ITC has been holding a series of expert panels to review existing evidence and gather insights on key themes. The third of these panels was held on the 17th July 2014, kindly hosted by Arup at their offices in Fitzrovia central London, under the title 'Governance and Delivery'. The panel included a number of leading experts, including academics, architects, local government leaders, transport consultants and civil servants. The format of the event involved a structured discussion chaired by ITC Commissioner Mary Bonar, and supported by project chairman John Worthington.

Discussion issues:

From the discussion some key themes were identified:

- As the evening progressed, it was clear that the objectives of HS2 in the Government and citizens eyes is changing. Two years ago, HS2 Ltd were charged to meet forecast increases in passenger demand by building a High Speed line to get between two points (phase 1) at the fastest speed, which started as an engineering project assessed against Treasury/DfT appraisal models. 18 months later, through debate and a greater public understanding, issues such as capacity and economic growth have, politically, come more to the fore. Currently, the UK HS2 project requires greater clarity as to what its ambitions and expectations are and the form of governance and delivery. ITC has the opportunity to present the need to reframe the issues. It would seem now that HS2 has three goals:
 - Constructing a High Speed Rail track with functional stations to meet the increased demand (HS2 Ltd minimum remit) – clearly defined
 - To be a flagship for all parties to put forward a vision for rebalancing the economy to give greater emphasis to the northern cities – the rhetoric supported by recommendations in reports to Government (Heseltine, Growth Task Force)
 - To become a catalyst for city region integrated infrastructure planning and economic growth
- In the UK, if there is to be greater devolution of power to the cities outside London, there is a shortfall of the capacity to provide far seeing leadership, collaborative working and proactive planning to stimulate development. Greater Manchester and Bristol were identified as exceptions. Paul Hildreth of Salford University, from his experience both within central government and as an academic reviewing sub regional spatial planning in the Northern Cities, summarized the current weaknesses of central government as:
 - Fragmented policymaking within and between departments
 - An inappropriate treasury economic framework that was focusing on saving money, reducing risk, not on ensuring the appropriate infrastructure to create wealth
 - The centre, which has a placeless view of the world – not what is appropriate for specific

places.

- It is unclear within the current model for central government funding to regions what the incentives are for the city regions to respond proactively (London Finance Commission). If the true value of HS2 is to be captured it depends on more than building a railway and capturing increased real estate value. First, it will be essential to create a proactive and collaborative governance system, to build an identity of place, an external image of what the city stands for and the confidence of its citizens. Incentives, it was proposed, might be a combination of funding, power (decision making) and identity (city character, focus and confidence). If change is to happen, the first step is to provide the motivation for cities to want to change – give them a sense of control over their own destinies and provide incentives.

(Post discussion note: the Birmingham Curzon Regeneration Company launched on 21 July is a potential solution to this aspect)

- One participant suggested that the single fundamental problem is that the governance at the heart of this project is a single bilateral arrangement under the DfT, and not all stakeholders have a sense of what is going on. We cannot restructure the way we do everything – we are not going to change the whole way this country is as part of delivering HS2. However, intellectually, the objective is very clear, which is about trying to drive the future economic growth of this country and therefore its competitiveness. There is a need for greater clarity from government about what it is trying to achieve, which then allows this project to become an enabler for what local places can do and empower them in the discussions. The HS3 debate was cited as an example that can help cities take control of this debate to enable them to take control of the process.

The ITC will now draw together the issues raised in the expert panels and study visits, and capture these in a report to be published later in the Autumn. This will lead to a major symposium to which all participants in the study visits will be invited. We would like to express our thanks to all those who have taken part.

The **Independent Transport Commission (ITC)** is Britain's leading independent think tank and research charity devoted to improving policy in the fields of transport and land use. The ITC fulfils its mission through a programme of educational events and debates, and by commissioning major research projects. We are grateful to all our core subscribers for their support of the ITC. For further information about our activities and supporters, please visit www.theitc.org.uk

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