



## *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, Space Syntax, 18<sup>th</sup> June 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 first of these panels was held on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014, kindly hosted by Space Syntax at their studios in central London, under the title 'Quality of place, station area design and identity'. 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 and Project Chairman John Worthington.

#### **Discussion issues:**

From the discussion some key themes were identified:

- An important concept that emerged in the discussion was that the station is a gateway to innovation and a place in itself – stations draw people out of and into places, so connections need to be considered on a wider scale. London Bridge station was brought up as an exemplar to this notion, which has seen so much new and redevelopment around the station that it has become somewhat of a new city centre – it has extended its realm of influence. This has been led by the local BID, which has been successful in drawing together all local businesses and activities into a common vision. The opportunity of redevelopment creates new uses and purposes not only for the station, but for the wider area it serves. It's about having a long-term spatial vision, and changing the mentality that goes beyond the red line.
- There was a lot of discussion on the 'red line' that surround stations, and how far this line should stretch in terms of consideration for station integration to its wider surroundings. In order to achieve an effective 'design' solution we need to be thinking beyond the immediate station area, although one can argue about exactly how far. The key point though, is that in order to overcome the barriers to this sort of thinking, the various players need to be convinced that there is 'value' in conceiving the whole project in these terms. Projects like HS2 are not transport projects, they are city or town projects.
- The question arose regarding who has the capability to measure the value of significant developments, such as the area around a station? It is clear that creating connections and infrastructure creates value, and delivery is often market-facing, but there is also major risk involved with such large infrastructure projects that could detract from other potential developments (threat versus opportunity). Using the business case to measure urban reclamation schemes is inappropriate because there are both long-term benefits as well as abstract social benefits. Some international examples of this include Delft and the French, who recognize the trade-offs for long-term value potential.
- It will be important to ensure that the various actors involved in the planning and delivery of HS2

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– including the city, TfL, developers, rail operators, and local authorities – are talking to each other throughout the process. A collaborative model, perhaps along the lines of Crossrail urban integration programme, could be useful to all players involved. That being said, major projects such as HS2 have to be driven by all political parties at the national level, working toward the common goal of approval and delivery, while removing it from the political agenda. It is important to develop mechanisms to engage landowners particularly as partners early in the process through such things as steering groups or BIDs. There needs to be a case for regeneration to bring in the various partners with competing interests, but it must ultimately be led by government vision.

- We also need to think beyond London, as it will look after itself. It was pointed out that a new station is not going to take business out of London, but it easily could do so in places such as Manchester and Birmingham. We need to start with the city-regions and think more in terms of principles rather than specifics. In the North of England, local government is changing as they are beginning to work beyond their boundaries, so they need to be supported with more power to back up this regional focus.
- Design review panels should be seen as critical friends and are hugely useful in galvanising energy and consensus. Ideally, these should include such things as sustainability, movement, social and community, culture arts and heritage, and local economy.
- As noted, it is important to consider the connections through stations and across infrastructure as it has a huge impact on the look and movement within a city. With HS2, we will finally have brand new stations and we need to look to Europe for examples on revamping stations. Often in the UK, the urban realm falls to the bottom of the hierarchy of things to consider, but it is critical that the urban realm not be thought of as an add-on. A station should be balanced behind and in front, and all modes of transport should be given equal status (such as is the case in Utrecht Central and Hague Central). In fact, all stations should be perceived as multi-modal interchanges even if there is not interchange with rail or rapid transit – in this case, bus, walking and cycling must be seamlessly and efficiently stitched in.

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](http://www.theitc.org.uk)

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