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ITC HSR Connected Cities Launch Afternoon Session Summary Note

Monday 16 May 2016
Hosted by Leeds City Council

During the afternoon session of the launch event, representatives from each of the city-regions were invited to briefly discuss their ambitions and challenges in relation to the arrival of HS2.

Leeds – Liz Hunter, Leeds City Council

Liz noted that the arrival of HS2 is generating new development opportunities for the city, including the incredible opportunity they have with the 136ha site at the South Bank, which is slated to bring 35,000 jobs and 4,000 new homes to the area. She emphasised the importance of cooperation, particularly with the DfT and HS2 Ltd, that has additionally helped to bring together the wider city-region through effective station integration. Not only is integration *within* the city important for Leeds, but integration and connectivity to *other* UK cities is crucial as well. She concluded with enthusiasm about learning and sharing experience and ideas amongst other UK cities.

Manchester – Simon Warburton, Manchester City Council

Simon noted that there is a great opportunity to seize with HS2 and that Manchester wants to build strong city-region economies in the North in order to build a strong North. They already benefit from major travel-to-work areas across the North, but need to harness this in the right way to increase regional but also intercontinental connections. Manchester has already developed a strategic regeneration framework for Manchester Piccadilly station, Simon stated, and they have recognised the opportunity that the station offers to create a major transport hub for the region. He pointed to Transport for the North, which has been the crowning achievement for Northern cities with a clear vision for connectivity across the North and maximising the impact of HS2. He emphasised the need for a clear delivery timetable and funding strategy that is appropriate for Northern city-regions, which has been and will continue to be helped by devolution from central Government.

Discussion

The point was raised that although you can set out what you want to happen, it doesn't always pan out the way you intend. It is the responsibility of the city-regions to provide a framework to enable the infrastructure and economic opportunities afforded by HS2 to be seized, but it must also capture the imagination of the people.

Although many consider Manchester to be 'ahead of the game', there is still a lot that they would like to learn from other cities and also would like to share their lessons learned with other cities. Furthermore, Manchester would like to see devolution for the North as a whole, as their fortune is largely dependent on the success of other Northern cities. This could be helped by an integrated governance and planning model across all aspects of transport in order to make this work.

There was some discussion about the relationship between Leeds and Manchester, who have had a strong working relationship and even partially share a travel-to-work area. It is clear that people look towards both cities to take their skills and this is why HS3 will be so critical to the region. Healthy competition between places is a good thing, and Northern leaders are discussing collective opportunities and strengths of Northern cities.

One delegate suggested that there is a tendency to look at the core cities, with the hinterland often being missed out of the conversation. They stressed that we need to consider the other connections as well.

East Midlands – Andrew Pritchard, East Midlands Councils

Andrew pointed out that the East Midlands is currently a buoyant economy with strong regional housing and population growth across a number of decades. They are a diverse and balanced economy, strong ethnic diversity, and is well connected by both road and rail. Not just one place, the East Midlands is a network of relatively small cities and towns – more of a polycentric region. However, Andrew cautioned, being polycentric means that it can be challenging to maximise the benefits from HS2 that supports the polycentricity. Andrew noted that the station site at Toton has the potential to link to a number of other places throughout the East Midlands in a way that embraces and enhances the polycentric nature of the region. The challenges, he noted, lie in connectivity to the HS2 station via trams, heavy rail, cycling, bus and pedestrian facilities. There is a need for a clear approach to station design from the beginning to enable connectivity across the region.

Crewe – Andrew Ross, Cheshire East Council

Similar to the East Midlands, Andrew stated that the Cheshire area is polycentric with one of the strongest economies in the North when measure by GVA per head. Crewe has a unique mix of strong infrastructure, connectivity and growth, and where these meet is important. It has been stated that the region has 360 degrees of connectivity – unrivalled in the UK – and it would be a significant missed opportunity to not connect HS2 into that picture. They will benefit from fast trains to Manchester, Birmingham and London and will also have fast routes through to Liverpool, Scotland and North Wales. However, they are struggling because HS2 Ltd and DfT have not made an official decision about what will happen with Stoke, but they are still moving forward with masterplanning for the station at Crewe including skills and business investment.

Discussion

One delegate wondered whether any city-regions had considered how their plans will be affected should HS2 not happen. One city-region noted that they have indeed planned for that, and that their growth strategies are dependent on the final decisions for HS2 – connectivity will dictate the growth story.

Another delegate reminded attendees that HS2 is not just about shifting people up and down the country, but about a deliberate attempt to rebalance the economy using HS2 as a catalyst. They further suggested that it may not be optimal to have regeneration anywhere and everywhere, and that maybe we need to channel it to a certain degree.

There was discussion about the need for a national spatial strategy, but its creation is unlikely. However, some regions have attempted to address this need by creating bodies such as Midlands Connect. The answer for the North, one delegate suggested, was Northern Powerhouse Rail – most of the benefits for the North will not be delivered through HS2 alone, so HS3 is crucial for the region.

One delegate from London noted that HS2 has brought a love-hate relationship between the North of England and the South. Certainly, he pointed out, HS2 is necessary for rebalancing the nation's

economy, but also to enable London's future growth. However, with increased connectivity comes increased synergy, and it is important for London to start working more closely with the other city-regions in a way that isn't all about them.

The point was raised that we should not be building terminus stations anymore. One delegate noted that there are many stations on the line that will improve regional connectivity by building a through-station, but the three existing planned terminus stations on the route could potentially suffer from limited connectivity mainly with quick services to London.

The debate about classic compatible services was raised by one delegate, and speakers referred to the lessons about this outlined in *Ambitions and Opportunities*. Indeed, some of the city-regions were building a business case around the classic compatible services, aiming to get the infrastructure right to allow for future classic compatible services.

Sheffield – Simon Green, Sheffield City Council

Simon began by asserting the need for collaboration within and between government departments – he stated that integration cannot happen without collaboration. He discussed how Sheffield's position is at odds with central government in terms of both the city council and the local business community. Although the region is made up of a disparate collection of cities and towns, it has evolved over the last 20 years into a more monocentric region centred around Sheffield. Simon argued that the city centre station location (as opposed to Meadowhall) would be better for the city-region as a whole. If collaboration had been there earlier and continues as it has been recently, there could be success in shifting the station location. Sheffield has seen great collaboration across the city-region and has been a leader on devolution. However, Simon noted that the debate needs to mature to consider the economics more holistically. He concluded by stating that HSR is not something that happens to them, but something that they can get involved with and take advantage of.

Birmingham – Anne Shaw, Birmingham City Council

Anne mentioned that the city council is already in early discussions about road works that needs to be completed to facilitate the HS2 station, and that there has been limited thinking about connectivity to the airport parkway station. They have been working collaboratively with the LEP to agree a wider connectivity package to integrate the HS2 stations into the West Midlands, alongside ensuring strong connectivity/interchange between Curzon and New Street stations in the city centre. Anne noted that they are hoping to address the issues around low connectivity in levels with high deprivation through improving metro, tram and bus routes throughout the city-region. It is important that the opportunities being created by HS2 get to those who live within the wider conurbation. They are hoping that through their transport strategy they can begin to address some of the social issues in the city.

London – Michael Colella, Transport for London

Although collaboration is extremely important, Michael emphasised the ITC's third point about commitment as critical to the HS2 story. He suggested that at the moment, we are still talking about cooperation rather than collaboration – or at worst, simply about consultation. As we move into the delivery phase, it is more important than ever to get agreement from HS2 Ltd for joint working and the creation of integrated working teams early on. This ping-pong approach, feeding off each other, Michael states, is optimal for proper collaboration. A project like HS2 requires political, social and financial commitment – that is not just about the Government giving the city-regions more, but also about the city-regions committing to what this project is about. Certainly, most city-regions have set out their strategy for HS2, but those strategies need government funding and support associated with delivering them.

Discussion

One delegate agreed that commitment is immensely important and that the successful projects that the ITC explored in Europe had a formal or informal regional authority guiding them. You can express loyalty to each other without signing a bunch of official agreements, which has worked very well in places like Utrecht. He likened it to marriage – you are in the relationship for better or for worse.

Another delegate stated that major infrastructure projects are good things, but we tend to focus on the infrastructure, not what we want from the infrastructure. For example, the Olympics in London had regeneration pushed to the side as they got on with delivering the Games. The challenge, the delegate stated, is to get ahead of the infrastructure so you know what is to be left behind once it arrives. They also emphasised the point about time: it is easy to think about existing transport systems, but emerging technologies can bring about challenges that will need to be addressed during the delivery stage of HS2.

John Worthington MBE, Project Chairman for the ITC's HSR project, asserted the need for cities to share information about how to make better cities. The challenge, he stated, is to work together – start within your city, but also build relationships with other city-regions incrementally. Another delegate agreed, noting that there needs to be strong and effective engagement with both business and residential communities who have a vested interest in the project.

