



Movement Matters is a series of inspirational thought leadership events exploring new ideas about places, people and economies. Drawing on experience from leaders from around the globe, these sessions provide a burst of fresh thinking and a great opportunity for industry networking. To attend any of our events register at: www.steergroup.com/events

Event summary

BRITAIN'S STATIONS AS PLACEMAKERS

13 February, 2019

6.00pm-9.00pm

ETC Venues County Hall
Riverside Building, Belvedere Rd
London, SE1 7PB

Great Britain has over 2,500 railway stations including 400 listed buildings. The independent Better Rail Stations report of 2009 made a number of recommendations for them, including that spending on upkeep and improvement should be stepped up for ten years to catch up on the backlog of upgrading nineteenth century buildings. Ten years later, the agenda has moved on, with an emphasis on devolution and the involvement of communities in the railway and stations which serve them, to seek wider benefits such as contributions to housing and social inclusion. We brought together four experts with different perspectives to facilitate a discussion on how the rail industry, central and local government and the private sector need to work together to unlock their potential.

Speakers' presentations

The first speaker was **Lord Adonis, former Secretary of State for Transport** from June 2009 to May 2010, who commissioned the Better Rail Stations report. In his talk, he highlighted three examples of good practice which had struck him as Secretary of State.

- Some station heritage had been preserved well, notably including London Marylebone, terminus of the expanding Chiltern franchise.
- The 1960s Victoria Line had platforms as close to the surface as possible and added a number of new cross-platform interchanges within the Underground network. In contrast, neither the 1990s Jubilee Line Extension nor the current Crossrail project had added cross-platform interchange with other lines in the same way.
- St Pancras International, developed by London and Continental Railways and opened to Eurostar in 2007, had become not only a transport hub but also a social centre, with a third of visitors to the station being there for reasons other than catching a train.

The major station openings of the last ten years seemed less visionary and, in comparison, stations such as Reading, Birmingham New Street and London's Kings Cross had relatively few commercial and retail outlets. With hindsight, it did not appear that there had been a systematic plan.

A further issue was to balance the portfolio of services in a station to support local use and engagement. Rent maximisation does not necessarily deliver the services most relevant to the local community, which may need dry cleaners, shoe repairs, key cutters or health facilities, rather than boutique shopping and gourmet eating.

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EVENT SUMMARY

Simon Warburton, Transport Strategy Director at Transport for Greater Manchester, set out the approach in Manchester, which has reached its highest population ever, but has had no new stations since 1999.

- The Greater Manchester Strategy feeds through to a spatial framework which embeds transport criteria into the selection process for new station sites. Sites are identified around public transport corridors and town centres and there is a requirement for high-density new housing around stations. This maximises the potential for rail corridors through new stations and rail and Metrolink networks. These may merge through tram-train, which can add connectivity and capacity without placing further demands on constrained central stations.
- Longer term, growth priorities will be shaped by the opportunities presented by High Speed 2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.
- Greater Manchester argued for devolution of its 97 stations and, following the Department for Transport response, is now working in collaboration to achieve the original devolution objectives. In Stockport, the station will be linked to a new bus station built under a park, with adjacent high-rise housing including redeveloped mill buildings. Irlam station has been redeveloped with a focus on the community and support from a local entrepreneur. Local management will build on the existing model, allow long-term investment and stewardship, and repurpose station estates to become transport hubs supported by retail, residential and community or educational activities.
- However, placemaking tends to be bottom-up, whereas rail network planning tends to be top-down. Coordination is needed between many bodies, including Manchester City Council, Transport for Greater Manchester, Transport for the North, Network Rail and HS2, all of whom may seek funding from the Department of Transport. The challenge is coordination to ensure that they collectively achieve the best result.

Rob Heasman, Project Director for Lendlease at Euston, spoke about plans for redevelopment of the station. A show of hands revealed that around 40% of the delegates use Euston on a weekly basis.

- The Euston estate occupies 22 hectares of Central London. A site of this size, location and strategic importance has extraordinary potential to deliver a whole new part of our capital city, with a fully integrated state of the art transportation super-hub. It will be a game-changer for Camden, for London and for the UK.
- However, historically, Euston station has formed a physical barrier between the Regent's Park and Somers Town communities. In Regent's Park ward, 87% of families are on tax credits and in St Pancras and Somers Town, 38% of households have an income of less than £20,000. By thinking about place and people first, this integrated project should make a transformational social impact as well as delivering on all our collective infrastructure goals.
- In the wider area, there is an embarrassment of riches, with 7 higher education institutions, 12 cultural institutions and 21 museums and galleries. The aim is to connect people, knowledge and ideas, in a place facilitating the movement of over 70 million people each year.
- To achieve this, a team including Lendlease, HS2, Network Rail, the Department for Transport and the London Borough of Camden are working closely together to bring forward 400,000m² of flexible commercial space, around 1,800 homes and a best-in-class retail experience. There will be open spaces and public realm, knitting together new infrastructure and transport links including rail, buses, taxis and cycling, supporting jobs for more than 30,000 people.

EVENT SUMMARY

Jeremy Long, CEO of European Business, MTR Corporation, and Rail Delivery Group lead for stations, described MTR's European's business. In Hong Kong, MTR is an integrated railway business, developing railways on a Design Build Operate and Maintain (DBOM) basis, owning rail-related property, and has been benchmarked as one of the world's most cost-effective railways. Jeremy went on to discuss his personal views of the challenges and opportunities for stations.

- He endorsed Manchester and Lendlease's approach of putting the station at the heart of the community, as an integral part of a wider development.
- He noted how city centre stations had been associated with the noise and dirt of railway operations and the areas around them had often become run down. Now trains are cleaner and quieter, and combining the high accessibility of stations with high amenity can attract higher rents.
- Station users have different needs: regular travellers expect convenience, comfort, information and security; occasional travellers need wayfinding, information and assistance; and non-travellers will be attracted by access, convenience, choice and value. However, these needs are changing fast: wayfinding is moving from map to app, information from Customer Information System (CIS) to Apple's iOS, and ticketing from cardboard to smartcards and phones.
- Jeremy posed some potential challenges for the future. First, most stations were small or medium-sized, with over 500 serving fewer than 50 passengers per day: how would these attract resources in competition with schools and hospitals? Second, new stations or parkways can alleviate town centre congestion, serve new development and help drive socioeconomic development, but appear to cost much more than other equivalent buildings.
- He suggested that all stations need both a catchment and community plan and a long-term operational plan, and that some also need a long-term asset and development plan. No retailer with over 2,500 outlets would fail to monitor and plan for them all.

Q&A

The Q&A after the presentations touched on a number of themes.

While growing demand is generally leading to more services, who makes sure that stations receive an attractive rail service? Lord Adonis recalled the impact of strong local voices like the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, effective in arguing against the closure of Hanborough station, which now has half-hourly services! Communities could mobilise in affluent rural areas, but would they do so in poorer urban areas? Jeremy Long noted that demand-responsive transport and, in future, autonomous vehicles might change patterns of access to stations, and hence their optimum number and location.

A related issue was integration with the existing modes of cycling and bus. Cycling is highly-integrated with rail in the Netherlands but can be seen as a liability rather than an asset in Great Britain. Bus stations are rarely collocated with rail, although these have been linked in Bolton: whose job is it to make this happen?

Speakers were asked which stations were best, and which presented the greatest opportunity. Simon Warburton noted that big German stations have vertical integration and do not sprawl, and saw Manchester Piccadilly as an opportunity. Rob Heasman admired Westminster Underground station for its design and saw Euston as an opportunity. Jeremy Long admired the cost-effective stations of the Docklands Light Railway and Manchester Metrolink. Lord Adonis agreed that the DLR was a good model: in contrast, Berlin's Hauptbahnhof was impressive but expensive, and Stuttgart's new station was both expensive and unfinished.

EVENT SUMMARY

Finally, could stations be run by regional asset management companies? Manchester would like to try this, as it could bring a long-term perspective. Perhaps the experiment should be tried and the lessons learned.

Key themes

Mike Goggin UK Managing Director at Steer, acting as Chairman, closed the session with a brief summary of key points:

- Stations need to be seen in the context of “One Public Estate”, rather than as merely part of the operation of a railway. Making connections between place and identity, between rail and bus, between passenger and community calls for this broader perspective.
- All four speakers had noted that there is a need for greater clarity of accountability and at times an empowered and controlling mind. Mike noted that the same theme was picked up in recent industry reviews of timetabling and performance.
- The panel agreed that understanding of community and catchment need to be considered: commercial and social needs are both important, and placemaking needs to deliver both.
- Finally, most of Britain’s stations were constructed in another era, but changing technology and demographics contribute to the need for a long-term view and vision for them and their role, and therefore for their operation, asset management and development.

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