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HS2 and Euston – the end of the line?

Two damning reports – Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office

'Time seems nigh to cancel both projects, HS2 Euston and the wider HS2 programme, before any further public money is wasted.'

On 27th March 2023, the National Audit Office (NAO) published its report, HC 1201, High-Speed Two: Euston, which was followed on 7th July 2023 by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) report HC 1004, HS2 Euston.

Between the publication of these reports, the PAC heard evidence from the Department for Transport (DfT) and HS2 Limited at its hearing on 24th April 2023.

The reports make for depressing reading as they confirm our worst fears about the Euston redevelopment and the HS2 project.

Despite being aware of the requirements for the redevelopment of Euston for over eight years, neither DfT nor HS2 Limited can decide and agree on the number of platforms required for the new HS2 services, nor have they been able to identify a station layout which allows HS2 a safe, buildable and affordable tunnelled access from Old Oak Common.

Had they been able to do so, DfT and HS2 Limited could then have identified design solutions to provide access from the new station to London Underground's Victoria and Northern Line services, to the Sub-surface lines via Euston Square Station and to Crossrail 2, whilst providing adequate foundations within the station to support the over site development (OSD) planned above it.

All these requirements have been known since well before Royal Assent for Phase 1, 23rd February 2017, but the PAC report HC 1004, in its Conclusions and Recommendations, states that *"Despite spending over eight years in planning and designing the HS2 Euston station, the Department still does not know what it is trying to achieve with the station"*^[1].

The Euston Express proposal, submitted by Sam Price in petition HoL-00691, was heard on 11th October 2016. It

^[1] PAC report HC 1004 HS2 Euston, page 5.

offered a comprehensive redevelopment of the stations to serve all NR and HS2 services whilst meeting all the requirement for the redeveloped station and an alternative, safe and buildable, tunnelled access for HS2 trains from Old Oak Common.

The Euston Express proposal complemented the existing redevelopment plans developed by Euston Estate (GP) Limited, the former owner of the commercial buildings at the station entrance that were compulsory purchased by HS2 Limited. Taken together the petitioned proposal, which was commended by HS2 Limited when it was heard, and the Euston Estate (GP) Limited proposal, can still provide a solution to the mess which faces Parliament and the public.

However, even though this scheme was and is deliverable at considerably less cost than would be incurred if DfT and HS2 Limited are allowed to continue with their involvement that has achieved nothing whilst spending ever increasing amounts of public money, it would mean spending perhaps 8 more years getting the permissions and doing the studies needed to deliver it.

The rightful conclusion after reading both reports is the development of Euston station should be taken out of the hands of the DfT and HS2 Limited and handed to the private sector, which has proven experience in developing complex developments associated with railway stations.

Looking at the wider future of the HS2 project, the PAC report states, in its introduction, *“Euston will be the London terminus for High Speed 2 (HS2), a new high speed, high-capacity railway between London, the West Midlands and the north of England.”*^[2]

From both reports, Euston will not provide a terminus for the high-speed network any time soon, the West Midlands has two existing railway routes to London, which can be further upgraded at a fraction of the HS2 cost, and there are no agreed solutions to connect the north with London via a high-speed network.

Lord Berkeley concludes: ‘Time seems nigh to cancel both projects, HS2 Euston and the wider HS2 programme, before any further public money is wasted.’

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^[2] PAC report HC 1004 HS2 Euston, page 4