

## HS2 – the problem and its solution

The cancellation of a large part of the HS2 project on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and the suspension of works to connect London Euston Station with Old Oak Common, may have saved money in the short term but it does create a major long-term problem for the incoming Government. Indeed, it creates problems...

- There is no connection soon into the West End of London at Euston, neither at Euston itself or via Old Oak Common, where the embryonic HS2 Station has one connection to the Network Rail system, via the Elizabeth Line and London Paddington.
- The problem of satisfying the Northern Cities demands for a high-speed railway connecting them to London remains even more difficult to solve.

Why has this situation come about?

Initially cost, at the time of cancellation, the estimated final cost of the project, at 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2023 prices, was £182.10 bn, the Government Funding Envelope is £102 bn. The problems at Euston stem from the impossibility of safely entering the station from the HS2 line under Park Village East (PVE) to reach a new station capable of supporting the oversite development (OSD) desired by the London Borough of Camden.

These problems can be solved and there are solutions on offer for Government consideration.

On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016, the House of Lords Committee hearing petitions against HS2 Limited's proposals for Euston Station, were told by Sam Price<sup>2</sup>, who developed the "Euston Express" proposal that HS2 Limited's proposals for the redevelopment of Euston Station and an approach from PVE, were unbuildable.

Mr. Price's proposal was commended as extremely good practice by HS2 Limited, through its then Chief Engineer, Andrew MacNaughton, who said that HS2 should nevertheless persevere with its lodged scheme, until it found a solution. Eight (8) years on, no safe solution has been identified and this section of the project is stalled.

Unlike the HS2 scheme, which only includes the development of the HS2 section of Euston, Mr. Price's scheme covers the entire redevelopment of the train shed for the station, high-speed and conventional services alike, and a tunnelled access for HS2 trains at Queen's Park, which avoids the problems of PVE. His proposal makes allowance for Crossrail 2 which is proposed to run beneath the station, and a new direct connection to Euston Square Station from Euston, between the Euston Road.

The HS2 proposal did not provide the "crash-deck" required for the OSD at Euston, Mr. Price's proposal did. Moreover his train shed layout, which accommodates the operating needs of conventional and high-speed trains, including the timetable for high-speed trains to the North prepared

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<sup>1</sup> Park Village East and surrounding area is built on a filled-in disused arm of the Regents Canal, which give rise to extremely fragile ground conditions that would only be exacerbated by the tunnelled access proposed by HS2 Limited



by Chris Gibb<sup>3</sup> in March 2024, complement the existing proposals for the OSD prepared by Sydney & London Properties Limited in 2008 but abandoned when the HS2 project was borne.

The HS2 scheme had stalled through cost pressures but its largescale cancellation leaves a railway between Old Oak Common and Birmingham, “Wormwood Scrubbs to Winson Green”, on which approximately £30 bn has been spent in the past 10 years, without a single metre of track being laid. Without connections to Euston including provisions in the design for future connections to Liverpool, Manchester, and Leeds, it may have to be abandoned, creating a latter-day Stonehenge.

So, what is the cost of the connection to Euston from OOC, using the “Euston Express” proposals?

At 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2024 prices, the costs are: -

1. Continuing with the style of procurement preferred by HS2 Limited, £14 bn
2. Using a more progressive approach used international and preferred by private financiers interested in becoming involved with the project - £11.6 bn, with completion in 2029.

In both cases the costs included an estimate of cost of the deep foundation required beneath Euston Station to accommodate the OSD. These foundations were omitted through Government decisions in 1959 and 1964 during the most recent reconstruction. The estimated cost, at 1Q 2024 prices, is £2.25 bn for which support from HM Treasury is required.

Public sector funding for the entire scheme is difficult, which is why the large parts of the scheme were cancelled in October 2023.

Private Finance IS available. Several parties from Australia, Malaysia/Singapore and Europe have made their interest known since the cancellation announcement in October 2023.

Their interest and support are conditional on the redevelopment Euston Station being built to allow twenty-four train per hour, twelve inbound and twelve departures, to serve the Northern cities. This timetable is fully described in Chris Gibb’s proposal mentioned earlier.

The interested parties require discussions with the Government to develop their offer to fund as soon as reasonably possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Former Virgin West Coast manager Chris Gibb is putting forward a radical alternative to the cancelled HS2 route between Birmingham and Manchester, “Rail” Magazine, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024. It provides a flexible use of the existing pendolinos and the new HS2 rolling stock to serve one enlarged Euston station either via the WCML or HS2 diverted to Queens Park and onto the existing lines into Euston.