

## INTEGRATING TRANSPORT AND BETTER INTERCHANGES

What was originally planned as the final meeting of the Ten Group in 2006 took place in Camden, thanks to Peter Bishop, and Bob West of their Kings Cross team joined us for dinner. We were also joined by Pat Hayes, the new Director of Borough Partnerships for TfL, who would like to become a member, which is a new departure, welcomed by other members. The session focused on developing interchanges, with the opportunity to learn from the massive Kings Cross project, probably the largest development in Europe. It ended up with dinner in a new gastropub and a brief look at the recently refurbished Brunswick Centre in North Bloomsbury. This looks most impressive, and showed how failing post war shopping centres can be transformed through imaginative facelifts and public realm works.

The briefing papers for the session included the range of tools in the GLA's *Tomorrow's Suburbs* for reducing dependence on the car, and an article on *Joined Up Planning in West London* by Peter Hall and Nicholas Falk. Copies were also distributed of the report of the Lille and Roubaix trip, with its lessons for:

- Devolving power
- Making sub-regional planning and management work
- Restructuring local government finance
- Changing images
- Upgrading skills.

### **The Kings Cross story**

The development of the Kings Cross interchange has taken ten years, and we were fortunate to be able to see the work going on to develop the international terminal and shopping complex under St Pancras Station. The station complex, which will link Eurostar with the Midland mainline and North Eastern trains, plus Thameslink and four underground lines is costing £500 million or a tenth of the total for the Channel Tunnel Railink. The impressive works to St Pancras skillfully integrate the new with the old, and will create an airport style departure lounge but with shops open to the public, while above it a six star hotel and apartment complex is being developed by Manhattan Lofts, and the flats are apparently all pre-sold. A major public benefit will be the upgraded public realm. Peter Bishop told us this accounts for 0.8% of the project budget, significantly more than Tottenham Court Road station, where it is 0.45%. Already the wider Kings Cross area is showing signs of improvement, with the completion of the P & O's Regent Quarter and the new entrance to the Circle Line, and expanded ticket hall. The first Eurostar trains are likely to be running by Autumn next year, along with the relocation of the Thameslink Station.

The current development of the interchange results from a unique deal in which London and Continental Railways took over the land alongside Kings Cross, Stratford and Epsfleet Stations, as part of a PFI type scheme. This was later under-written by a Treasury backed bond for £6 billion, thanks to the support of both London and Northern councils in a deal brokered by John Prescott. However, as Nicholas Falk explained, the process had originally been kicked off by recognition of the development potential of the railway lands, through an unsuccessful scheme put together by Rosehaugh and Stanhope, which brought together land owned by National Freight and Network Rail. It seems that schemes of this kind invariably involve a number of false starts.

### **The challenges of interchanges**

While the scale of Kings Cross is quite unique, the Group recognised that similar problems arise in developing land around any interchange. Interchanges are key to improving the use of public transport, and yet pose a number of special problems:

- Coordinating transport improvements and development alongside
- Thinking in terms of transport corridors, which stretch beyond London's boundaries
- Working with a large number of different operators and property owners
- The need for '*retrospective urban design around locked-in transport decisions*'

Pat Hayes, who has an ongoing interest in interchanges as part of his work with the boroughs, reckons there are some 120 interchanges to be tackled. He has set up an Interchange Board, and this now brings together the different transport providers. He fears that in 20 years time transport capacity will be used up everywhere, as there is simply not the finance to build all the new lines that have been asked for. Hence getting better use of buses is essential, and changing modes is an inevitable fact of life, particularly in the suburbs.

Most interchanges suffer from problems in securing the collaboration of landowners, and the different railway companies, who have different objectives and do not talk to each other. The problem is aggravated by financial uncertainties, which makes it hard to plan any improvements, as transport bids are judged nationally. Speculation is a further problem, as the costs of holding on to under-developed land are low. Though the LDA is starting to get involved in some sites alongside railway stations, (and Network Rail is starting to look at the potential for improving strings of stations), unless the local authority plays a proactive and orchestrating role, nothing much is likely to happen.

### **Management lessons**

Camden's approach to what '*the management of chaos*' had clearly paid off (as has, it seems, the idea of a single company London and Continental managing transport and development together). Though Camden Council had gone through a bad period, new leadership had seen the importance of the Kings Cross project in achieving a number of ends. The Council Chief Executive, recognising the potential, initially provided

£650,000. In total the Council had invested £2.5 million, which compares with £10 million it has cost Argent so far (subsequently Roger Madelin, Chief Executive of Argent, put the figure at £15-25 million, depending on how you looked at it. However the package of Section 106 improvements for the community have been valued at £150 million, which shows the high returns possible from a proactive approach in situations where there is real development value to be unlocked.

The keys to Camden's approach included:

- Setting up a bespoke Kings Cross team (of between 6-9 planners, reporting to Peter Bishop, and involving other departments as necessary)
- Bringing different interests together (for example in Tottenham Court Road the railways and the underground were not talking to each other)
- setting up and running a high level Impact Group, chaired by the former head of Network Rail, to deal with problems of implementation as they arise eg road closures, night working, and apart from one conflict that went to court, progress has been amicable
- Promoting collaboration not competition (things are little better than in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and so the public interest needs to be properly represented!)
- Publishing planning and development briefs (for example Ian Ritchie has come up with ideas for expanding the public space by redeveloping the South side of the Euston Road to a higher density)
- Providing continuity through the role of Bob West who has worked on Kings Cross for ten years, and hence 'knows everything and everybody'
- Engaging political leaders by appeal to 'reputation or potential damage'
- Ensuring local authorities adopt the public realm and manage it to a high standards (to avoid 'gated communities')
- Using lobbying power, and the power of 'well-being' to secure higher standards.

### **Barriers to improvement**

The group recognised the enormous lead times in getting infrastructure projects implemented (Crossrail was apparently devised in 1947), and that capacity constraints were threatening progress on delivering development. The Continental model eg Euralille seemed to work better because they are less constrained by professional mindsets, and are able to 'see' the whole project. Some of the barriers to both speeding things up, and producing better value for money, include:

- complex Parliamentary procedures to get permission before funding is in permission (£24 million apparently spent so far on planning the West London tram) as detailed design and assessment is required before applications can be considered
- lack of political consensus over proposals eg Ealing went Conservative because of opposition to the West London tram
- reluctance of politicians to exercise leadership as there are few obvious benefits and plenty of costs from development, yet politics ultimately determine which projects go ahead

- lack of financial mechanisms for linking planning of transport and development, or for sorting out who pays for what (for example regeneration benefits are not counted when transport projects are assessed against each other)
- lack of financial incentives for forward thinking eg LABSCI may return some of the Business Rate, but it is used for purposes other than regeneration
- dominance of engineers and accountants, plus lawyers, resulting in ‘tunnel vision’, as those in charge press on regardless (*‘engineering is the medical term for an advanced form of autism’*)
- institutional politics as well as physical uncertainties over the life of a project lead to lots of wasted effort and duplication.

### **Practical action**

Though it was hoped that Lyons et al may help sort out the mess, and encourage devolution (which would make joining up decisions and working together much easier) the fear is that not much will change, (particularly if the economy enters a downturn). Hence how can the peculiar British system be made to work better in providing the missing leadership and skills? At least ten good ideas were raised in discussion:

1. Recognise that uncertainty and risk are essential facts of life, which planning must contend with, and that transport may well follow rather than lead development in the UK
2. Devolve as much power as possible to the regional level to enable links to be made between spatial and economic development plans, and Local Implementation Plans for transport
3. Work within the constraints of very limited transport investment budgets which rule out most major projects (boroughs typically ask for £25 million for the Local Implementation Plans and get £4 million)
4. Budget for feasibility studies of options, and for adequate measures to improve the public realm and pedestrian experience (note, this is where a successor to the Single Pot may be called for)
5. Develop basic urban design skills so that planners do not just rely on words but can draw out roughly how things might be made to work better and so technicians generally take a more holistic approach that gives more priority to the needs of pedestrians
6. Continue to use processes of ‘looking and learning’ to build capacity, as the skills required to manage urban change are best acquired through observation and practice
7. Develop ways of considering the regeneration/development impacts in project planning and assessment
8. Focus on travel management, the better utilization of existing capacity, and the implementation of small projects that can make a major difference to behaviour eg signing
9. Lobby for local authorities to be incentivised to provide the necessary leadership, and to take the inevitable risks eg capturing part of the uplift in land values, working through sub-regional teams

10. Recognise that senior officers (and civil servants) have a responsibility to always consider the bigger picture, and ensure they have the means and tools to educate politicians accordingly.

### **Next steps**

Discussion afterwards suggests there is real enthusiasm in the group for:

- going on to a fourth session (several members said that they learned so much)
- widening the group (and Pat Hayes has indicated he would like to join)
- extending the boundaries if we can find people with similar interests (suggestions please!!)
- having another visit abroad (Copenhagen???)
- perhaps focusing on how to improve the public realm and encourage walking generally in the next session (which would tie up with a visit to Copenhagen and their main street Stroget).

We agreed to run one last session in Newham in November, focusing on the Skills for Leadership, and considering how to enthuse members about transforming or ‘shaping’ places. Newham’s transformation as an organization has won widespread recognition, and could provide a useful model for how you secure the political leadership and consensus to achieve an urban renaissance. The achievements and upsets at Stratford also hold some lessons for how the public and private sectors work together.

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