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Transforming transport: THE BIRMINGHAM INTERNATIONAL HUB

Martin Dyer, Venue Development Manager at the NEC discusses the impacts of development of the Birmingham international Hub and the potential for growth in the West Midlands

AS A young trainee Engineer, I can still vividly remember my first journey, to the National Exhibition Centre (NEC), arriving at the end of a short concrete section of quiet motorway that terminated in the middle of the countryside a couple of miles south of the M6. I had of course arrived at what is now Junction 6 of the M42. That was in 1977.

The NEC opened in 1975 situated in the heart of England and centrally located in the growing motorway network. The following year, British Rail, opened the first completely new major railway station to be built since Marylebone station was completed in the late 1890's, and the arrival of Advanced Passenger Trains (APT) was to reduce journey times from London to one hour. Elmdon Airport was operating from a small terminal handling one million passengers per year. We had the 'Birmingham National Hub'

But let's fast forward to 2009. Today The NEC is the UK's largest and one of Europe's busiest exhibition venues, with more than 190,000 square meters of covered space through twenty

interconnecting halls welcoming over 2.1 million visitors to a diverse range of over 140 exhibitions every year. With more than 70% of visitors coming from outside of the West Midlands, transport remains a key USP for us. Within a short distance is Birmingham International Airport (BIA), handling ten million passengers a year with an exciting Master Plan to extend the runway and terminal facilities opening up access to the Far East, South Asia and the West Coast of USA, delivering more options to come directly to the West Midlands.

With this in mind, an effective and sustainable transport system is essential to the success of The NEC and BIA as places to work, visit and live. There are a number of improvements currently being undertaken:

- M42 ATM system is helping to deliver more reliable journey times for visitors to the significant regional economic assets located on the corridor, demonstrating that more lanes can deliver better travelling conditions.
- Bus travel will be transformed over the next

couple of years as project ANITA (Airport and NEC Integrated Transport Access) is delivered under the DfT major scheme criteria by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and other partners.

- Train services and frequency are slowly improving from London and other locations.

So what does the future hold?

The AWM Ecotec study of the M42 Corridor Growth Area established in 2008 that this area was the best economic performing part of the West Midlands, exceeding the UK average in terms of GVA output. It also recognised the significance of the current integrated transport provision but also some of the difficulties around capacity limitations, particularly congestion on the motorway network and rail services. It suggested that the term 'Birmingham International Hub' would identify the significance of the area, the economic assets and the transport connectivity. Recent discussions and activity around High Speed Rail from HS2Ltd only



The Birmingham International Hub – Air, Rail, Road, Bus and The NEC

add to the significance. Against the recent news of the £15bn West Midlands productivity gap, excellent transport provision will be essential to maximise the ambitions of the master plans of The NEC, BIA and the other assets located at 'The Birmingham International Hub', each of which are significant economic multipliers to the benefit of the rest of the Region.

www.necgroup.co.uk

Achieving success in major transport projects

IN THIS global downturn, many governments across the world are looking to stimulate their economies through major infrastructure and public works schemes, whilst others are recognising the opportunity to accelerate projects, taking advantage of the savings that may arise from the supply side of a competitive market place.

In the UK the priority will be on several major transport infrastructure projects, including making best use of the existing network through Managed Motorways, High Speed 2 and the National Rail Electrification scheme. The Midlands is not unaffected by significant infrastructure developments with the New Street development underway and extension plans for Birmingham airport.

It is now more important than ever for those involved in these developments to realise; cost and time certainty from major project delivery, demonstrable value for money, and fit for purpose assets that provide economic and socio economic benefits.

Portfolio Management

However, quite often programme benefits are not fully realised. Too much focus is applied to individual project outputs rather than the desired outcome of the overall programme. Limited usable management information can then lead to variable decision making at the programme level and strategic misalignment with the supply chain.

More focus needs to be given to a portfolio management approach that establishes an effective governance framework, enabling the programme to deliver benefits in line with an organisation's strategic objectives. This will help ensure improved efficiency, certainty, speed and control.

Key Steps for Successful Delivery

1. The benefits case and business case need to

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consider the applicability of conventional benefits and recognise the greater potential benefits rather than focusing mainly on financial aspects.

2. Greater focus and pro-activity should be placed on stakeholder management in order to accelerate the development and delivery process
3. The procurement strategy needs to reflect market conditions, be flexible in relation to timing and fully engage the supply for maximum efficiency
4. Identifying the risk position from the outset ensures all stakeholders and the supply chain are clear on expectations and both costs and time are not impacted by in-decision.
6. The approval and decision making process needs to be fully considered. A complete appreciation of the scheme's speed to market, as well as the short term economic benefits will help to prevent delays in approvals and project development.

By setting up the right form of Programme Management Office from the outset, there will be an increasing surety that data is real-time accurate, allowing strategic decisions to be optimised. This translates into clearly defined accountability, consistent delivery and control of risk, stakeholder confidence and maximum efficiency in the supply chain.

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