

KING'S CROSS AND EUSTON REDEVELOPMENTS

SOCIAL IMPACT STUDY

Note for King's Cross Development Forum

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to make the case for a comprehensive and systematic study of the likely effects of the redevelopment of the King's Cross railway lands and the separate but related rebuilding and decking over of Euston Station. It's argued that an independent study, properly constructed, can inform both public opinion and decision-makers of the scale and nature of changes of these two very large developments. Also that it can help to shape priorities, improve co-ordination and ensure accountability.

A study of this kind would be framed and presented in primarily technical terms. In setting out the arguments, however, there is much to be learned by touching on the history and more general issues raised by the two schemes.

Why do we need a study?

The arrival of the Channel Tunnel terminus at St Pancras together with the redevelopment of the surrounding railway land is a process that has been underway for two decades. 2009 will see planning permission submitted for the redevelopment and decking over of Euston, an individual scheme at least as ambitious as St Pancras Eurostar terminal, if smaller in overall size. The effects of the two schemes will transform the area south of Camden Town, affecting the size and nature of its population, its employment profile, property values (with consequences for access to residential property) and, of course, transport. These are the biggest changes in the area since the railway construction between the 1830s and the 1860s. During that period, the Midland Railway alone demolished 4,000 homes in Somers and Camden Towns displacing perhaps as many as 32,000 people (HJ Dyos, *Exploring the Urban Past*, 1982:102).

The railways have continued to exert a strong influence on the areas around them as transport patterns and technology have changed. For example, in 1900, a successful campaign against the London and North Western Railway successfully opposed a private act of Parliament by the Company designed to seize a large tract of land between Primrose Hill and Euston. The *St Pancras Chronicle* commented at the time

A railway company has no soul to be saved and no body to be kicked, and the directors care very little for the opprobrium of the public if they can get what they want, even by driving the proverbial 'coach and four' through an act of Parliament. We know something of the method by which this feat is accomplished and it is nothing less than scandalous that these wealthy corporations should be able to evade the law in the way that they are wont to.

The comparison is inexact and the context different. But this echo of the past still carries considerable force, reminding us that it is the period between 1960 and 1990 that is different. During these years, thanks to a combination of planning blight and uncertainty over the future of rail travel, the area remained frozen in time.

The distinction this time round is that the decision makers must take some responsibility for the effects of radical change on local populations. Yet responsibility for *what*? Certainly for housing and transport activities. Beyond this the picture becomes blurred. Until some kind of answer is

provided, the major interests will necessarily continue to pursue their own concerns to the exclusion of any overall picture and its likely consequences.

The assumption here is that the combined effects of the two developments must be the focus of interest, with the corollary that it is timely to explore them now. It is also accepted that without appropriate information there can be no meaningful debate, consequently no worthwhile assessment of the public interest. To the extent that the public interest depends on adequate information and an understanding of the overall aims and structure of both schemes, we lack the means to make sense of them or contribute anything of real value.

Information and planning policy

The idea of an 'impact' study requires explanation. Why use 'impact' when 'effects' would be a more accurate term? Because the former carries the notion of transformation and radical change. In this context the redevelopment of King's Cross and Euston stations resembles a meteor or hurricane obliterating all in its immediate path creating ripple effects that diminish with distance.

Nor is the idea new. Neither the Channel Tunnel nor its related rail link into London went ahead until they were subjected to a cost-benefit analysis. In the early stages of the King's Cross scheme in 1988, Michael Edwards of University College London and Ellen Leopold produced a pilot 'social audit' based on the concept of a balance sheet. Leopold's paper, 'Implications of the proposal to develop the Railway Lands at King's Cross' remains the only study in 21 years of the complex issue of costs and benefits (summarised in *Local Economy*, May 1989: 17-25).

Essentially British Rail's original proposal was a modern transport inter-change paid for from the profits of the scheme. However, Leopold pointed out that Camden's residents would pay the revenue costs of maintaining roads, rubbish collection, lighting etc. through local taxation. Far from cashing in on the scheme, the local authority might end up as a *net* contributor to it. The findings of the social audit, though tentative, suggested that Camden could triple its social gains without jeopardising British Rail's demands, still leaving the developer with a £100 million profit.

It is perhaps not surprising that a nationalised rail system starved of investment and a local authority that had just been rate-capped failed to heed these warnings. The King's Cross scheme, according to Leopold, was 'a great Trojan horse, unleashing huge changes in a highly concentrated form on a community whose guardians have already been disarmed'. This fitted perfectly with a series of major reforms to housing, education, local authority finance etc. introduced in the second half of the Thatcher regime. The scale of the King's Cross proposal 'producing national income streams that dwarf the size of most local authority budgets' required, in Leopold's words, councils to 're-think their conceptual and corporate approach to future large-scale planning applications well in advance of their arrival at the Town Hall'.

The current context differs in at least three important respects. Firstly, with the world's economy falling into recession, the economic prospects for large-scale development are less certain. Secondly, population around the stations has increased with no corresponding improvement in social facilities. The increase reflects national demographic trends and more overcrowding in rented housing. Following a refusal by central government to release investment for social housing, unless tenants accepted an arms length management organisation (or ALMO), the physical deterioration of Camden's stock is accelerating. Finally, social polarisation arising from these and other changes has intensified both the extent and depth of inequality. Poverty is expressed in stark physical terms. Somers Town ward, immediately adjacent to a brand new £400 million hospital, has inadequate local health services for a population whose death rate for adult males is among the worst in London at three for every two in Camden as a whole. There could no clearer indicator of multiple deprivation.

The other side of the picture is growing pressure for development on the fringes of King's Cross and Euston. An obvious question is the extent to which public transport can cope with both significant

growth in the existing network *and* new commercial and residential development. An estimated 300,000 travellers a day passes through the King's Cross St Pancras underground station, London's biggest and busiest interchange. With a further 100,000 expected from St Pancras International and assuming 100,000 a day through Euston, the daily throughput totals half a million people. These figures predate oil price rises and the resulting switch to public transport, so do not reflect current rising trends. Despite plans to separate out international, national and local passenger streams and rumours of an enlarged or entirely new underground station, there is still no real response to the revolution in public transport.

The new Crossrail service linking east and west London, running south of King's Cross, is intended to relieve major pressures on the underground system. Bus services are scheduled for a 40 per cent increase between 2001 and 2011. Proposals for a tram service connecting King's Cross with Brixton and Peckham have been scrapped. However, the extension of the Thameslink rail system to northern Norfolk and the Kent coast will relieve existing surface lines but increase numbers at King's Cross. Between 2010 and 2018 the capacity of the six underground lines serving King's Cross will be increased from between 11 per cent and 20 per cent depending on the lines in question. (Without knowing how these figures were arrived at, it is difficult to comment on them.)

Ellen Leopold's plea for inter-agency co-operation arose from a concern about the unequal effects of development. These latest trends, however, raise questions about managing an urban system that is fast outrunning all available space. It shifts the demand for a comprehensive analysis of anticipated effects from its former subsidiary role to a new and central position.

It follows from this that we have to examine the aggregate effects of the combined King's Cross Central scheme (including the re-opened St Pancras) and the new Euston proposal as parts of a single system. The two should be evaluated in combination. But, this is by no means the end of the story. Issues relating to poverty, the pressures of redevelopment and environmental needs do not naturally fall together. The need for firmer direction and control must be demonstrated, involving elected politicians in the decision-making process. Progress can only be made through setting political priorities. Decision makers need to bring information and control together in a way that has yet to be attempted. This is essential both to refining the overall goals of the two schemes *and* to routine decision-making.

It can be argued that Camden's planning system has failed on two fronts. The first is that the goal of balanced development, supposedly central to general planning policy, has not been translated into detailed decision-making. Means have not been joined with ends. With the partial exception of housing, the failure to impose clear social priorities has given too much freedom to the developers. It also encourages over-development with insufficient attention paid to the true capacity of the site over the life of whatever buildings will stand on it.

Some idea of the cost may be gauged by plans to increase the numbers at the only secondary school in the south of the borough by 400, an increase of a third. There are, according to the education department, no sites for a new school. Yet the existing premises are flanked by two of the largest development sites to become available in London since the 1950s!

The second failure is to meet the basic requirement of the planning process to secure an orderly pattern of land use within a workable vision matching social needs and future demands. The capacity of the King's Cross/Euston sites is elastic but not infinite. Whilst careful design may alleviate the inherent problems of unchecked development, this is taking a very big risk.

The role of public opinion

At the start of negotiations between British Rail and Camden Council in 1987, four people within the Council were allowed into the discussions. They were Tony Dykes, then Council Leader, two of his close associates and the Director of Planning. The negotiations were conducted behind closed doors with the housing department excluded. This has been a common pattern in inner London,

since the redevelopment of St Katherine's Dock in the late 1960s, the first stage of the immense Docklands scheme. On that occasion, Tower Hamlets' ruling Labour group, not to mention the rest of the Council, was presented with a *fait accompli*. In consequence, a small and insufficient amount of public housing was squeezed onto an awkward corner of the site. There was, however, a political cost. Dissatisfaction with the lack of accountability underlying this failure was a major issue behind the Isle of Dogs revolt in March 1970.

A similar process has disempowered and fragmented King's Cross and Somers Town. Even were this attitude to change, it would be very difficult to persuade local citizens that anything can be gained from discussion and debate, the obvious response being 'Why bother?'

For these reasons, an independent study, carried out by outside consultants, academics or a combination of the two, might just help to restore local confidence. It is, however, only a first step. Its success (or failure) depends on three issues: the quality of the work; the extent to which all parties are prepared to support it; and where it leads (if anywhere). Much will depend on the flexibility of the developers and the Council and the extent to which existing plans are open to negotiation.

At present, the prospects of any such concessions are slight. However, transport congestion is now approaching crisis point. As it looms closer, so the benefits of a comprehensive view will become more apparent.

At a more general level, changes in official attitudes will be linked to the growing consequences of a failure to plan systematically, most apparent in the urban transport infrastructure. However, with economic decline leading into recession, uncertainty now affects other aspects of the scheme. Incoming tenants of commercial property are less keen to take a long-term commitment, making the scheme less attractive to commercial landlords. The University of the Arts and the Medical Research Council, planning to take over the existing Granary building and a new building behind the British Library respectively, expect proceeds from the sale of their existing properties to finance part of their moves. But the sinking property market we now have may well undermine this assumption.

The case for an impact study, therefore, can be divided into three broad categories.

The first is *technical*, relating to the capacity of both the King's Cross and Euston sites to accommodate conflicting demands on space. These include transport infrastructure, the balance between commercial and residential property (and within this, the balance between private and social tenure) and the need for social facilities.

The second is *economic*, reflecting the growing uncertainty of both the property market and the prospects for commercial success in a shrinking economy.

The third is *social*, beset by anxiety about the willingness of private owners to take up accommodation whose future value is uncertain, at a time when their own incomes are less secure. The remaining (social) housing also faces difficulty in raising funds from the City.

What might the main components of the study be?

The elements of the study should be based on a detailed examination of changes in: -

- Transport
- Population
- The labour market
- Housing
- The costs and benefits, both social and economic, of both schemes
- Their contribution to changes in the overall structure of London

The aim is to take the four principal themes (population, housing, employment and transport) in order to construct a range of the likely effects of the two developments. These effects are measured by comparing what would have happened in the absence of the schemes (i.e. had existing trends been maintained) with the expected effects of the schemes. These findings will need to be presented in local, regional and national terms. Whilst these will generally be treated separately, there will nonetheless be overlaps and points of transition between them.

An example is the international dimension of the Channel Tunnel terminal, given that its influence extends to Brussels, Paris and beyond. The obvious growth in passenger numbers and influx of international travellers as it affects London's existing transport network would be included. The same is true of employment. The 1986 Canary Wharf study by Queen Mary College addressed the regional effects of Docklands redevelopment, as must any similar study of King's Cross and Euston. However, there is an equal need to gauge labour market changes within local areas. With the opening of St Pancras International, attention naturally shifts to the effects on the dense residential neighbourhoods surrounding the three termini.

Turning to the housing market, property values are linked to social class and occupational status, both of which will change. Balancing the interests of newcomers with those of existing residents will need to redress a long-term decline in socially rented accommodation. Further issues linked to employment include what local linkages will the new corporate occupiers of expensive commercial property make? To what extent can or will they absorb part of the local workforce? Social and economic adjustment brings with it the need to consider the rate at which change takes place. How quickly will changes be felt and how far reaching will they be? In these areas alone, fairly sophisticated data will be needed to reach a properly informed policy.

Some people or groups will be worse off as a result of the scheme(s). It is a necessary but insufficient condition that the gains must outweigh the losses. Whilst we accept that there will be losers, we must go beyond this requirement. The prevailing wisdom among those making the decisions is that everyone will gain. However, we need to know that the benefits are not confined to a very small group and, in the words of E.J. Mishan, 'that no gross inequities are perpetrated' (*Journal of Transport Economics and Policy*, September 1970: 212-34).

Conclusion

Within this context, the elements of an impact study offer the chance to respond flexibly to changes by combining a range of possible outcomes. They also help identify and avoid the areas of greatest risk for both schemes (e.g. overdevelopment, transport and social facilities) and, in particular for those local neighbourhoods and low-income groups that are most vulnerable. Comparisons with other areas of London likewise subject to rapid development also need to be made. This applies particularly to the 2012 Olympic Games. A need for co-ordination across several agencies is common to both, but the tighter timescale of 2012 will enable lessons to be learned for the longer-term King's Cross and Euston programmes.

There is no avoiding the central importance of information to the planning process and public debate. An interesting recent innovation is the Thames Gateway Knowledge Platform, a statistical database launched in 2006, offering users information down to ward level and the ability to cross-reference 1,300 indicators relating to 20 local authorities. Users include three levels of government (central, regional and local) and universities. But it is not, as yet, open to the general public. Until access is widened, this otherwise progressive initiative works against the basic condition for public debate that all parties be equally informed.

Since the 1960s it has been the plea of every working party, government committee and official initiative that without proper consultation democracy breaks down. The case here is that those who *make* the decisions and those *affected* by them come together in an effective social learning process. The first step towards this is information to facilitate informed debate. Two things have

changed since the stalemate and hesitations of the Channel Tunnel link could be regarded as a special case. Firstly, the financial burden of improving station infrastructure must be born by private capital. Yet the current vulnerability of this assumption in an emerging slump of international capital markets undermines this model.

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