

It's all about the people

Building the right teams and the right relationships with groups involved in construction and communities affected by it will be crucial to success, says **Ailie MacAdam**

In answer to the question “who will build HS2?” I am certain that many of my industry counterparts, especially my fellow members of the High Speed Rail Industry Leaders Group, would raise their hand. As would thousands of potential suppliers, HS2 Ltd, Government officials, and the many skilled workers, support staff, keen graduates and future apprentices who understand the wealth of opportunities that this project will present.

To my mind, HS2 is all about people.

As well as offering a new source of work continuity for the construction industry, a project such as this will provide a golden opportunity to invest in training the next generation of engineers and construction professionals. A report by global recruitment firm Randstad states that the number of construction workers employed by 2050 is likely to be nearly 70,000 short of the nation's requirement, and for qualified engineers the gap is more than 35,000. Similarly, a study by the UK's National Skills Academy for Railway Engineering (NSARE) identifies that a particular concern is the significant number of over-55s working in traction and rolling stock, at a time when the demand for these skills will grow in the coming years.

HS2 will offer a chance for owners of small businesses to strengthen their enterprises. On the Crossrail project, for example, we have calculated that 58% of the supply chain is made up of small and medium-sized companies.

And of course HS2's future passengers will experience improved journeys between many of the UK's cities, and increased capacity will allow for better local transport connections – making daily lives more pleasant and prosperous. Some parts of the UK will be transformed (just think of King's Cross in London).

However, in order to realise these benefits for people, there is a huge job ahead to align the various groups potentially involved in HS2: whether they are communities affected by construction, contractors with businesses to run, asset owners, train operators, infrastructure maintainers, designers, legacy and development organisations, financial sponsors or governing bodies.

From my time on both High Speed 1 and Crossrail, I know just how



challenging it can be to build trust and understanding and keep everyone on the same page, both inside and outside the project. I remember just before the launch of Eurostar operations at St Pancras International in 2007 just how many people held a stake in getting that station open on time and on budget – and then there were those who would prefer it wasn't there at all! It was certainly a full-time job to work effectively with all of those stakeholders and keep costs under control.

I am often asked what I have found to be the biggest challenge on these mega-projects. Developing a common

vision of what success is and then working together with the multitude of stakeholders and interested parties to achieve that vision (without alternative agendas getting in the way) is definitely up there.

So a secondary question to “Who will build HS2” is: “How do you build and maintain support, harnessing input and innovation from disparate groups for a project the size of HS2?”

The industry has gained some great experience from projects such as HS1 and Crossrail. There is no doubt it can be done – with the right people, the right teams and the right relationships.

Ailie MacAdam is a senior vice-president at Bechtel where she is currently the managing director of Bechtel's global rail business. She was also formerly a director on both Crossrail and High Speed 1.

turn to page 20