

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

Well, the weather is improving, days stretching out and activity is slowly picking up in the project world here in UK so it must be nearly spring. In a long period dominated by the downturn in the oil price, many industries have reported a slow-down in new project start-ups as business cases have failed or shown reduced ROI or simply lack of benefits, news is beginning to come through that typical project ingenuity is emerging to find ways to get around some of the worst effects of the latest financial crisis.

Among major topics this month are redevelopment plans for south London, the latest on the Mars lander project, a look at a flagship Government project and recent events at the Association for Project Management.

REDEVELOPMENT IN LONDON

It seems like everywhere you look there are plans for new bridges across the River Thames. The last new bridge was completed for the Millennium Footbridge that spanned the river opening up views St Paul's Cathedral from the South Bank and linked the then new Tate Modern to the City. There were problems to do with damping oscillations caused by pedestrian footfalls but these were soon overcome.

Readers will recall the proposals last year for the so-called Garden Bridge to cross the river from Temple Underground Station to a site just east of the National Theatre on the South Bank. The grandiose plan attracted a pledge of £30 million from London Mayor Boris Johnson, towards the projected £175 million overall cost of construction.

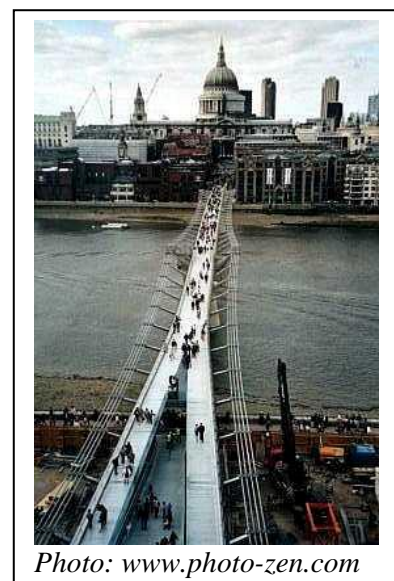


Photo: www.photo-zen.com

Critics were quick to point out a number of issues and The Guardian raised some of these:

- how can the long-delayed plan for a Thames crossing in east London be revived? There are 16 road bridges west of Tower Bridge, but none to the east, where the city's growth is burgeoning, until you hit the far-away Dartford crossing?
- what has happened to the long-awaited plan for a pedestrian bridge at Nine Elms, where 20,000 new homes are being built?
- why has a well-worked through scheme to make Victoria Embankment a pedestrian-friendly experience has simply fallen by the wayside?

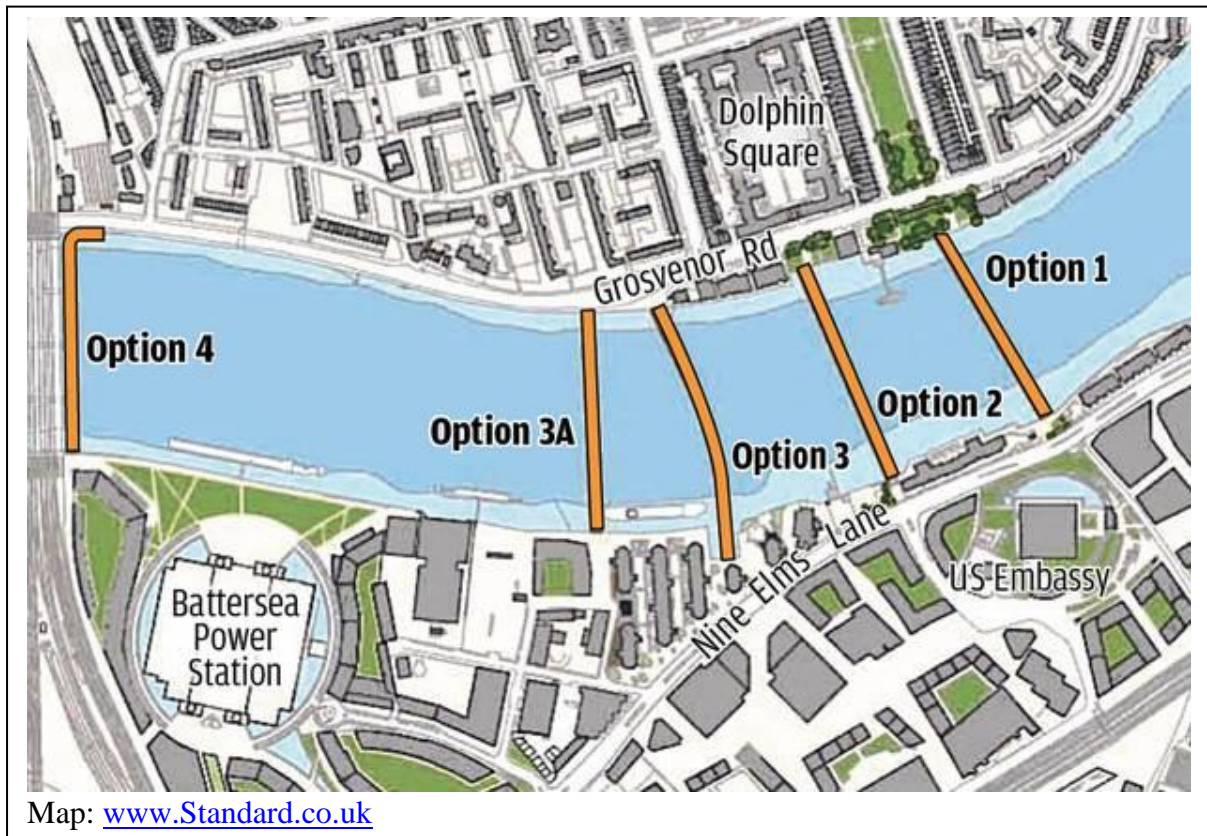
Richard De Cani, Transport for London's director of strategy and policy says Transport for London (TfL) is "scoping options" for the other projects, but he is reluctant to be drawn on why the Garden bridge – just 300 metres from an existing crossing – has been so magically fast-tracked and received such substantial public funding.

Then there is the money issue. The design was unveiled in June 2014 and reported to cost £60m. However, this had risen to £100m by July and was reported to be some £120m-£150m by the end of the year. The new cost at £175m, is "a genuine bottom line budget" covering aspects such as VAT and "real-estate issues". According to Lord Davies of Abersoch, chairman of the Garden Bridge Trust, the bridge was always known to cost at least £150m. However, the Government has pledged £30 million to match the TfL funding.

The scheme received planning permission in November and work could start this year. The completion date of 2017 reported in some media seems to be in some doubt. As a legal challenge has been mounted over the whole scheme, an early start seems unlikely. Critics cite a wide range of issues, including the impact of closing Temple Station for a substantial period during construction, restrictions on use and access, dangers arising from crowding at events planned to help fund the construction and lack of clarity over finances, especially running costs expected to come in at about £3.5 million annually. The BBC noted (see their website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-29627906> for a full summary of opposition) the comparatively poor benefits case which comes in at 1:1.6 compared with other major projects in London, such as Cross Rail which comes in at 3.1:1 and the Victoria Line extension at 5.2:1. Local opposition is considerable and vocal.

Compared to the furore over this possible project, which is seen as a vanity project more like a tourist attraction than a practical transport link, the reception of ideas for the Nine Elms Crossing is positive. This bridge is planned to be a pedestrian and cycle bridge connecting Nine Elms on the South Bank with the historic Pimlico embankment. It is a key component in the Nine Elms Vauxhall Partnership's transport development plans.

A feasibility study by Transport for London (TfL)'s has confirmed that the bridge is viable and would be a valuable addition to central London's transport network. The exact location has not been announced yet and there are several possibilities as shown on the map below. is yet to be confirmed but the preferred option (1 below) would land close to the site of the new US Embassy.



The Partnership is holding a 2 stage competition to find a design. The first phase completed last week and attracted 74 entries from both established design houses and newer “up and coming” designers. Many preliminary sketches show highly imaginative solutions for the pedestrian and cycle bridge. The 4 shortlisted designs will be announced next month and winning design will be revealed in the summer of 2015 when the Partnership will explore a range of funding options which could include sponsorship. According to TfL's feasibility study, the bridge would cost around £40m, providing a car free alternative to Vauxhall or Chelsea Bridges.

Ravi Govindia, leader of Wandsworth Council and co-chair of the Nine Elms Vauxhall Partnership, said:

“This competition is calling for architects from across the globe to come forward with exceptional, inspiring designs for a new bridge at the centre of the world's greatest city. The successful entry will have to win the hearts of Londoners who are tremendously proud of their river and its rich architectural heritage.

“There are considerable challenges and engineering feats to overcome. The design must work alongside the cutting edge architecture emerging on the south bank as well as the elegant frontages on the north. The landing points on both sides must integrate sensitively with their surroundings and provide a smooth and safe experience for the pedestrian and cyclists who use it.

“This bridge is also a badly needed and valuable piece of infrastructure for London. It has a very strong transport case, will support the city’s growth and has significant funding commitments already in place. Developing an inspiring, beautiful design will allow us to take the project to the next stage and ensure this project comes off the page into reality in a much shorter timeframe.”



Three entries in Nine Elms Bridge Competition. Images: Wandsworth Council

OTHER LONDON DEVELOPMENTS

Staying south of the Thames, there is further news of redevelopment. The next big Tube project will be the Bakerloo extension from Elephant and Castle through New Cross, Lewisham, Catford and Beckenham Junction to Bromley town centre and West Wickham. The new link will connect South East London with the West End and is another regeneration project, this time with TfL collaborating with Southwark, Lewisham and Bromley. New tunnels will be required, either along the Old Kent Road or via Camberwell to New Cross Gate and then on to the other Boroughs.

No funding is in place yet but recent announcements concerning the future of investment for the Old Kent Road area by the Mayor of London makes the scheme attractive. Based on current work on London Underground, costs are expected to be of the order of £30 Billion. If the project is given the go-ahead, work on the extension would start in 2023 and finish during the 2030s.

MARS LANDER PROGRAMMES

This news is not exactly fresh but as we have had the first call for “residents” now is an appropriate time to take a brief look at this programme. First, there are several contenders for the race to colonise Mars. Arguably the most credible is that of NASA but there is another called Mars-One which aims to send crews of 4 every 2 years, beginning in 2024 after a preliminary unmanned mission scheduled for launch in 2018.

The full NASA launch is still a long way off but at the end of last year, a test flight signalled the start of Nasa's quest to send astronauts out into the solar system. This test flight was limited to a two-laps-around-Earth test flight for the new Orion spacecraft. This flight lasted just four and a half hours. However, it was the farthest a built-for-humans capsule has flown since the Apollo moon missions, shooting 3,600 miles out into space in order to gain enough momentum to re-enter the atmosphere at 20,000mph.

The test vehicle was fitted with 1,200 sensors to gauge its durability for future human use. Advertised destinations include an asteroid to be corralled in lunar orbit for human exploration in the 2020s, followed by Mars in the 2030s.

"We're approaching this as pioneers," said William Hill of Nasa's exploration systems development office. "We're going out to stay eventually ... it's many, many decades away, but that's our intent."

The British interest lies in the UK Space Agency's announcement of a £48 million project to send a solar powered vehicle to land on the Red Planet. The vehicle will be equipped with a drilling rover and is due for launch in 2018. This lander will be preceded by the ExoMars orbiter due to launch in 2016 with the aim of detecting gases such as methane. The rover is expected to have an operational life of around 2 years



ESA Mars Room

One of the shortlisted rover designs is under construction at the UK Space Agency facility in Hertfordshire.

APM HONORARY FELLOW HEAR LATEST NEWS

The Association for Project Management (APM) held its annual Honorary Fellow's Lunch in London last week. Some 40 Hon Fellows gathered at Home House, in London's Mayfair for the lunch hosted by APM President Tom Taylor. Apart from the usual social highlights, guests were able to meet **Sara Drake**, the new Chief Executive who took up her post only days before the lunch. Among the highlights of the lunch was the "State of the Nation" review by Chairman of the Trustees, **Steve Wake**.

In his review of the last 12 months, the Chairman highlighted the success of both the Women in Project Management Conference and APM Presents...where record numbers attended and saw APM become a finalist in the Association category in the Conference of the Year event. The website has attracted a place in the final of the Social Media of the Year awards. He also drew attention to a number of new guides issued and the achievement of Investors in Volunteers, where APM received the very first certificate to be awarded. Membership numbers continue to improve with more Corporate Members joining, despite the economic pressures, and 21,150

individual members. Qualifications continue to provide a strong attraction with a 36% growth in APMP certificates and 600 Registered Project Professionals.

The Annual Awards enjoyed it's best ever year with record entries for the awards themselves as well as the Gala night selling out – again! Overall, a successful year for APM!

OTHER NEWS

Drax power station generates about 7% of UK's electricity and is converting some of its boilers from coal fired to biomass. To do this, it is receiving grants from the Government in the form of generous renewable energy subsidies. These subsidies have been funded by levies on domestic energy bills – an unpopular move in these straightened times. However, these subsidies are being challenged not by UK tax payers but by the European Commission which is opening a state-aid investigation into a smaller scheme to convert Lynemouth Power Station in Northumberland. The Commission claims consumers may be over charged and question plans on environmental grounds.

Olympic Legacy seems to be in the headlines continuously. The latest news is about a dance studio opening in the former press centre. This is notable because the studio is devoted to contemporary dance. Choreographer Wayne McGregor is opening a £5 million studio and will offer thousands of hours of free learning for local schools and communities. This is the first cultural organisation to move into the former Olympic Press and Broadcast centre. This project will be partly funded by donations and philanthropic contributions that will allow McGregor to offer world class facilities to up to 30 young choreographers, on the condition that they work with local people in a programme called Free2Create.

Finally, a new university technical college is being established at Crewe. These new education initiatives are being established to overcome the skills shortage that bedevils British industry. This College will be supported by Bentley Motors, part of the Volkswagen Group. Bentley are building a new research and development centre in the town. According to Kevin Rose, board member for sales and marketing at Bentley, more designers and engineers from the local area are important for the company to protect the marque and expand its sales overseas. He went on to say that basing its designers and engineers in UK was the only way to preserve the qualities prized by overseas clients. Some 87% of sales are sent overseas with USA (29%) and China (22%) the most significant. Mr Rose noted that Bentley had been able to recruit enough designer at the new R&D centre, finding engineers was proving problematic.

And so another report closes. It is clear that UK faces a problem with finding enough engineers but it is good to see efforts in many parts of the country aiming to overcome such shortages.

About the Author



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Miles Shepherd is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK and overseas Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He is currently Director of PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and the Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He was involved in setting up APM's team developing guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk.

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