

UK Project Management Round Up¹



By Miles Shepherd
Executive Advisor & International Correspondent
Salisbury, England, UK

INTRODUCTION

Pressure of work prevented me from reporting last month, so you get a double dose this month. Quite a lot has happened despite the slowness of the economy so we must hope people are beginning to adapt to the conditions; certainly some businesses have been very quick to react, changing their business model and continuing to trade successfully. Few seem to be reacting with projects but there can be little doubt that careful planning has been necessary – and the changes clearly need to be managed – that sounds like project management even if the perpetrators choose to call it something else. This month, we take a brief look at major projects, moves in the energy industry, updates on some construction projects and more.

MAJOR PROJECTS

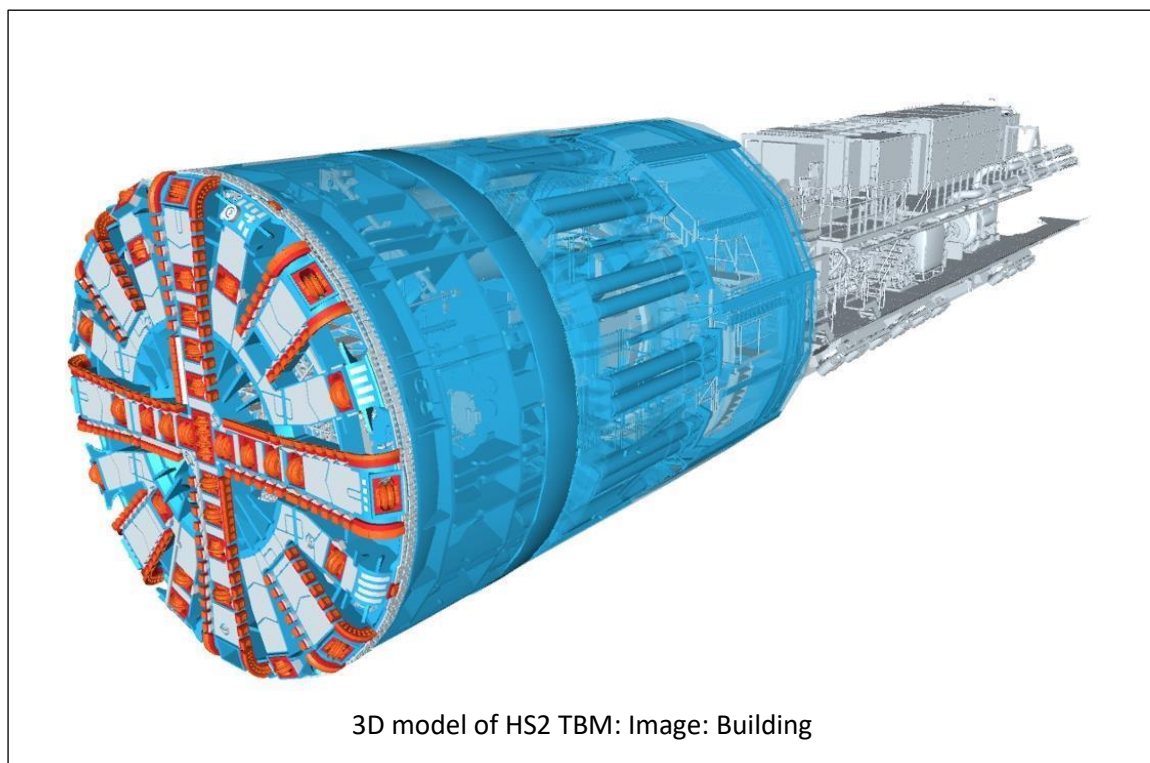
High Speed 2 (HS2) has been progressing quietly during the lockdown and construction work has now begun. The project received a green light in February and the official “notice to proceed” was issued in April. Our Illustrious Leader (OIL) Boris Johnson claimed it was passing the point of no return as the formal start of construction took place at the beginning of September. The first phase build is the route from London to Birmingham and will include 10 miles underneath the Chilterns in Buckinghamshire. HS2 is billed as Europe’s biggest infrastructure project, 22,000 new jobs hinge on successful completion and about £12 billion has been spent to far – roughly a quarter of the total budget.

Phase 1 includes major tunneling work so we have welcomed Cecilia and Florence to help out. These are not the tunneling Project Manager – remember these roles were occupied by women in the Cross Rail Programme – but tunnel boring machines (TBM) – German boring machines. It was not immediately clear why these have been brought into service as I seem to recollect, we had eight German Boring Machines purpose built for Cross Rail. On closer inspection, the HS 2 tunnels are bigger and

¹ How to cite this work: Shepherd, M. (2020). October 2020 UK Project Management Roundup, PM World Journal, Vol. IX, Issue X, October

there are four soil types to burrow through. Cecilia and Florence, built like the eight little maids at CrossRail by Herrenknecht, are huge. According to Align, the joint venture of Bouygues Travaux Publics, VolkerFitzpatrick and Sir Robert McAlpine who will deliver the work:

- The TBMs are 170m in length – nearly 1.5 times the length of a football pitch;
- Each one weighs roughly 2000 tonnes – about the same as 340 African bush elephants;
- Once they start, they will run non-stop for 3.5 years;
- The tunnels will go as deep as 90 metres below ground level – ensuring communities and countryside above are not impacted by the railway;
- The size of the TBM cutterhead which will bore the tunnels is 10.26m, roughly the height of two giraffes standing on top of one another;
- The internal diameter of the tunnels in which the trains will pass through will be 9.1m, slightly larger than two London buses stacked on top of one another.
- The tunnels will be lined with concrete segments that will be 2m x 4m and weigh on average 8.5 tonnes each.
- 112,000 of these concrete segments will be required to complete both tunnels.



The pair are the first variable density TBMs used in the UK specially designed to overcome the ground condition challenges. These machines are expected to run non-stop for 3.5 years.

Notwithstanding world class venues such as the Birmingham Symphony Hall, England has been short of world class concert halls as performers have frequently complained about poor acoustics, particularly in the older venues such as the Royal Albert Hall. Of course, this problem is not confined to England, some complained similarly about the Sydney Opera House. Now, the University of Oxford is seeking to create the city's first "world-class" music venue. Funded by a £150 million gift from **Mr Stephen A. Schwarzman**, chairman and chief executive of Blackstone, the American private equity firm, the concept was released in the summer of 2019. The gift is the biggest philanthropic gift in British history, dwarfing the £100 million donation given to Cambridge University by the British financier **David Harding**.

Professor Louise Richardson, the Oxford vice-chancellor, was quoted in *The Times* saying the gift is "transformative", saying that Britain did not have a "culture of educational philanthropy but I think we are going to have to develop it if we are going to compete successfully globally". She added that "the Harvards, the Yales, the Stanfords have much bigger endowments than we have. . . we have a long way to go to match their endowments and wealth". Arts Council England revealed that the total amount given by philanthropic individuals to arts and culture in England during 2017-18 was £310 million

The concert hall will form part of what is billed as Europe's largest humanities campus. The Stephen A Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, is expected to cost £230 million. It will incorporate a library, a 500-seat concert hall, a 250-seat auditorium and a broadcasting centre, plus an Institute for Ethics in Artificial Intelligence.

Not to be outdone by these major projects the Parliament Refurbishment Project limps on. The latest wheeze is a transparent pop-up Parliament venue. Proposed by **Lord Foster**, the architect behind projects such as the Millau Viaduct and London's Gherkin, the idea is the brainchild of the property magnate **Sir John Ritblat**,



Pop-up Parliament by Lord Foster. Image courtesy DELANCEY FOSTER

The purpose-built temporary building is planned to be erected on Horse Guards Parade, a few hundred yards from the Commons. Those who watch British ceremonial occasions will recall that Horse Guards Parade is where the Queen's Birthday Parade takes place each June. Colloquially known as the Trooping of the Colour, it attracts enormous crowds. The parade square was also the location of the Beach Volleyball competition during the London Olympics so is well used to colourful events.

The pop-up is cheap at only £300 million, a mere bagatelle when set against the £4 billion planned cost of the repairs. Given normal construction underestimates, we can expect the final bill to be much larger.

ENERGY PROJECTS

Another change, and one apparently not driven by the virus, is the shift to wind power by two major oil and gas conglomerates. First we learn that Shell is investing in off-shore wind farms. The idea is to raise profit margins by using the surplus energy these farms generate to produce hydrogen that can be used to charge batteries. A press release claims that using this method to store energy, and installing floating solar panels next to the turbines, should enable it to offer "a continuous power supply", even when the wind isn't blowing.

A pilot project is under construction to put the technologies through trials at a new wind farm off the coast of the Netherlands. If successful, the technology could be deployed more widely across the industry, according to the company.

Not to be left out, BP has announced a \$1.1 billion deal to part-own projects off the United States. Partnering with Equinor, 67 per cent-owned by the Norwegian government, BP is buying a 50 per cent interest in two leases off New York and Massachusetts, where it plans to build four wind farms. The farms will have a planned capacity of 4.4 gigawatts, enough to power more than two million homes.

This latest deal is part of BP's strategy, announced in 2019, to increase its investment in green energy. The aim is to develop 50 gigawatts of renewable power capacity by 2030, up sharply from 2.5 gigawatts last year. **Bernard Looney**, the company's chief executive, has set a goal of eliminating its carbon footprint to net zero by 2050.

These two announcements come against the UK Government's most recent policy statement on renewables. UK will reduce net carbon emissions to zero by 2050. Whitehall departments were given until last 11 September to submit proposals for inclusion in OIL's address. It is also expected that Mr Johnson plans to use new post-Brexit state-aid freedoms to foster green industries for coastal and post-industrial communities. All this is pointing to floating wind turbines.

Floating farms would slash the cost of offshore wind energy hope senior Ministers. The Crown Estate, which controls the energy development rights of the UK coast, approved plans for a pilot project off the Pembrokeshire coast last month. Floating wind farms, in waters too deep for turbines and using technologies from the offshore oil and gas industry, open possibilities for more ocean exploitation without the pollution.

CONSTRUCTION NEWS

The construction industry is widely seen as critical to most national economies and so technical developments, particularly those that affect the management of projects are very important. One major problem in UK is obtaining permission to build. Major construction projects are regularly stalled for years as debates between special interest groups and developers, planners and policy wonks rage. HS2 and Heathrow runway projects are classic examples. So new rules announced by the Government have received mixed reviews.

On one hand, it is well recognised that speeding up infrastructure is critical. The Prime Minister (PM) announced a spending plan to include road improvement, hospital development, school construction and other infrastructure. The PM also wants what he calls “shovel ready” projects to boost local growth, including provision of £12 billion for affordable homes. In order to achieve such growth, planning laws will need to be “streamlined”. This has raised concerns that such tweaks will be a race to the bottom as eighteen major conservation charities call for more local accountability and democratic planning rather than any further deregulation.

The issue here is who is accountable? These multi-million £ charitable entities who are themselves not as transparent as ordinary members would wish and whose interests often do not serve local interests or local authorities. What is the role of the developer and their stakeholders? Most project managers would say that some balance is needed but we see little of that as stakeholders adopt entrenched positions and nothing gets done.

On a slightly brighter note, there are proposals to fast track the development of modular homes. This investment programme proposes to build 75,000 modular homes a year by 2030, creating up as many as 50,000 jobs and reducing carbon emissions from new homes by 40 %. The proposals are outlined in a policy paper co-authored by **Mark Farmer**, the government’s “champion for modern methods of construction”. According to press reports, the paper has been well received by **Jack Airey**, head of housing policy at No 10, and **Tim Leunig**, economic adviser to the Chancellor.

SMALL PROJECTS

There is always a plethora of small projects but the wretched virus has spawned many linked to cycling. Even in sleepy Salisbury, we have had our street system degraded to prevent cars from using the city centre while “encouraging” cyclists. We have very few cyclists and other expensive schemes have failed to bring the anticipated droves of pedallers onto the roads, so locals expect more congestion and few cyclists.

Pedal power has succeeded in prising £45 million out of the Government, though, to fund proposals by the Canal and River Trust to improve 30 stretches of canal towpaths. Many of these footpaths are in inner city area and can provide valuable space for exercise so the plan to reinstate 100 miles of towpath is popular. It is also a good example of a portfolio of small projects. The Government has committed £2 billion over the next 5 years to encourage more cycling and walking.

PM ISSUES

The Association for Project Management (APM) announced their new Board Chair. **Debbie Lewis** has officially become the organisation's new chair, following her election by the Board. She joins recently appointed President, Sue Kershaw, and CEO Debbie Dore to make up an all-female senior management team.

Currently director of strategic architecture programmes at BT, Ms Lewis manages a portfolio of large-scale complex programmes that underpin BT's network and IT architectural ambitions. Previously she was programme director for establishing BT's Ultrafast and 5G programmes.



Debbie Lewis APM Chair (Image APM)

In her APM role, which she will fulfil for a two-year term, Ms Lewis will be focusing on further strengthening APM's membership proposition and reinforcing its position as the chartered body of the project profession internationally. She takes over the role from **John McGlynn**, director at design, engineering and project management at consultancy Atkins, who was elected as a trustee in 2014 and as chair in 2016. Mr McGlynn brought much needed senior management experience to APM that combined with his technical PM expertise as APM implemented the many changes brought about as part of the Royal Charter requirements.

Milla Mazilu has been elected as second deputy chair, alongside incumbent Alistair Godbold, who will continue in that role. Milla Mazilu will serve a one-year term as deputy chair.

APM has just released its Members Review for 2019/2020 ahead of its Annual General Meeting to be held on-line in November. Headline numbers look good with an 11% increase in membership, driven by a sharp increase in student members (up 3,000 on the year). Current membership is over 33,000. Corporate membership stands at 542, including associates and there has been an 18% jump in overseas membership. In the year to end March 2020, more than 20,000 people achieved an APM qualification and Chartered Membership topped 1000, a major milestone.

Against this very strong performance, some problems emerged as Covid-19 hit and the country went into lock-down. All APM qualifications were paper based and required face to face examination. Clearly this wasn't going to work during lock-down so APM accelerated its programme to enable all qualifications to be delivered remotely. As 50% of its income is generated by qualification, this was clearly a project of major importance and one that APM brought forward: it had originally been planned to start work after the new qualification had been introduced. That the qualification suite is now available on-line is a tribute to effective project management.

Those who follow Association matters will know that APM offer a full on-line programme which this year included transferring their conference programme to web-based presentation and a number of additional webinars have proved highly successful, attracting a broader audience than many traditional offerings. Amongst

other events, special Fellows Forums were added to the line up, targeting the senior level members. The education and research offering has also be ramped up and will be the subject of next month's report.

One of the more useful moves in UK infrastructure project management has been to require all Senior Responsible Managers, the civil servant in charge of major projects, to successfully complete the prestigious 1 year programme at the Major Project Leadership Academy, part of Saïd Business School. The bespoke programme was developed at a cost of around £934,000. Now, the School has been accused of cutting and pasting the programme from one of their own existing programmes.

The claims come as part of an employment tribunal where an Oxford graduate who took a senior role at the school, said that it misled the Cabinet Office. According to press reports, the "major project leadership academy" was established to build "the skills of senior project leaders across government". According to the report the bespoke programme ". . . looked like a copy and paste job, despite the proposal and tender documents having stated that the [school] would 'amend and adapt' [the existing module's] design and content." Apparently, the material looked very similar to the Masters in Major Project Management available at the school. Personal experience leads me to think it would be very unusual if existing material was not adapted and naive to expect entirely new material.

COVID PROJECTS

There are any number of Pharma projects linked to the virus and I have no intention of reporting them, except to say that Oxford Phase 3 trial has restarted after a brief stop to investigate possible adverse side-effects. A report in *The Times* stated that new enrolment on trials had been halted after a British volunteer showed symptoms of transverse myelitis, a rare inflammatory condition that affects the spinal cord. Professor **Ian Jones**, professor of virology at the University of Reading, said: "It's inflammation of nervous tissue which can be caused by a number of agents, one of which is viruses. The stoppage might be because the symptoms are plausibly linked to the vaccine, although it could be something else." The volunteer has since been released from hospital and the trial restarted.

Of more concern, at least nationally is the shambles surrounding the development of the English and Welsh track and trace app rolled out in September. First, it could not accept negative test results, then it was discovered that results from tests taken via the National Health Service or Public Health England cannot be reported either. Concerns over lack of compatibility with older phone operating systems and reporting of false positive results have also emerged. While some of these flaws are simply wrongly reported in the press, where lack of understanding of technology and statistics is rife, there are deeply worrying issues that need to be fixed. The project management implications are not limited to testing failures: specifications must have been developed hastily and lessons learned from the £11 million failure of the previous system do not seem to have been applied. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland have already introduced their own individual contact tracing apps, which users can switch to should they visit either country.

BREXIT

Finally, BREXIT is drawing to a close. When I started writing this report, we had 96 days to go till the end of the transition period – the time remaining is even less by the time you read this. Reports are seeming out about post-BREXIT trading arrangements. **Lord Frost**, the UK's negotiator, and **Michel Barnier**, his European counterpart, will begin the ninth round of talks just before the end of September. The main issues seem to be around fishing rights and state aid. The London press seems upbeat and reports that European negotiators have indicated for the first time that they are prepared to start writing a joint legal text of a trade agreement with the UK, before fresh talks begin at the end of September.

If the ninth round of talks go well then negotiators, will hope to enter the “tunnel”, where the final details will be hammered out in total secrecy, at the end of September. The expectation is that this would then lead to two weeks of secret discussions and a final agreement to be put in place just after the next EU summit in Brussels in mid-October.

CLOSING REMARKS

Readers will be welcome news of two animal stories this month. First, a giant rat has been awarded an animal bravery award for its work clearing mines in south east Asia. Magawa, an African giant pouched rat, who sniffed out 39 landmines, is the first rodent given the ‘animal George Cross’. While this is a spectacular achievement for a class of animal that normally attracts revulsion, spare a thought for the humble locust. These voracious critters apparently have a sense of smell that can detect and track new odours within a few hundred milliseconds, using about 50,000 smell sensors in their antennae. We are more used to dogs as the traditional animal for sniffing explosives, but now the need is to get into hard-to-reach spaces, and the military are looking towards a smaller option and we learn that The US Navy has invested \$750,000 (£560,000) in a research project to design a “bomb-sniffing cyborg locust”, and turn the pest into a sophisticated weapon. The project began in 2016 so this is a long-term project!

And finally, Londoners (there are almost no tourists in Town) can be reassured that the world has some stability – the project to restore the Elizabeth Tower which houses Big Ben emerged from its wrapping as we closed for press.

About the Author



Miles Shepherd

Salisbury, UK



Miles Shepherd is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World Journal 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. His consulting work has taken him to Japan, Taiwan and USA. Past Chair and Hon Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president, chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He was a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is immediate past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He is currently Chairman of the British Standards Institute project management committee. 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.