

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

I'm still in catch-up mode so there are some older stories in this edition as I work through the news since Easter.

GOOD NEWS

I always like to start with some good news, for two reasons: first, there is plenty of it about but you need to look for it, and second, projects are much more successful than the general public realise. So if we don't tell people about our successes, they just won't be able to pick out the good bits from the mass of negative rubbish in the Press.

Environmental projects feature more regularly these days as the world at last begins to appreciate the problems we are storing up for future generations. Serious work in the aircraft industry has been reported on these pages since 2020 when we commented on the use of hydrogen as a replacement fuel for aircraft. ZeroAvia have conducted test flights in UK earlier this year using a hydrogen fuel cell to power a modified twin engine Dornier 228.



Image: ZeroAvia

Only one engine used power from the fuel cell but the tests were successful and ZeroAvia are moving ahead with further tests in mid-July at the Cotswold Airport in Kemble, in UK. According to the Company, second test-bed plane will take flight in the coming months near ZeroAvia's headquarters in Hollister, California. The two dual-engine aircraft will use fuel

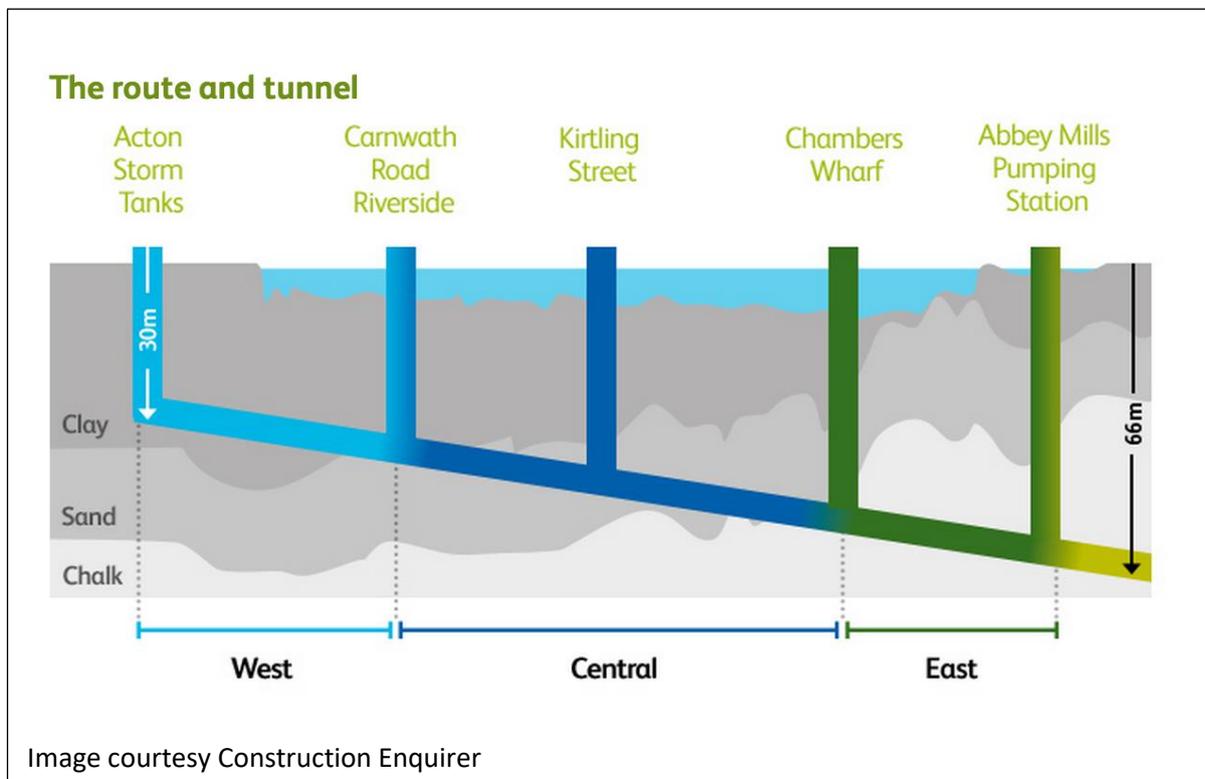
cells which convert hydrogen into electricity to drive propellers and batteries on one side, while a conventional jet engine will be used on the other side.



There are other electric aircraft, with one in Slovenia already certified for use and in UK we have the Sherwood eKub (at left), developed at Cranfield University by a consortium of the university, the Light Aircraft Company, Flylight Airports and CDO.

Readers may recall our reports of the Rolls Royce electric aircraft test flights at Boscombe Down where two world records were set. The non-oil concept is attracting a great deal of interest from major aircraft firms such as Boeing and Airbus. The advantage that hydrogen brings is the lack of harmful emissions as the only waste product is water. Electric also seems promising but how to scale up to passenger aircraft is the problem

The next bit of good news is the completion of London's Super Sewer. It's proper title is the Thames Tideway Tunnel. The original concept was raised over 20 years ago and construction began in 2016. The Thames Tideway Tunnel runs under the River Thames for 16 miles, from Acton in the west to Abbey Mills in the east. Tunnelling was completed at the end of April, just six years after construction started.



Construction of the tunnel followed the process that has become familiar on other major tunnelling projects such as Crossrail and HS2, in this case boring was done by 6 very large tunnelling machines – each named after formidable women pioneers from London’s history. These are now dismantled prior to the tunnel being given its secondary lining before it is brought into operation in 2025. This will be a few months behind schedule, thanks to the pandemic. Historically minded readers will recall the “Great Stink” in the summer of 1858. That resulted in the original sewer works by Sir Joseph Bazalgette and this system has been largely unchanged since the mid-Victorian era. Tunnelling costs were around £3.8 bn and preparations came in at £1.1 bn, all funded by Thames Water’s customers! The benefits are reduced risk of overpowering the system, local flooding and major reduction in sewage release into the Thames.

POSSIBLY GOOD NEWS

A long running debate over a subsea power cable is nearing its end. Called the NewConnect Interlink, the project is supposed to deliver a 725km from the Isle of Grain in Kent to Fedderwarden in the Wilhelmshaven region of Germany. This is a complicated proposal as the cable would run through British, Dutch and German waters. However, It would have the capacity of 1.4 gigawatts in either direction, which apparently is enough to power 1.5 million homes.

This is a speculative proposal which was originally due to start up as early as this year. It has been pushed back repeatedly and according to press reports, is not now expected to start up before 2028. NeuConnect has cited a series of issues including supply chain constraints with cabling manufacturers, regulatory delays in Germany and the pandemic. This was before the Russian invasion of Ukraine which has hit energy supplies as Russian gas supplies to Western European states, and especially Germany, have been severely curtailed. In the short term, it looks unlikely that Germany would have any surplus electricity to feed into the supply system and UK is not yet in a surplus situation either. The business case looks somewhat shaky.



UK has several power links to Europe: two subsea links to France, one to the Netherlands, one to Belgium and a new link with Norway that started up late last year as reported in my New Year report. Decarbonisation plans are, apparently, under threat without energy links between European nations. These links reduce costs by helping to smooth out fluctuations in renewable power output in different areas, enabling surplus wind power to be exported rather than wasted. Other interconnections are under construction: one to Denmark and another to France via the Channel Tunnel.

There are other problems, too. Such schemes require major cooperation between political regimes to say nothing of regulatory agreements so with the regular spat over BREXIT, French threats to “turn off the power” as a bargaining chip do not sit well with UK planners. This latest threat is linked to the £1.2 bn project to connect the British and French electricity grids. One British Minister has called the project a threat to UK energy security. The end result was an abandoned project.

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

The impact of the sanctions on Russia have had repercussions in the project world. Many multinationals have pulled out of Russian based projects at great cost. An example is Shell which announced its withdrawal last month. Shell is reported to be taking a \$5 bn hit as President Putin signed a decree taking control of the Sakhalin-2 project.

As reported in The Times (1 July) Shell said in February that its Sakhalin-2 stake, combined with its interests in other Gazprom projects such as the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, were together valued at \$3 billion. It then said that it intended to withdraw from Russia altogether after an outcry at its continued purchases of oil, adding that it expected impairments related to its exit of up to \$5 billion. Analysts claim that Sakhalin-2 could supply about 4% of world liquid gas supplies.

All this is on top of another London-listed energy major pulling out of Russia. BP plans to offload its stake in the Russian oil giant Rosneft. Back in June, BP reported that it had written off the entire value of its stake and had booked a total of \$24.4 billion in non-cash charges related to its decision to exit Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

With oil and gas supplies under threat, and electricity prices going through the roof, attention turns to other forms of energy supply. One not-so-welcome supply is coal. We have worked hard to replace coal as a fuel for over a decade but with the unexpected losses of overseas energy, plans need to be made to keep the lights on over the winter and Ministers are reported to be turning to coal. EDF, the French energy giant, announced that it would keep open the two remaining at its West Burton A plant in Nottinghamshire to stay open until the end of March 2023, instead of closing in September as planned. EDF is reported to be finalising a deal to support the plans with National Grid’s electricity system operator.

There are other options, particularly on the nuclear front and I will be covering recent developments in my next report.

APM NEWS

Project People in UK know that this year is a big one for the Association for Project Management as it hits its 50th birthday. There is a lot on its website (www.apm.org.uk) and in *Project*, its quarterly magazine so the themes are well reported. Recent events include the Power of Projects conference held at London’s Park Plaza Riverbank. This flagship conference returned to face-to-face format to celebrate APM's 50th anniversary and explored leadership, sustainability and diversity in the profession.

The Fellows Forum held at the Institute of Directors dealt with relations with the C-Suite.

Another aspect of the 50th Anniversary celebrations is the review of what APM recognise as the 50 most significant projects of the last 50 years. There is a blog on the topic here <https://www.apm.org.uk/blog/reflections-on-five-decades-of-incredible-projects/>

You may also want to look at APM's new strategy at <https://www.apm.org.uk/about-us/apm-strategy/>.

CLOSING REMARKS

And now for something completely different. These are two local project related stories concerning birds. The first is a good news item which shows the power of projects in different environments. Two charities have been working on a project since 2017 to restore a breeding population of Ospreys to the South Coast.

The project involves moving 60 juvenile Ospreys from Scottish nests into the Poole Harbour area. This translocation process is intended to create a bond between the young Ospreys and their new local area, before they leave on their first treacherous migration, usually to West Africa. This bond draws the Ospreys back to Poole Harbour on their return to the UK, after at least 2 years maturing in their wintering grounds, when they will identify suitable nesting sites. The translocation therefore lays the foundations for their return as a breeding bird to the South Coast, 180 years on from their local extinction. The really good news is that the first pair of Ospreys have nested in Poole Harbour this summer and can be seen on the project webcam here <https://www.birdsofpooleharbour.co.uk/osprey/osprey-webcams/>



Image: Vicki Jauron, Babylon and Beyond Photography / Getty Images

The other story is one that prompts a lesson learned. As part of a major rail upgrade and development programme, the multi-million-pound A35 Holmsley bridge project was halted for a month. Hampshire County Council's £5.5 million rail bridge replacement works on the A35 at Holmsley, in the New Forest, are fully finished after the delay, and the C10 Station Road under the bridge reopened after lengthy delays caused by nesting chicks. The key road was due to reopen in mid-April but was delayed due to the presence of the newly hatched chicks nesting beneath a bridge support. A second clutch of eggs were then reported, further delaying works. Now that the second clutch has fledged, the project can be completed. And the lesson? Well, check on the time of year your project starts and anticipate delays in rural areas. I have to say, the second clutch would have caught me out!

And so we end the UK report. Normal service will be resumed next month now that the most important back stories have been cleared.

About the Author



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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, USA and Russia. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He was, for seven years, 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.