

UK Project Management Round Up¹



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GOOD NEWS

Had to look pretty hard to find good news but it IS there if you look hard enough and look in some unexpected places.

First up is HS2. The good news is that Euston remains in the HS 2 Plan. You might not think this is good news but what it means is that key Governmental people such as the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, see that HS 2 will continue into one of central London's major rail termini rather than terminate somewhere out in the sticks, as has been rumoured in recent weeks, with possible options of an end point at Old Oak Common. There is a slight problem in that Our Illustrious Leader (now known as Current Our Illustrious Leader or COIL) has reminded the electorate that when he was Chancellor, he announced the integrated rail plan. This would improve journey times, reliability and frequency "across the North, across the Midlands and everywhere in between." The small problem is that he made no mention of London. Now this might mean COIL has a problem knowing where London lies in England or that it only figures as an afterthought. Some will take comfort from the words of the current Chancellor who stated last week that he did not see "any conceivable circumstance" in which the line would permanently end at Old Oak Common in west London, rather than the central station of Euston.

Next we have the War in Ukraine. I never thought there would be any possible good coming out of this appalling assault on an independent country but the war is speeding up transitions to renewables as major companies like BP move out of oil and into renewable power and energy efficiency. There are reports, too, that Germany is no longer dependent on Russian gas.

¹ How to cite this work: Shepherd, M. S. (2023). UK Project Management Round Up, report, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XII, Issue II, February.



Major UK investment in offshore wind power. [NHD-INFO/Flickr]

Then we have the news that UK is now a net energy exporter with electricity exported to Europe soaring as our use of wind and solar power increases. *The Times* reported that in 2022, UK Renewable power sources generated in excess of 40 per cent of Britain's electricity needs for the first time as both wind and solar output increased, according to the analysis by Imperial College London for Drax Electric Insights. This

allowed more electricity to be exported to Europe than ever before. Wind and solar generation hit all-time highs, according to the first analysis of the year's power mix.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

It seems that everywhere you look in the UK press (and no doubt in other countries too) the march of artificial intelligence (AI) is reported. In the last week alone, my daily paper has 27 stories linked to AI. I was interested to learn that an AI robotics firm uses 3D cameras and artificial intelligence to spot broccoli heads ready to be picked, even when they are obscured by leaves, and gently separates them from the plant. The



Robotic broccoli harvester reported in *The Times*

device, pictured left, can work in fields around the clock: a boon for farms amid the shortage of agricultural workers.

Elsewhere, we learn that AI in the form of ChatBOT is causing the demise of homework, as some schools are having to abandon traditional essays that test what children know because artificial intelligence software is so powerful, it can write these for the kids.

The artificial intelligence bot has speeded up the use of "flipped learning", which involves students preparing at home for discussions and assessments in class. I'll be interested to see how this affects my own work at universities where students are required to write up their research.

Less scary are reports that AI can reduce the cost of some highly expensive MRI scans by reducing the need for dye injections (it does this by using AI to interpret results that do not need the same level of resolution needed by the human eye). Similarly, AI is used in cancer screening and several other medical applications.

The next area for AI investigation must surely be to report on project progress. AI is already used in military scenario planning and it would seem a simple step to apply similar logic to project performance. Would that produce better understanding of progress management, more accurate reporting and improvements in the woeful performance of estimators? Anything that encourages better project outcomes is surely to be encouraged.

Before we all panic, AI has not led to the elimination of humans in those industries where it has been implemented, despite claims that AI will kill the creative industries just because it can write a politician’s speech. In fact, press reports note that AI such as ChatGPT just regurgitates text that it has been trained on and has no understanding of the real world, so lacks basic intelligence. **Yann LeCun**, Meta’s chief AI scientist no less, views ChatGPT as “a flashy demo,” as he told the Big Technology Podcast. “From the scientific point of view, GPT is not a particularly interesting scientific advance.” Further, he says that most of human intelligence is not text-related, and involves a control planning system created by evolution. None of that is captured by any AI system – YET! What AI can do is harness the potential of data analytics to bring about significant improvement to project management in all its forms.

CLOSING REMARKS

Regular readers will know that I like to end by highlighting projects in the world of conservation. This month I have been out on the Norfolk coast birdwatching. Not too much related to projects there you might think. But you would be wrong. I noted on a nature reserve that illustrated portfolio planning in its set of 5 river regeneration projects. The conservation charity used results from other projects in its portfolio to help plan this group as well as for training their project managers – yes, they actually have real PMs and call them by their job title. In my week up country, I visited 11 reserves: every one of them has one or more properly planned and managed projects that vary from the aforementioned river regeneration via beaver engineering programs to “simple” construction projects to improve visitor access. All very encouraging!

If you are wondering what I saw on my travels, I can reveal sightings of Richardson’s Cackling Goose (I thought all geese cackled), numerous Marsh Harriers and a long eared owl among the 102 species sighted.



Rischaradson’s Cackling Goose
©Steve Percival



Marsh Harrier © Laurie Webb



Long Eared Owl Courtesy The Guardian and Mark Cocker

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.