

Mark Thurston: The critical role HS2 will play in the country's short-term economic recovery

May 20, 2020



It has been little over a month since HS2 Ltd was given Government approval to issue notice to proceed.

But since that time, despite the challenges facing the whole country with COVID-19, the construction of Britain's new high-speed railway has accelerated ahead.

Just last night the **Old Oak Common station** gained planning approval and is set to be the largest newly built railway station in the UK.

In the last few weeks **Curzon Street station in Birmingham** has been granted planning approval, while the station to be built in Solihull has become the first railway station globally to achieve the BREEAM 'Outstanding' certification.

The vast opportunities of the multi-billion pound project are also being realised with the searches having started for **lift and escalators**, **track system suppliers**, and **signalling and control system** contractors – all of which total in excess of £3 billion.

Mark Thurston is a British electrical engineer and businessman who is Chief Executive of HS2 Ltd. He has written the article below for railbusinessdaily.com about why it's a project the whole country can get behind.

"As the UK emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, we at HS2 see the project as playing a critical role in the country's short-term economic recovery, and the longer-term challenge of levelling-up the regions and transforming the way we live, work and travel in Britain.

The HS2 project today looks quite different to the original plans drawn-up in 2009, but the ambition remains the same – to provide a new, low carbon, railway that will release capacity on the existing crowded rail network, while greatly improving connectivity in the North and Midlands.

After years of planning, design refinement and a comprehensive review, last month the Government granted HS2 Ltd the Notice to Proceed for our four main works civils contractors on Phase One of the project between London and the West Midlands.

In these uncertain times, the start of full construction of HS2 is a shot in the arm to our industry. Around 9,000 jobs are already supported by the project. At its peak that figure will reach 30,000 including 2,000 apprentices – employed directly on our sites and tens of thousands more in the supply chain around the country.

An estimated 400,000 supply chain contract opportunities for UK businesses will be created during Phase One of HS2. Our assessment is that around 95% of those contract opportunities will be won by British-based businesses and around two thirds of those will be small and medium sized businesses.

HS2 is a true national endeavour.

Companies across the country will be involved in HS2's construction. Once the full route is complete, nearly half of the UK population will be linked to HS2 services. And even if you don't live along the line, HS2 will improve your existing services by releasing capacity and taking cars and lorries off the roads.

The likes of Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester are already benefitting several years before the railway opens, as businesses move into those cities in anticipation of the new connectivity. It's estimated that HS2 will create nearly 500,000 new jobs and around 90,000 new homes in the Midlands and the North.

HS2 will also take advantage of new low-carbon materials and technology as well as new energy-efficient electric trains which, powered by an increasingly decarbonised national grid, means HS2 is integral to the UK's drive to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Creating jobs and skills now, improving our economy, travel and environment in the future – HS2 is something the whole country can get behind."

Mark Thurston, Chief Executive of HS2 Ltd