

Stations – Places not Spaces

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*Jon Bishop who leads **Arcadis'** Stations Hub, a virtual team of professionals who are passionate about stations, discusses aspects of good inclusive and connected design for our future stations.*

Stations are complex environments with rigorous engineering requirements and standards. They are first, however, places for people and need to be designed to give all members of the public equal access to and enjoyment of the connectivity and networks they link.

This starts with access. Step-free access is a bare minimum requirement; when considering how accessible a station is factors such as light and glare, sound reverberation, air quality, legibility and multi-mode connections need to be considered. All of these influence the ability of people to enter and use a station environment.

As part of this, wayfinding in stations is key to how successfully they are used. Wayfinding should be intuitive, helped by visual connections between decision making points that enable passengers to quickly observe and proceed with their journey. Reducing decision making points eases passenger anxiety and helps to minimise congestion. Where passenger flows vary dramatically, smart signage strategies can be used linked to station data. Use of directional tactile surfaces in floors to assist partially sighted or blind passengers is important to help their navigation.

Natural light can enhance wayfinding, is beneficial for well-being and can help passengers emerging from underground environments to orientate and adjust themselves as they exit the transit system.

Returning to public transport after COVID-19, we can expect passengers to have a heightened awareness of the quality of environment they experience. Robust finishes, cleanliness and hygiene are foundational aspects to instilling confidence in the station environment; quality materials and beauty will amplify comfort and ease.

Stations are a link between two domains: network and public realm. A passenger approaching from either benefits from being able to recognise their destination through a clear visual identity in the station architecture. Using bold iconic gestures or subtle creative interventions, stations are an opportunity to introduce delight to the mundane.

Human centred design for stations, means creating an environment where people feel they belong as much a train and its tracks. It means following good design principles so that safe construction, operation and maintenance of a station is delivered in parallel to prioritising the passenger experience.

Connected Design

Stations are nodes connecting people between places on a local, regional and global scale. But station architecture is also responsible for linking public realm, mixed-use developments and multiple transport modes within the immediate vicinity.

The future station is more than a single point of entry to and from a network; it is stitched into the urban realm it serves and is responsive in providing for the needs of its users.

Until this year, the way we live was increasingly mobile. During the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen how people can continue to live and work with limited travel. Our railways and stations are now competing with technology in the form of MS Teams/Zoom and work life balance as well as traditional competition from buses, trams, and private cars.

When emerging from the station or arriving at it, passengers have multiple transport modes to choose. Stations should play a role in creating seamless onward connections to other transport modes, encouraging sustainable travel wherever possible and embracing emerging technologies such as Electric cars and scooters and E-VTOL aircraft in the future.

Where location used to be a dominant factor, we can anticipate the public paying more attention to the quality of places when choosing where to live, work and play. To be resilient through shifting trends, it is critical that stations are perceived as places that offer an experience beyond thoroughfare and recognised as role players in activating urban areas. This might be catalysing development or hosting diverse community and commercial functions that animate stations areas through peaks and troughs of passenger footfall.

Active travel is a healthy, sustainable choice and can be a safe, attractive option where the appropriate infrastructure is provided. The future station is a hub where people arrive and continue their journey

without hassle, finding what they need to orientate, replenish and move at their pace.

If the space is provided, station areas can be places where people meet, chat and dwell. Good quality public spaces are the essence to any form of civic function and how well they are used is the temperature check on just how good quality it is. The station forecourt is the anchor between station and public realm, it can be a passenger's first or final impression of how valued their civilian presence is in the city and on the network.

The future station does not have a red line around it. It is integral to the physical and social fabric surrounding it and the design choices we make to shape how this transport infrastructure meets the ground will impact just how effective it is in integrating with and activating urban areas.

- [Arcadis](#) recently announced it had joined forces with [Linxon](#) and [SSE Contracting](#), to power up a greener and more effective railway, delivering the HV solution as one.

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