



London needs project Crossrail

Baroness Jo Valentine is Chief Executive of London First the business organisation which has campaigned tirelessly for the Crossrail project.

Crossrail is moving from drawing to drilling, from idea to reality. This morning the Mayor and Transport Minister jointly celebrated the commencement of works on the new Canary Wharf Crossrail station, underneath the dock at the Isle of Dogs. It is another green signal passed on a journey towards the first passengers climbing aboard in 2017. Work is underway or in preparation in many other parts of the route. Tottenham Court Road Tube station is being enlarged to prepare for the new line. The voids for the Paddington and Moorgate stations have been incorporated into redevelopments completed in the last few years.

The funding agreement, with contributions from business and farepayers as well as from Government, offers excellent value for money for taxpayers, supporting as it does the continued success of London, the engine of the UK economy. The people are in place, the lead contractors have been appointed..... Crossrail already has a head of steam.

In eight years time, Crossrail will bring 72,000 people per hour at peak time to and from the capital's centre, linking Heathrow directly to Canary Wharf and London's Thames Gateway to the City and the West End. It will add ten per cent at a stroke to London's rail transport capacity. In East London, the regeneration catalysed by the Olympics will be hammered home by East Enders being better connected to the rest of the capital.

Some may ask if we can afford it. Wrong question. Can we afford not to build Crossrail?

To the surprise of many Londoners, when overseas investors are quizzed about London's comparative attractiveness to other international cities, our transport networks are regularly cited as a strength. But complacency would be dangerous.

Crossrail was canned in the recession of the early nineties, because the transport planners believed that the effects of recession would last forever and that fewer people would need to commute into central London. Every toe-trodden, squashed nose Tube commuter knows that that was a bad call. We needed Crossrail ten years ago; we will need it so much more by 2017. Without it, and the vital improvements to the Tube, London will slowly grind to a halt and business and jobs will go elsewhere – to Frankfurt, Paris or New York.

Now is exactly the right time to be building Crossrail. Construction materials are cheaper in a downturn. Civil engineering jobs are more valuable in a recession. London needs project Crossrail now and Crossrail the railway, as soon as possible.

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