

ExploreStation

Building momentum for a future passenger hub
September 2022

ExploreStation is led by the Design Council and delivered in partnership with Commonplace, DigitalUrban and The Glass-House Community Led Design.

Supported by



About the Design Council

The Design Council is the UK’s national strategic advisor for design, championing design and its ability to make life better for all. It is an independent and not for profit organisation incorporated by Royal Charter. The Design Council uniquely works across all design sectors and delivers programmes with business, government, public bodies and the third sector. The work encompasses thought leadership, tools and resources, showcasing excellence, and research to evidence the value of design and influence policy. It’s Design for Planet mission was introduced in 2021 to galvanise and support the 1.97 million people who work in the UK’s design economy to help achieve net zero and beyond.

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Image courtesy of 7N Architects
depicting station design at stage one
of ExploreStation

Background

Network Rail want to continue and expand on the enduring legacy of Great Britain's railway stations to create the transport hubs of the future.

To aid this vision, it is working to transform the way people and communities engage and interact with local stations, by recognising and enhancing their potential as civic assets.

In 2019 there were over 1.8 billion rail passenger journeys in Great Britain. Many people's daily lives are shaped by their experiences of rail travel, from the spaces passed through on departure and arrival to the trains travelled on and the mobile apps used for navigating connections.

Network Rail own Great Britain's railway infrastructure, including over 20,00 miles of railway tracks, bridges, tunnels, viaducts and operational buildings. This includes over 2,500 stations which are the gateway to the UK's railway for millions of people across Britain — the majority of these stations are small to medium in size, placing Network Rail at the heart of local communities across the nation.

Category D, E and F Stations

Great Britain’s railway stations are classified into six categories from A to F, based on the volume of passenger trips per year. Small to medium stations are identified as D, E and F stations.

Approximately 80% of Network Rail’s stations – over 2,000 – are classified as small to medium (or D, E and F stations). By improving the quality and experience of the most commonly occurring categories of stations, Network Rail will positively affect millions of lives.

D

Medium sized stations

Staffed
0.25-0.5 million trips
per annum
298 stations across Britain



Wood Street Station, Category D
© Luke O'Donovan

E

Small sized stations

Staffed
Under 0.25 million trips
per annum
679 stations across Britain



Corby Station, Category E

F

Small sized stations

Unstaffed
Under 0.25 million trips
per annum
1,200 stations across Britain



Goostrey Station, Category F

Priorities for future transport hubs

In 2019-20, the Design Council, alongside Network Rail, ran a national engagement programme called ThinkStation. Over the course of three months, eleven workshops were held in four cities and the Design Council spoke to more than 320 people representing a cross-section of the British public. This built an understanding of the priorities for future railway stations and helped to shape the brief for an emerging national passenger hub.



Through these ThinkStation conversations, nine key priorities were identified for the next generation of railway stations:

- 1 Support existing and new communities in their local area
- 2 Reflect and embody local character and heritage
- 3 Provide consistent quality of space and service
- 4 Establish connections with and between town centres and/or high streets
- 5 Celebrate and improve the quality of green spaces and open spaces and/or provide access to them
- 6 Be welcoming and facilitate inclusive travel
- 7 Support and better integrate cross-modal transport
- 8 Help to address climate change
- 9 Ensure longevity by accommodating changes of use, capacity, and trends

Reimagining passenger HUBs

The ThinkStation priorities informed the design brief for Re-Imagining Railways Stations, an international design competition which challenged entrants to re-imagine how transport hubs could act as an interface between communities and the railways in the 21st century.

In May 2021, Network Rail, and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) announced Edinburgh-based 7N Architects as the winner of the *Re-imagining Railway Stations* competition. 7N Architects is leading a design team of ARUP, LUC, and Gardiner & Theobald to further develop their proposals for the HUB Station.

Image courtesy of 7N Architects
depicting station design at stage one
of ExploreStation

The HUB Station Design

The HUB Station aims to create better travel experiences and new community hubs that benefit passengers and local people alike.

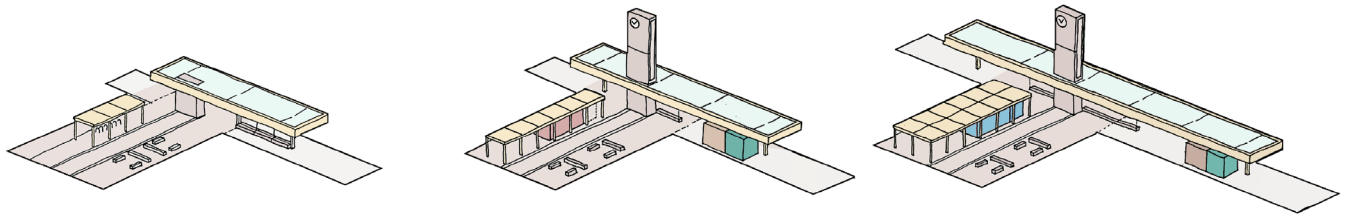
The proposals for the HUB Station take a kit of parts approach that is adaptable to different scales and sites, responding to their social, physical, and environmental context.

“ Our concept is designed to capture the identity of Network Rail in the 21st century as a progressive, sustainable mode of transport with a pivotal civic role in serving communities throughout the country.”

7N Architects

The principles that make HUB Stations different:

- 1 Community stations**
A key ambition of the new design is to enhance the ways in which stations contribute to local communities. This also represents one of its primary innovations– taking stations from places to board and alight from trains to places that can play a role in civic life.
- 2 Open and transparent spaces**
The design proposal brings a sense of lightness and openness to stations. It does this through a minimal structure, security, and fencing that allows sight and movement through the station into surrounding areas.
- 3 Environmental sustainability**
Sustainability is embodied in the HUB Station’s design and approach, generating energy and minimising energy use, activating the station to encourage sustainable and active travel options and ensure the design is flexible and adaptable to meet changing and future needs. One of the most visible sustainable features of the HUB Station are the translucent photovoltaic panel platform canopies which generate renewable energy to provide power for the stations.
- 4 Kit of parts**
The kit can be applied in different configurations to suit stations of varying scales, environments and diverse community needs. Each component can work in isolation, or arranged together in a variety of configurations to deliver a coherent, recognisable, and elegant station. Elements can also be applied to existing stations to adapt their facilities and functionality.
- 5 Inclusive and accessible design**
An inclusive environment is one which works for everybody, both in terms of providing a welcoming space and ensuring physical accessibility. The HUB Station design aims to demonstrate best practices in inclusive design, and to replicate these standards nationally, to create places that are welcoming, easy to navigate and meet the diverse needs of different people.



Examples of the HUB Station design for Category F, D and E stations.

Image courtesy of 7N Architects depicting station design at stage one of ExploreStation.

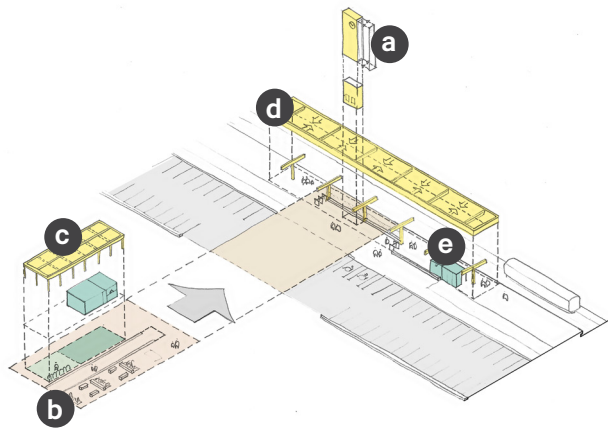


The Kit of parts components:

Components of the station design can be independently created, modified, replaced or exchanged within the larger systems. There are several advantages to a kit of parts approach: faster assembly, easier maintenance and testing, and improved product longevity. There are also technological advantages, especially when it comes to upgrading or improving products. Rather than having to purchase a whole new device or module when the current model becomes obsolete, a kit of parts needs only for the outdated part to be replaced.

- a **The clocktower** — acts as a beacon to help identify the station. Its materials and finish can be adapted to reflect the character of each local area.
- b **The welcome mat** — extends the public space outside the station, creating space between people and cars, inviting people to spend time here.
- c **The activity framework** — can be adapted to the needs of each place, providing space for local communities and small enterprises alongside station facilities such as ticketing and cycle storage.
- d **The photovoltaic (PV) canopy** — even the smallest HUB Stations will include a timber framed platform canopy with integrated PV panels, contributing up to 60% of the station's power needs.
- e **The pods** — create extra shelter under the platform canopy or activity framework. These can include space for passenger facilities such as waiting rooms, toilets or a ticket office.

Image courtesy of 7N Architects



The Design Council

Meaningful engagement is the hallmark of a built environment programme that genuinely cares about its impact and acknowledges that we are at our most powerful together. Engaging on a proposal that has the potential to transform the British public’s relationship with travel, while enhancing their communities, requires ambition and innovation in scope and delivery.

We have been honoured to support Network Rail to innovate and reimagine since 2017. We led ExploreStation with an ambition to take engagement to unprecedented levels and deliver outstanding results.

We are proud to have partnered with organisations that excel in diverse and distinct engagement activities. Commonplace are leaders in online engagement, Digital Urban are pioneers in bringing the world of immersive virtual reality experiences to engagement and The Glass-House Community Led Design’s playful and thoughtful workshops set the standard for collaborative design. The Design Council was supported by Caro Communications and Rowena Hay of Shortwork who joined the team to help tell the story of ExploreStation and evaluate its results respectively. The Design Council extends our sincerest thanks to this whole team, each of whom brought passion and enthusiasm to ExploreStation.

We could not have delivered our programme without the input and co-operation of 7N Architects and their design team and we thank them for incorporating this national conversation in their work. We especially thank Network Rail for this wonderful opportunity to set a new standard for engagement and creating an inspiring and successful exemplar for the built environment and infrastructure sectors.

We also extend our particular thanks to everyone who took the time to participate in our activities and helped shape the HUB Station design. Whether in-person or online we have had the most extraordinary response, proving that a national conversation on railways and infrastructure is welcome and valuable to us all. This programme has been a true testament to the power of collaboration and its ability to inspire and create possibilities.



Minnie Moll
Chief Executive

Foreword

Network Rail

Network Rail’s stations dot our villages, towns and cities creating a presence in our environment that we interact with on a daily basis, whether as passengers or members of communities across Great Britain. We recognised the power of this presence through the ThinkStation engagement programme in 2019/20, when we asked people what future stations could be. We received a resounding response that these buildings and their surrounding spaces could become places for communities in their own right.

The *Re-imagining Railway Stations* competition embedded ThinkStation’s recommendations in the brief and we were delighted with the proposal from 7N Architects. This is a proposal that can be an iconic design, in common with a long line of British designs from the red telephone box to the double decker Routemaster bus. But a place is nothing without its people and humanising a design in a nation with a diversity of people and preferences means prioritising their needs.

Fortunately for us, we had a pathway for accomplishing our goal through our own design principles and the recommendations from the ThinkStation report, both of which commit to continuing the conversation with the British public. We see their input in informing and helping shape the new station design as fundamental to creating welcoming community hubs, which enable seamless travel experiences, across the nation.

ExploreStation confirms the value of this approach. Across activities and conversations, we have been reminded of the high standards expected of Network Rail, especially concerning sustainability, inclusion and local identity. We also now understand what we need to do to meet these standards and embed them into delivery.

What is also amply clear is that a nationally informed design framework alone is not enough. At each location where we hope to deliver the HUB Station it is important that we listen to what communities want in their area. We will continue our conversations with people, as recommended by this report. This will help realise the aspirations set by ThinkStation and continued in ExploreStation, for places that connect people, enhance civic life and bolster local pride and identity.

We think the HUB Station will set a new high standard for what all stations should deliver for the passengers and communities that they serve. The ExploreStation programme has played a vital role in establishing this standard. We are also proud of the new standard that has been set for community engagement and hope this model continues to be replicated by rail, wider transport and national infrastructure providers alike.



Anthony Dewar
Professional Head Buildings and Architecture

ExploreStation opened a conversation with the British public to develop the design and implementation of the HUB Station, Network Rail's new proposed design for small and medium sized stations across Great Britain.

Executive Summary

The engagement programme was commissioned by Network Rail, Britain's rail infrastructure provider, and led by the Design Council, the UK's national strategic advisor for design. The programme was delivered in partnership with Commonplace, Digital Urban and The Glass-House Community Led Design.

Through ExploreStation thousands of people across Britain learned about the HUB Station design, the winning response to the Re-Imagining Railway Stations competition, by 7N Architects with Arup, LUC and Gardiner & Theobald. It innovates the station by transforming it into a community and civic asset.

People could share their thoughts and ideas via an online platform or by participating in activities, such as workshops and exhibitions, immersive virtual reality experiences and design reviews. The public's feedback contributed to setting the standard for how the HUB Station will achieve its aims of addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, while also prioritising people's experiences in terms of resilience, safety, welcome, access and inclusion.

The engagement was carried out in two stages. At each stage, the ExploreStation partners shared their insights and recommendations from the activities they led. This content was, in turn, collated, reviewed and evaluated by the Design Council to identify strategic and detailed insights and recommendations. These insights and recommendations were contained in interim reports that were shared with the design team and Network Rail to inform the developing HUB Station proposal.

ExploreStation's significance

Network Rail's commitment to embedding its design principles — such as inclusive, collaborative, innovative, environment, identity and enhancing heritage — in the creation and delivery of its assets, and its intelligent approach to doing so, is noteworthy.

ExploreStation is the culmination of over four years of research, consultation, competition and development. This includes the development of an implementation strategy giving guidance for how the HUB Station can be adopted and delivered locally, which was also commissioned by Network Rail. The programme reflects a level of industry and public engagement that is unprecedented in the UK in terms of small station design.

In the current global context of post-pandemic social change, the extreme climate emergency, population migration, and economic/political instability, Network Rail's objective of meaningfully collaborating with the public to transform their relationship with its infrastructure and assets has more relevance than could previously have been imagined. The HUB Station is about connecting communities, but doing so in a sustainable way, which addresses the need to build faster and more efficiently. ExploreStation ensures this is not done in a conceptual way, but in a humanistic and regenerative way.

This journey is required from our built environment, transport and infrastructure sectors to tackle how they respond to a world in crisis. It is no longer a choice but an imperative that our products and services contribute to creating a resilient and hopeful future by taking individual responsibility for achieving that vision. This can only be achieved at a strategic level through ambition, boldness and patience. This programme and report give the inspiration and blueprint for success.

How to use this report

This report pulls together the responses, feedback and ideas that emerged from the British public across the whole ExploreStation programme. Following the Design Council’s careful review of all of the content generated over two stages of activities and consequent insights, the report is structured as follows:

- Strategic insights and recommendations to Network Rail on next steps for delivering the HUB Station
- Insights and recommendations for the infrastructure sector on project development and future engagement



Image credit:
eventphotographybristol.co.uk

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Amongst people’s feedback there were clear themes and recommendations on actions that must be taken to develop the HUB Station design, but that were beyond the remit of the design team. The section giving strategic insights and recommendations to Network Rail on next steps for delivering the HUB Station recognises this. It provides specific advice for the rail provider on actions it must consider and implement to support the HUB Station to bring delight to people and communities alike.

The scale and impact of the ExploreStation programme is a first for Network Rail, and likely for the wider transport and infrastructure sectors as well. There is considerable learning to be derived from what the programme has told us about what people want from their infrastructure, as well as on best practice in engagement. This understanding and knowledge is summarised in the section giving insights and recommendations for the infrastructure sector on project development and future engagement, which the wider sector can use to innovate their own processes, products and services.

An additional set of insights and recommendations on the design and implementation of the HUB Station, is detailed in Appendix 1. This section is aimed at both Network Rail and the design team. It provides considerations and next steps for how all elements of the new station can be planned, designed and managed to maximise inclusion, sense of place, futureproofing, connectivity, climate change mitigation and biodiversity.



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Image credit:
David Lake Photography

29,612

People engaged
through
ExploreStation

4 Activities
3 delivery partners
2 engagement stages.



ExploreStation is Network Rail’s largest ever public engagement and co-development programme

3

Rounds of online engagement

17 feedback themes
8 news updates
Earliest contribution time 2.05am
Latest contribution 11.47pm

5

Immersive virtual reality events

105 hours exploring the virtual station
6 VR headsets
2 hand controllers
4 modified train seats

9

Collaborative design workshops

3 exhibitions
2 Publications
2 online events
1 architectural model

11

Cities and towns across Great Britain

4 museums, 1 university
1 community centre
1 co-working space
1 local pub, 1 business incubator
1 Adventure Playground
1 city hall

80

Hours of independent expert design advice

3 Design Advice Panels
6 place experts

Local, national, and international awareness of the ExploreStation programme

6.7 million

Social media impressions

111 posts through the national social media campaign
#GreatBritishStation

28

Pieces of local, national and industry press coverage

534,000 print circulation
299 million online readership

Global Design Forum 2022

London Design Festival’s annual programme of talks



Principles & Approach



Image credit:
Heather Isobel Photography

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Principles

The ExploreStation engagement programme was designed to support Network Rail, and its consultant design team led by 7N Architects, in developing a future passenger hub that is resilient, flexible, inclusive, welcoming and ultimately reflects the needs of passengers.

The programme's approach was underpinned by two principles:

1

The HUB Station will have a national impact, therefore engagement had to be at a scale that had not been attempted before. It had to appeal to as wide a base of people as possible, across a range of demographics including location, age, experience and background, even those who might have thought they had no interest in rail, infrastructure and the built environment. In short, it had to be truly inclusive.

2

ThinkStation recommended nine priorities that should underpin the design of the HUB Station. It was therefore critical to tangibly progress those priorities, hold the design to account and meaningfully embed them at this stage in the design process. ExploreStation is, therefore, a continuation of the ThinkStation journey.

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Image credit:
Eddie Macdonald

Approach

ExploreStation innovated existing norms for engagement through designing a new process that encompassed a number of important considerations:

- **Embed the ThinkStation priorities in the goals for ExploreStation**
- **Work in partnership**
- **Deliver diverse activities**
- **Support conversations at different depths of detail**
- **Two stage process**
- **Independent Expert Advice**
- **Evaluation**

Embed the ThinkStation priorities in the goals for ExploreStation

The ThinkStation priorities were reviewed for how they were realised in the design of the HUB Station. Through this review, a series of engagement themes were created for ExploreStation, each of which corresponded to one or more of the ThinkStation priorities. Engagement activities were designed to correspond to each theme.



Work in partnership

Engagement in design processes can be carried out in different ways and at varying scales, and each approach can help serve different engagement objectives. An effective engagement strategy will create a range of ways to engage people in a dialogue to inform change.

These different engagement formats are incredibly effective and give valuable insights about a project in question. Those who deliver programmes of engagement have a depth of understanding about what works in their format of engagement, what materials to use, which venues work best, even the best times for people to receive communications, as well as attend events.

We chose leaders and pioneers in distinct forms of engagement to come together as a team and bring their expertise and knowledge to build a programme that would appeal to the widest audience, while recognising and responding to their diverse needs. Our team consisted of:

- **Commonplace**, who provided an online engagement platform which allowed people to feedback wherever they were – home, school, library, office – so long as they had an internet connection.
- **The Glass-House Community Led Design**, who designed hands-on workshops (in person and online) with creative activities that stimulated conversations, and sparked ideas for how HUB stations can meet diverse needs while supporting local places.
- **Digital Urban**, who created fun and exciting virtual reality experiences, incorporating movement along with an immersive design which allowed participants to move through it and appreciate the finer details of what a place might feel like at different times of day and in different weather conditions.

Deliver diverse activities

The ways in which people understand built environment proposals can vary vastly. For some, plans are perfectly intuitive, for others it is descriptive words that spark imagination and others still may find it best to be immersed within the design. To ensure that we were communicating the design to people in a variety of ways that met this range of requirements and preferences, ExploreStation hosted diverse activities to attract responses from the widest array of people.

Support conversations at different depths of detail

ExploreStation made conversations central to its approach. The exhibitions, workshops and immersive experiences enabled conversations between the ExploreStation team and visitors/participants, as well as conversations with each other. But not everyone wants to engage in a detailed conversation. The aim of ExploreStation was to achieve a design that would create comfortable and welcoming experiences for all and we chose to reflect that in the form of engagement as well.

The ability to choose the intensity of how to engage, from reacting to the proposals online (with choices of smiley faces or ranking ideas on a scale and similar), to exploring and discussing the proposals at a two-and-a-half-hour workshop meant people could interact at the level, and depth, with which they were comfortable.

Two stage process

The programme was also designed to act as a conversation between the design team and the participants. Engagement activities carried out in two stages allowed the design team to develop the proposal and explain how the design evolved in response to stage one participants’ feedback and thoughts. At stage two, these could then be communicated to new and returning participants from stage one, and they could contribute to further refinement of the proposals. This could be undertaken knowing that their comments and ideas were being addressed and considered, as they had seen the impact of their contributions from stage one in developing the design. The two-stage process underlined its collaborative nature.

Independent expert advice

The Design Council pioneered ‘design review’, through which an independent expert panel review built environment proposals and provide their guidance and feedback on how the design can be developed to achieve excellence. Network Rail’s Design Advice Panel (DAP) is a well-established programme for carrying out reviews of the organisation’s built environment assets. The Panel offers holistic advice incorporating sustainability, heritage, construction, public good, identity, wayfinding, engineering, access and inclusion, management and more. For ExploreStation, the Panel gave their advice across three reviews: at stages one and two of engagement and at an interim stage of the design’s progress.

Evaluation

ExploreStation undertook a rigorous approach to evaluation of the programme to measure the difference this programme made (impact) and to share our learning for the benefit of future rail passenger engagement. Further detail on the evaluation process can be found in Appendix 2.

Project timeline

Stage 1
November –
December
2021

Stage 2a
February – March
2022

Stage 2b
May – June
2022

Project inception

September 2021

Engagement Principles of the HUB Station design

Commonplace online platform

The Glass-House workshops and exhibitions

Virtual workshop
Sheffield – Israac Somali Community Centre
Bristol – Engineshed
Cardiff – Cardiff City Hall

Design Advice Panel

Design development

Engagement Delivering for communities

Commonplace online platform

Design Advice Panel

Design development

Engagement Delivering for communities

Commonplace online platform

The Glass-House workshops

Liverpool – Bluecoat Chambers
Manchester – Science & Industry Museum
Brighton – University of Brighton
London – High Trees Adventure Playground
Virtual workshop

Immersive virtual reality experiences

York – National Railway Museum
Shildon – Locomotion
Manchester – Science & Industry Museum
Hereford – Shell Incubation & Innovation Centre
Paisley – Telford’s Pub

Design Advice Panel

ExploreStation Report to Network Rail

London Design Festival launch 21 September 2022



Engagement activities & approaches

Each of the ExploreStation engagement activities were led by individual partners, that brought their unique approaches and tools to create distinct experiences which supported the programme's objectives

1

Collaborative design workshops



Image credit:
Heather Isobel Photography

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Partner

The Glass-House Community Led Design

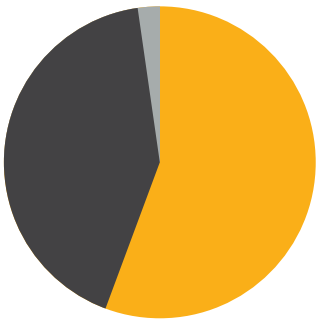


The Glass-House Community Led Design is a national charity dedicated to connecting people with the design of their places, and connecting design with people. It has supported communities, organisations and networks to work collaboratively on the design of buildings, open spaces, homes and neighbourhoods for two decades. It sees design not only as a tool for creating great places, but also as a way to connect people and empower them with enhanced confidence, skills and a greater sense of agency.

It engages with live projects providing hands-on support, training and practical resources and constantly seeks to experiment, innovate and inspire new thinking and debate through action research, events and knowledge exchange. Its work is built on a culture of collaboration and partnership with a broad spectrum of communities and organisations at a local, regional, national and international level, across disciplines and sectors.

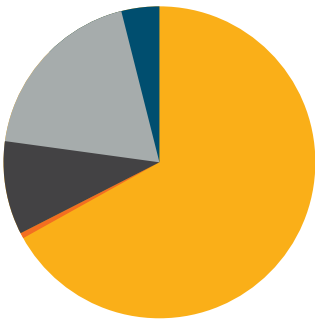
The Glass-House believes that everyone has the right to great places to live, work and play. Placemaking approaches that unearth and mobilise diverse people, organisations and assets lead to more sustainable and equitable places and help to build social capital. Creative, inclusive and collaborative design processes offer a fantastic frame to help achieve this.

193 visitors



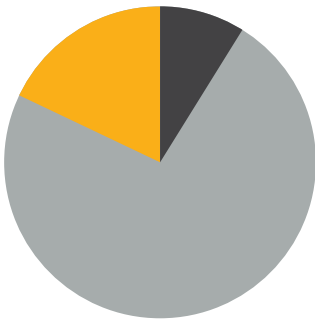
Gender

Male	55.7%
Female	41.2%
Non-binary	3.1%



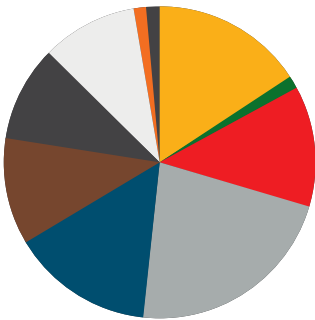
Ethnicity

Asian	6.7%
Black	16.5%
Mixed	2.1%
White	55.7%
Other	0.7%



Disability

Yes	9.3%
No	73.2%
Prefer not to say or no response	17.5%



Age

Under 13 – 15	15.5%
13-17	1.0%
18-24	11.3%
25-34	23.7%
35-44	15.5%
45-54	11.3%
55-64	10.3%
65-74	9.3%
75-84	1.0%
85 or over	N/A%
Prefer not to say or no response	1.0%

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Approach

The Glass-House Community Led Design delivered nine workshops and hosted three exhibitions across the ExploreStation programme, delivered as a combination of online and in-person events to offer varied engagement opportunities.

The workshops were designed as safe spaces that were independent from the design team and Network Rail to allow participants to ask questions, talk through the design and speak freely and openly about their opinions, thoughts and ideas. A key objective for these workshops was to create a space for discussion, debate and ideas generation, as well as capturing feedback on the emergent HUB Station design.

The Glass-House used creative methods, including information sessions, role play activities, action planning, collective visioning and hands-on crafting. This range of activities created various routes into exploring the principles and design of the HUB Station, and to considering how HUB Stations can be successfully landed in local places.



Images courtesy of The Glass-House
Community Led Design



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Activities

In-person workshops

The in-person workshops, each two-and-a-half hours long, were open to the public. They were delivered at varying times, but most commonly between 18:00 – 20:30 to accommodate those working standard day shifts. Sessions were delivered across Great Britain and in various venue types to encourage a diverse range of participants to engage.

One workshop was a closed session with a group of young people aged nine to fifteen years old at High Trees Adventure Playground in South London to create space to invite children and young people into the ExploreStation conversation.

Online workshops

The online workshops were designed to bring together people from across Great Britain to explore the HUB Station through a particular lens. These online sessions also allowed interested participants who could not make in-person sessions or were not comfortable attending in-person an opportunity to get involved in the ExploreStation conversation.

ThinkStation stakeholders joined the first online session to continue the conversation that started through that programme. This workshop aimed to reignite the dialogue with these participants and to utilise their expert knowledge, as well as their experience of having been involved in the initial programme of engagement which produced a set of key recommendations. These would go on to inform future iterations of the HUB Station design framework to better achieve the ThinkStation recommendations.

The second online workshop brought together members of the public and aimed to welcome and accommodate, as well as explore the specific needs of those who identify as neurodiverse and/ or those who are physically or mentally disabled.

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Interactive exhibition

Interactive exhibitions were a precursor to the stage one workshop sessions. The exhibition, formed of twelve A1 boards, informed people about the ExploreStation journey by providing important contextual information on: ThinkStation; the Re-imagining Railway Stations RIBA design competition; station categories and past design examples; introductions to key themes around sustainability, modular design, accessibility and inclusion.

The exhibition included several interactive activities, which aimed to unpick perceptions of the station and the approach to modular design, as well as gather nostalgic stories and experiences of rail stations.

ExploreStation publications

To accompany the exhibitions and workshops, The Glass-House produced an informative guide which acted as a point of reference between the HUB Station design, the ExploreStation journey and the workshops. These publications were distributed at the exhibitions, and workshops, as well as being shared online to inform participants about the project. They also connected the different engagement activities by providing information about the immersive experiences and online platform.



Image courtesy of The Glass-House
Community Led Design

The added value of the workshops and exhibitions to ExploreStation

Sharing perspectives

The in-person workshops provided an opportunity for those who wanted to do so to engage with each other. The conversations in the room were enriched through sharing and exploring different perspectives which, in turn, enriched the feedback. While bringing people who have not met before together in a room can appear an intimidating proposition, The Glass-House set a tone and atmosphere that invited interaction while creating warmth and openness. This created the conditions for in depth one-on-one conversations, as participants could have their particular concerns discussed or questions answered. It was important to create opportunities for personal face-to-face engagement within ExploreStation for those who are uncomfortable or unable to share feedback online.

Creating room for specific experiences

Within ExploreStation, it was important to ensure we reached the diverse and varied audiences who may not have organically responded to the ExploreStation activities. By designing workshops that were aimed at specific groups, such as the High Trees Adventure Playground workshop that was for nine to fifteen-year-olds, or explored specific themes, such as the online workshop that focused on inclusion, it was possible to gain insights into areas that directly corresponded to ThinkStation priorities and recommendations the programme was testing against.

Online and in-person activities

The workshops had the flexibility to be offered online and in person and this flexibility created a distinct advantage. While both formats enabled in depth conversations, the online workshops allowed for participants from across Great Britain to get involved, and were able to accommodate larger numbers of participants. While the in-person workshops created more intimate sessions for more in-depth discussion and feedback.

Creative ideas through playful activities

The workshops not only set a welcoming, safe atmosphere to explore participants' responses to the design, they also stimulated creative thinking that allowed participants to understand and explore elements of the station in imaginative and inventive ways. By challenging participants to use their imagination within the workshops through crafting activities, they were able to develop fresh, creative and playful ideas which provided vital feedback on the HUB Station design.

Top right image courtesy of The Glass-House Community Led Design

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Bottom images: Heather Isobel Photography

2

Immersive virtual reality experiences



Image credit:
David Lake Photography

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Partner Digital Urban



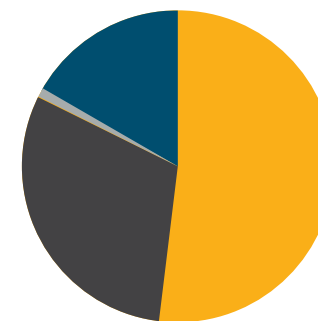
Digital Urban is a 3D digital design agency with a simple mission: to improve design and enhance engagement for built environment projects, using 3D modelling, gaming technology and videography.

It is made up of a team of leading experts and its founder has worked in digital and community engagement for 20 years, creating digital models for cities and creative immersive experiences which help stakeholder engagement and facilitate a more collaborative urban design process.

Its approach is underpinned by a desire to ensure everyone, especially those with no familiarity with built environment terminology or plans and visuals, has the ability to understand and be informed about proposals for the places around them.

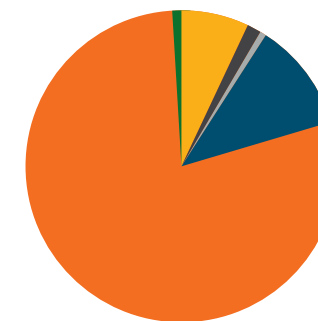
630 visitors

308 feedback forms and conversations



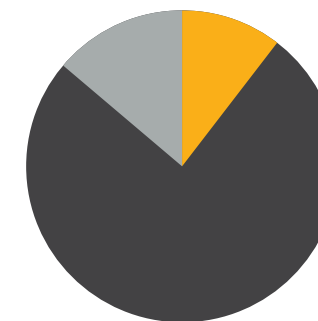
Gender

Male	51.3%
Female	33.0%
Non-binary	0.7%
Prefer not to say or no answer	15.0%



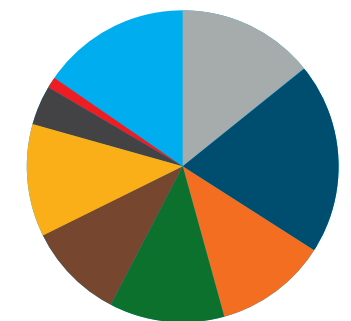
Ethnicity

Asian	6.7%
Black	1.0%
Mixed	0.7%
Prefer not to say	13.3%
White	77.7%
Other	0.7%



Disability

Yes	11.0%
No	74.7%
Prefer not to say	14.3%



Age

Under 13	N/A
13-17	N/A
18-24	15.3%
25-34	17.7%
35-44	12.0%
45-54	12.0%
55-64	13.7%
65-74	10.7%
75-84	3.0%
85 or over	0.7%
Prefer not to say or no answer	15.0%

*demographics data based on 308 participants who completed feedback forms

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Approach

Digital Urban developed two virtual reality immersive experiences, touring five locations across eleven days, delivered as part of the second phase of the ExploreStation programme. The immersive aspect started on arrival, with a mock signal box and railway seating setting the stage for participants. Using virtual reality goggles, they were then immersed within the proposed design, to experience moving towards and through it.

Digital Urban used a detailed technical, experiential and visual understanding of the design to create virtual immersive experiences. Activities were informative while being playful and gave participants an element of control over what they experienced, so they could explore and feedback on what mattered most to them. The playful approach was also underpinned by a desire to reach a diverse group of participants to engage with proposals.



Image credit:
David Lake Photography

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While traditional methods of engagement via written feedback were present, Digital Urban encouraged further conversations, with members of staff on hand to inspire dialogue while the public interacted with the model. A dedicated team member supported ExploreStation’s ‘evaluation Betty’ offer — a life size cut-out of a station guard, named Betty. Participants could stick post-its on Betty, saying what they loved, learned and would take away and use from learning about the design, as well as what they would bin (an actual bin was placed at Betty’s feet for participants to symbolically throw away ideas they did not like). This provided an opportunity for collecting thematic data and detailed conversations with participants about the project.

Overall, Digital Urban sought to engage the public in a more personal manner than traditional forms of engagement and consultation. The playfulness of the experience and organic thematic data collection onsite support this.



Image credit:
David Lake Photography

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Image credit:
David Lake Photography

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Activities

More4

The 'set' for the More4 experience provided railway seats, arranged in a typical configuration, and allowing groups of up to four to participate together. Once seated, participants were presented with their VR goggles and their 'experience' began. First the train carriage was constructed around the seats and a voiceover announced the start of the journey. The seats vibrated as they would on a real train, and the sound of the train completed the effect. Participants then 'travelled' a short distance through a virtual landscape while the voiceover provided context on the Network Rail and HUB Station proposals. Once participants arrived at the platform, the VR gave the experience of being rotated to face the platform and the station was constructed in front of them. As it was being built, text boxes appeared to explain different elements and their innovations, such as the canopy and its PV panels.

This experience gave the context to the station, giving information on its design and helping participants to understand its modular construction.

ExploreMore

Participants used VR goggles and controls that took them from a set point outside the station to any part within the station and its environs. For example, walking through the welcome mat into the landscape or into the station, through the barriers, along the platform and into a waiting space pod and up and over the bridge on to the next platform. Participants could spend as long or as little time as they liked getting a sense of the station's setting within a town or village as well as its scale and proportion.

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Added value to ExploreStation

An understanding of the engagement topic is not required

Where other engagement methods require participants to decide that they are interested in the project being discussed, and an active communications campaign to reach them, immersive virtual reality experiences can be far more organic in the way they work. Passers-by can take a few minutes out of their day to satisfy their curiosity without any prior knowledge of the project and then share their feedback. If they are not interested in sharing feedback, it still creates the ability to inform people of plans in an intuitive, simple and quick way.

Overcomes the need for knowing and understanding technical language

The essence of the design and its innovation can be conveyed purely through visuals and creating as close an approximation of the experience of walking through the station as possible, without requiring participants to know or understand technical and sector-relevant information to explain proposals.

Creates playful and joyful experiences

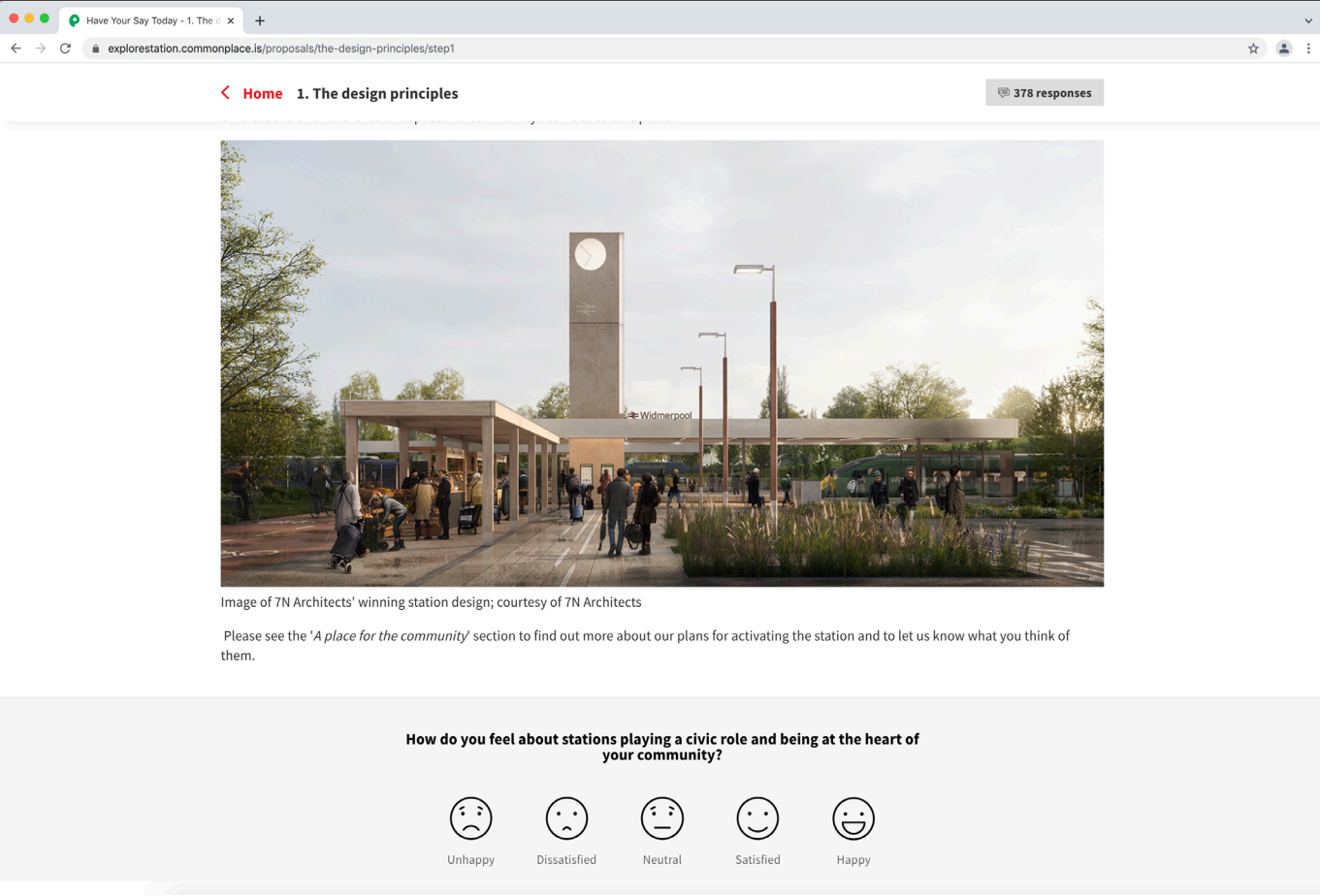
While the use of VR has inherent attraction, the design of an experience that takes it further by creating a 'set' and appealing to other senses, such as sound and smell, makes for a more fun activity, that increases appeal and makes people want to have conversations with each other, as well as responding to the engagement.

Demonstrates a desire to communicate widely

The dedication to designing and hosting an experience that feels different to traditional ways of engaging sends a message about the organisation's dedication to sharing with, and hearing from, as wide a range of people as possible.

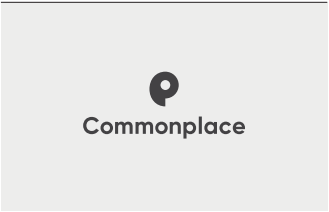
3

Online engagement platform



Partner

Commonplace



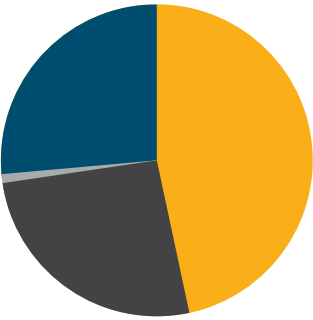
Commonplace is a digital engagement platform that connects people to the places where they live, work and play, helping them to shape and influence changes in their neighbourhoods. Commonplace has helped more than 5.25 million people to engage with over 1,800 projects across the UK as well as globally.

Commonplace’s approach to engagement involves building a relationship that deepens and evolves over time. It views engagement as a conversation – not a one-off survey, event or episode.

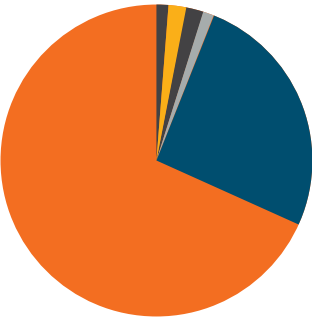
28,776 Commonplace platform visitors

3,776 contributions

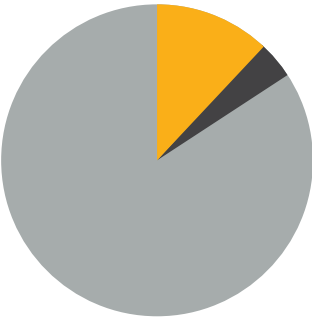
1,343 subscribers for news updates



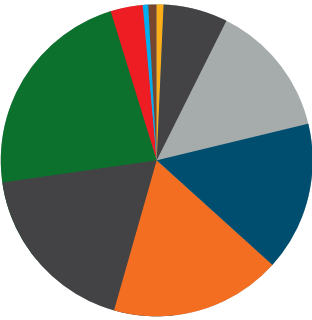
Gender	
Male	47.6%
Female	25.3%
Non-binary	0.9%
Prefer not to say or no response	26.2%



Ethnicity	
Asian	2.1%
Black	2.1%
Mixed	1.1%
Prefer not to say or no response	25.4%
White	68.5%
Other	0.6%



Disability	
Yes	12.4%
No	3.3%
Prefer not to say or no response	84.3%



Age	
Under 13	N/A
13-17	0.8%
18-24	5.8%
25-34	13.9%
35-44	14.7%
45-54	18.0%
55-64	20.0%
65-74	21.9%
75-84	3.5%
85 or over	0.5%
Prefer not to say or no response	1.0%

*demographics data based on 791 participants who completed equality monitoring forms

Approach

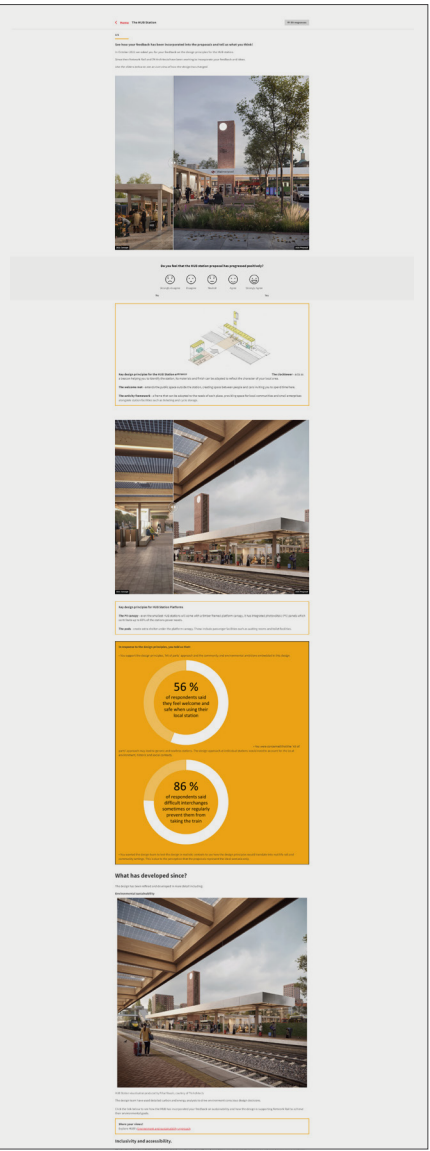
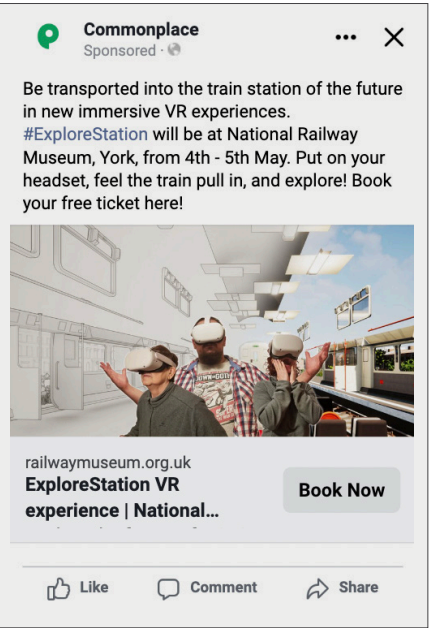
Commonplace provided an online platform, accessible by anyone with an internet connection, with informative tiles which told participants about the background of the project and its design principles while also inviting participants’ thoughts on them.

The aim was to make it easy for participants to share their responses through quick engagements such as selecting smiley face reaction options, ranking design ideas based on preference and asking them the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with design solutions, among other activities.

For those who wanted to provide more detailed feedback, open text options were included on every tile so participants could state what they thought had been missed, state in depth what they liked or were concerned about and their ideas for improvement. Every tile asked whether there was anything else participants would like to say.

Participants could read each other’s comments and feedback. This not only created trust through transparency but also allowed for the sharing of ideas and knowledge.

The ExploreStation Commonplace site remains archived at: explorestation.commonplace.is



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The added value of the Commonplace platform to ExploreStation

Mass engagement

The power of the internet to transform engagement has been fully realised by Commonplace, allowing people to not just respond wherever they are based but also at whatever time that suits them. This is a critical advantage for those who may be more alert or able to engage at hours that are not conducive to group activities, such as workshops.

Special interest group engagement

Groups who have a specific interest area that they would like to see addressed could share the Commonplace site and ensure that there is mass representation of their voice. For example, within a set period, stage one of ExploreStation received a significant level of feedback from cyclists focusing on the ‘getting to and from the station’ tile. This indicated that this interest group had seen an opportunity to influence the design and had shared the engagement among peers. It resulted in a strong set of feedback for ExploreStation on onward transport needs for sustainable travel.

Honing in on specific areas of interest

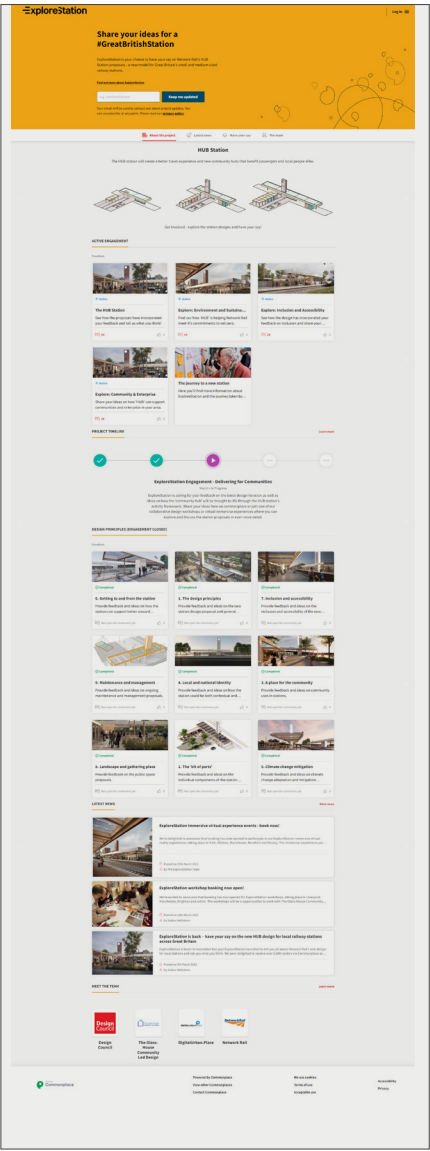
The number of comments on each tile varied significantly, demonstrating that some people just wanted to feedback on a single issue or two that most mattered to them. This showed that not everyone cares about everything and being able to provide a platform in which people can focus on the element(s) they care about over everything else is a valuable tool. It invites engagement from people who may not participate if they felt they had to respond to every element of the design.

Learning and understanding

Commonplace allows for all visitors to read each other’s comments and, if they choose to do so, agree or disagree through thumbs up and thumbs down reaction icons. Not only does this show which comments have wider support — useful information in itself — but the ability to read each other’s comments also enables an increased understanding of different perspectives. This often acted as an information and learning tool, as people could read and understand the nuances of other’s feedback, which could shape their own response as well as increasing knowledge in an area they may not have appreciated previously.

Focused social media communications


Through social media optimisation Commonplace was able to drive the conversations online and offline, targeting specific locations and demographics to ensure that views of diverse communities were represented. Advertisements for the workshops, immersive experiences and Commonplace activities reached a combined audience of close to 500,000 people.





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4


Network Rail Design Advice Panel


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Led by
The Design Council

The Design Advice Panel (DAP) is an independent advisory service to Network Rail for station and infrastructure enhancement, development and associated master plans. The panel of multidisciplinary experts act as a critical friend to review projects and offer advice and assurance of the design quality and impact of built environment projects, particularly in their ability to respond creatively to the needs of people, places, and the environment.

ExploreStation
Design Advice Panel Members

1 Adam Brown (Chair)
Architecture, Co-design,
Environmental planning,
Regeneration

2 Deborah Nagan
Public realm design & delivery,
Rail & infrastructure,
Sustainability.

3 Garry Colligan
Town centres, Transport,
Urban design

4 Stephen O'Malley
Ground remediation,
Public realm,
Water management

5 Rachel Leggett
Community development,
Neighbourhood planning,
Urban design

6 Sarah Jones-Morris
Building with nature,
Collaborative design,
Green infrastructure

Approach

The DAP offered advice and guidance to the HUB Station project team at three key stages of ExploreStation to ensure that expert peers complemented public engagement.

The Design Council appoints a multidisciplinary panel of experts to review the proposals for a new project and discuss the strategic opportunities and challenges to be explored and addressed, as well as give recommendations on improvements related to the detailed aspects of the design. A report summarises each panel meeting and is shared with the project team and attached as supporting evidence towards achieving internal sign-off between project stages.

The added value of the dap to ExploreStation

An expert viewpoint

Individual DAP panel members brought a wealth of skills, knowledge and experience designing and delivering large scale and/or transport infrastructure projects. This enabled them to articulate, contextualise and prioritise the public’s views, supplementing this with their learnings and understanding of best practices from infrastructure projects and elsewhere in their expert fields. It also enabled the panel to offer practical advice on how to viably incorporate feedback within the technical and operational complexities and governance of rail infrastructure projects. Strategic recommendations to Network Rail considered how the industry could better support HUB Stations to thrive.

A targeted in-depth testing of the proposals

As a critical friend offering a collaborative and impartial space, the DAP scrutinised and tested the design in conversation with Network Rail and the design team. The panel approached the process intending to understand the current context and scope in which the project team were working and offered constructive and timely feedback to support the project team to take the project forward successfully.

A test bed for new ideas

The DAP acted as an impartial sounding board for some of the project team’s latest and evolving design thinking, especially the landscape and sustainability approaches and the Category F-mini option (a proposed new sub-division of category F stations). They could provide quick and impartial early insight to help shape the emerging strategy before these ideas were locked in and developed in detail.

Image courtesy of 7N Architects





Insights and recommendations

The thousands of contributions, both quantitative and qualitative, were reviewed, collated and matched to the ExploreStation engagement themes. Through careful analysis, detailed insights and recommendations were developed for each theme about how the HUB Station design should be implemented in communities across Great Britain. These insights and recommendations are summarised in Appendix 1.

Clear learnings also emerged from interactions, contributions and partner observations during the development of ExploreStation. These informed insights and recommendations of a more strategic nature. They are grouped into insights and recommendations at two levels:

- Insights and recommendations for Network Rail on next steps for delivering the HUB Station
- Insights and recommendations for the infrastructure sector on project development and future engagement

Insights and recommendations for Network Rail on next steps for delivering the HUB Station

ExploreStation aimed to ask the British public about their thoughts and ideas on the HUB Station proposal. However, commentary and feedback about certain aspects, such as access, inclusion and next steps, go beyond the station to more strategic recommendations that must be addressed by Network Rail.

Create an attractive and reliable service that affords dignity to everyone by enabling independent travel and equal experiences

The HUB Station prioritises inclusion, a key recommendation from the ThinkStation programme, and a continued theme from ExploreStation feedback. There was general recognition that the HUB design represents a clear improvement on what exists in terms of accessibility and provision for people with physical disabilities and limitations.

In terms of creating a genuinely inclusive experience, however, more work is needed to create the confidence that everyone can travel on the rail with ease and independence. A more attractive and viable service for many could be created through paying greater attention to reducing unfair burdens on people to make their own arrangements for additional support or relying on receiving help at the station, which may not always be available.

Addressing this barrier to equality is only genuinely possible through creating places that allow wheelchair users and those with baby buggies, walking sticks, crutches and any other mobility limitations to move through and across the platform, and then get on and off the train, without requiring help. This is beyond the remit of the HUB Station but failure to deliver on this through level platforms, or solutions provided to allow ease of boarding and disembarking trains, and working lifts undermines the HUB Station’s ability to be regarded as a truly inclusive place.

Network Rail must prioritise the measures that are necessary to create the equitable experiences it aims for, and which give people the independence and dignity they need to feel comfortable using its network.

Celebrate Great Britain’s places through the HUB Station

The HUB Station is a proposal for a design that can be adapted to different configurations and sizes across Great Britain. As demonstrated by its name, it is also designed to act as a hub, in which communities can meet, interact, and have their individual needs identified and met. A strong theme across all forms and stages of feedback was a desire to have not just a place in which communities are able to thrive, but a place that celebrates local culture, history and identity. In addition to contributing to local pride, the HUB Station can be the means through which people instantly know where they are and something about the place they’ve arrived at, through the way in which its identity has been expressed in the design.

This is particularly achievable as the HUB Station proposal already identifies potential for reflecting local art and culture. As a next step, there should be guidance for celebrating each local place in which the HUB Stations are delivered. The guidance should detail the scope and a variety of methodologies for identifying what a town would like to celebrate, how its delivery will be procured and how it will be implemented. It is important not to have a one-size-fits-all approach, for example an art competition may work very well in one place but another may prefer distinctive planting etc. Instead create many avenues to express a place’s identity so the best approach can be selected based on the location’s context.

Create a station and community enterprise ambassador role to ensure a successful activity framework and safe and welcoming places

While the prospect of an activity framework that facilitates community enterprise was very welcome, there was scepticism about how it will be managed, how people can put themselves and their ideas forward for inclusion within it, and how this will be implemented and controlled among other concerns. For people to truly have a sense of confidence in how the activity framework will work, there needs to be individuals who will help them navigate its use and function.

There is an opportunity for this role to develop partnerships between community rail organisations and local station teams to support the community enterprise function. This would have the benefit of reintroducing a ‘caretaker’ role to both the station and the activities within it that will be undertaken as part of the HUB proposal. In addition, there was also a desire for community gardening and growing in the landscape spaces, the management of which could also be overseen by the station and community enterprise ambassador.

We suggest that those in this role could liaise with local charity organisations and shops, community groups, tourist offices, schools, entrepreneurs and others to host and carry out activities within the framework, while giving people a sense of a station that is cared for and an organisation that cares for its passengers.

Continue to test the robustness of the design through a full-scale prototype

The HUB Station design will be available for adoption by station developers and operators for extending or adapting existing stations or building new ones across Great Britain. The HUB Station proposal has been designed to take into account the priorities which emerged from ThinkStation and was then further influenced and shaped by the ExploreStation participants. The next logical step is for the design to be tested in a real context. This is not just to ascertain its robustness in execution but to ensure it is an attractive option for delivery at all.

The design introduces many innovations to the existing station ideology; from the welcome mat concept and its landscape offer to the activity framework and PV canopy. These innovations have been welcomed by ExploreStation participants who identified the various ways in which the station could play a role in their communities while suggesting further considerations for measures that could make the station locally relevant. However, these departures from existing station norms could be perceived as a significant risk that station developers and operators may not want to take them on themselves. Testing the HUB Station proposal and its innovations for communities will help overcome potential concerns and resistance to the proposal.



Image courtesy of The Glass-House Community Led Design

A prototype would allow the opportunity to test the following aspects of the design and implementation of the station:

- 1 Local engagement strategy**

This report recommends continuing local engagement and it would significantly add to the value of the prototyping stage to develop and test a local engagement strategy.
- 2 The activity framework**

The activity framework can host a variety of activities, from coffee stands to goods donation and exchange hubs or even blood drives and art and exhibition studios. This list is as diverse as each community’s priorities and interests may be. The prototype will allow the activity framework to be tested as a meanwhile space that provides rotating and diverse uses.
- 3 Community and enterprise coordination**

The activity framework introduces different management and coordination consideration from a typical station, and this report recommends creating station and community enterprise ambassadors who can support this function while also giving passengers the assurance they seek when travelling. The prototyping stage can trial and develop this role, testing its potential and limits.
- 4 The landscape proposals**

There was strong and consistent interest in using the landscape and planting to deliver sustainable drainage and create a more attractive place that invites meeting and lingering, which can all be tested as part of the prototype. Using this space for community growing was also of strong interest and this is an opportunity to test how such an initiative could work, and help people get to know local species but also identify planting that is resilient to climate change.

- 5 Passenger experience**

In terms of passenger experience, the two most commented on challenges to people feeling welcome and comfortable were access and inclusion and being protected from Britain’s weather. The prototype would allow for testing these experiential aspects with passengers.
- 6 The detailed elements of the design**

A particular example of this is the feedback received on the canopy, which the Design Advice Panel noted as the critical element for creating the effect of floating and lightness of the station. It would be useful to test these types of detailed considerations in a real life scenario as they are essential to the design’s success.
- 7 Maintenance and security**

The prototype could help test and scrutinise various options for station and support the development of maintenance and security strategies. This could range from testing the impact of daily use and wear and tear or vandalism to the stations materials to simulating trespass, safety and security events. Where appropriate this could include working with a local ‘friends of’ group.
- 8 Evaluation**

It would be possible to evaluate people’s experience of the station and also the experience of delivering and managing the HUB Station with consequent lessons recorded for future delivery of the station design.

Continue engagement at local level in creative, playful and diverse ways, while targeting key audiences

The ThinkStation programme recommended that community engagement should continue at all stages of development and delivery of this station, and this sentiment was strongly echoed across the ExploreStation stages and activities.

If the station is to genuinely play a civic role that connects people and communities at a local level, then it must have a meaningful understanding of the people it will serve, their needs and priorities and each place’s history and context.

Continuing engagement in diverse ways and at different levels of detail, made bespoke to distinct audiences, would also be of considerable benefit. For example, the way in which a conversation is carried out with local entrepreneurs and small businesses would be very different to one with school children or those in the arts, leisure and cultural sector, while commuting passengers may choose to have a different conversation entirely. We also recommend creating opportunities for these audiences to come together to explore their different needs and ambitions so that these can coalesce through the detailed design and implementation process.

The success of the immersive VR experiences lay not just in the innovative use of technology it utilised to engage audiences, but in the way that it enabled people to understand the proposals swiftly and holistically, without having to navigate plans or technical drawings that many find intimidating, off-putting or just meaningless. Being embedded in a design that quickly told a complex story while still being fun, however, prompted vivid feedback, which is incredibly valuable.

It is essential to map key audiences and develop a plan for ensuring they are made aware of the engagement well in advance of it taking place, so they can communicate further to their networks, and accommodate engagement days within their plans. Within this it is critical to be proactive in engaging groups whose voices aren’t often heard, such as young people, ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, to avoid designing in inequalities to our built environment, which can exclude a huge number of passengers. It is also important to note that with some targeted audiences, it may be necessary for the engagement to be taken to them, fitting into their plans rather than vice versa. This was a model that was followed for the workshop at High Trees, which was enormously effective in reaching a younger audience (nine to fifteen-year-olds) whose valuable perspective was not one we could be guaranteed to reach without an active effort and plan to do so.

Map demographics to set objectives for diversity

ExploreStation’s aim to engage with a diversity of people and communities was a challenge, as there was no benchmark for measuring success. However, it is necessary to have a clear goal, or there is a risk of diverse engagement being de-prioritised or not achieved at all.

In the absence of such a benchmark, ExploreStation focused on engaging participants who reflect national demographics. However, even this was a challenge as trusted demographic data for Great Britain is not easy to find. For example, government data breaking down demographics by ethnicity is available for England and Wales but does not include Scotland. The programme continued to use this data set as its goal, with a recognition that it may not be accurate for all the nations covered by ExploreStation.

Further engagement for HUB Stations at a local level should aim to engage a diverse range of people and communities, reflective of these local population demographics. In the absence of Network Rail’s own targets, local demographic data should be used as a benchmark of success.

Invest in the landscape – it is central to community, sustainability and ecological resilience

One of the key innovations of the HUB Station is that it creates a gathering place for people and passengers alike. The proposed landscape has been designed to work hard by providing multiple functions. It will support the community-minded aspirations while passively bringing a host of other benefits. For Network Rail, it is a clear opportunity to deliver against many of its Principles of Good Design: for example community focused, innovative, identity, environment, inclusive and collaborative.

The vision is a place in which people can linger as they sit on benches while surrounded by resilient local planting, and there is even the possibility of play among raingardens. Where trees are incorporated, they will provide shade and enhance the station’s identity by being a key feature of it. At the same time, the planting can encourage pollinators and enhance biodiversity to meet Network Rail’s own targets, as well as including water management measures, such as sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). Community growing initiatives, including food and herbs, could be delivered in this space.

ExploreStation participants overwhelmingly identified the multiple benefits of a well-designed and managed landscape. Likewise, they overwhelmingly supported these proposals and aspirations, with many pushing for even more. The proposals were, however, also greeted with scepticism and even cynicism. The vast support for the vision was countered by concerns about delivery. Would reality match up to the images? Who would provide the attention and care that is needed to ensure resilient planting that also reflects local character? How would it be managed in the long term? Would this really be a gathering place for people with children too?

If the cultural shift signified by the HUB Station, of railway stations becoming community assets, is going to be meaningfully delivered, it is critical that the landscape proposals are not compromised. For many, it is the most tangible benefit of the design and a clear demonstration of the ‘community asset’ aspect of the design.

The landscape, therefore, should be treated with equal thoughtfulness and importance as the built structures so as not to undermine the design of, and people’s confidence in, the HUB Station. We recommend ensuring that a robust strategy for its delivery and long-term management is identified, protected and this aspect is not value engineered. This will transform people’s relationships with stations, as the HUB Station intends, and also with Network Rail.

Communications about the HUB Station at the local and national level should be bold, confident and celebratory in tone and format

The HUB Station presents an opportunity for Network Rail to tell a good news story about developing and enriching its assets to address societal needs through environmental sustainability measures and taking on a civic role in communities. The journey to getting there is also noteworthy. This opportunity to be an exemplar of how communications and further engagement on the station is carried out should be embraced by framing it as the positive development for the railways and for people that it is, and ensuring everyone is aware of the benefits the station brings. This will create champions for the station and encourage its adoption, which will be a significant benefit to our local towns and villages.

Furthermore, ExploreStation created settings in which people learnt about design, the built environment, social and environmental sustainability, materiality, wayfinding, inclusion and much more. There was real enthusiasm and interest as those who may not have previously had an opportunity to consider how aspects of station design come together to create successful places were able to bring their own questions and insights to benefit the HUB Station’s development.

The #GreatBritishStation social media initiative invited people to share their favourite stations and reasons for their choice while the ‘washing line of memories’ activity from the first stage of workshops prompted stories and nostalgia. These activities showcase why travelling on the railways is unique, and cherished, among the British public.

The combination of these activities and responses to them reveals a wonderful, and powerful, opportunity to inform and educate about railway stations and also to celebrate Britain’s stations and people’s experiences of them.

There is scope to continue this complementary approach of educating and celebrating as community engagement is carried out at local levels, which may particularly contribute to the evocation of local people, identity and sense of place at individual stations.

At a national level, there is scope to create a database for the HUB Station, documenting its development, from ThinkStation through to ExploreStation and engagement and delivery at individual locations, as well as explaining its significance and innovations. The database could take the form of a website available to the public with opportunities for people to share their travel pictures and stories of community enterprise where they live.

Image courtesy of 7N Architects





Insights and recommendations for the infrastructure sector on project development and future engagement

Recognise and interpret sustainability and regeneration as holistic practice and set your ambitions and standards high in delivery

People expect and want sustainable and regenerative practice to be the baseline for new projects. Regenerative practice in particular, which acknowledges that we exist within natural systems and is about activity that creates a net positive, is increasingly accepted as the new paradigm for design. The climate crisis and biodiversity loss are of such primary concern that people are not convinced or satisfied by what they perceive to be measures that do not go far enough. Their expectations are high, and they are prepared to be vocal about any perceived compromises while equally excited about the meaningful delivery of their expectations.

It is also notable that participants held themselves to high standards when it came to sustainable and regenerative practice, and there is a keen desire to be supported in their aspirations. This is not just demonstrated in a demand for bicycle parking and electric vehicle charging points, as well as seamless connections to mass transit and walking, but in a desire for the activity framework to house locations for donation, exchange and sharing of objects and services. While this can be interpreted as activities that facilitate community-feeling alone, it would be a mistake to do so. Accompanying the desire for thriving communities was a desire for the potential it brings to reduce wastage through sharing physical objects and knowledge. Similarly, there was demand for a design that enhances landscape and biodiversity, with participants demonstrating a high regard for places that support our ecosystems to thrive.

The Design Council's *Beyond Net Zero: A systemic design approach* provides guidelines for a holistic design process that encourages and enables regenerative practice, through considering people, planet and inclusion. We recommend undertaking this approach when embarking on and assessing new design projects. This will act as a guide to meeting the high expectations of communities for local and national infrastructure and built environment projects.

Image courtesy of The Glass-House Community Led Design



Rethink approaches to innovation

Innovation is the means by which we create better products and services. However, innovation is often interpreted as tweaking the way in which a product or service currently functions, rather than being a method to transform what that product or service is, and therefore our relationship with it. The latter approach can significantly enhance the role of our products and services, making them more valuable to their target audience, and thereby their providers as well.

Network Rail recognised how this approach could transform the local station and asked the questions ‘What are we trying to achieve?’, ‘Are we asking the right questions to achieve it?’ and ‘What might we be missing that we can push ourselves to achieve?’. This process was the first step to challenging and re-setting the brief for local stations.

But there was an added innovation. By opening these questions to the public, ExploreStation (and ThinkStation before it) prioritised and embedded public benefit within the process of re-setting the brief. As a national infrastructure provider, Network Rail now has a mandate from the British public to transform local stations from a place with one function to a multifunctional asset that can help to address climate change and biodiversity loss, serve our communities and increasing safety and inclusion, as well as much more – all while continuing to fulfil its traditional role.

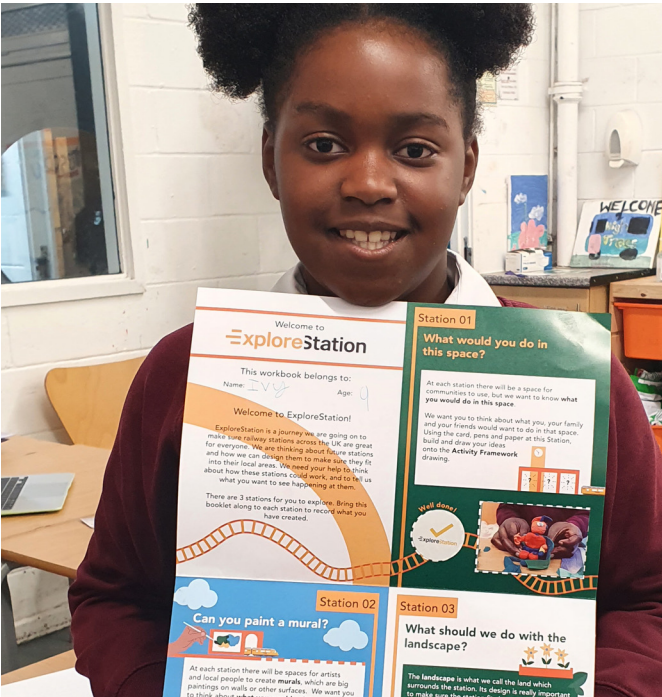
True innovation challenges the scope and boundaries of traditional projects and is an extremely powerful tool, particularly for legacy infrastructure which, in an age of multiple challenges and crises, requires a re-think and re-set for future relevance and societal resilience.

Engaging with audiences that represent diverse backgrounds and demographics requires careful planning and dedicated resource

This project is unique in its scale, a built environment project that is national in reach but could be local in impact. It was also carried out within a sector that is recognised to have high engagement and interest from the white, male, and middle-aged demographic. While this was not viewed as a negative within the programme – it is valuable to hear from an existing audience who care about the sector and how it develops – it was also important to hear from wider communities in order for the HUB Station to be a genuinely welcoming place for all.

Reaching beyond the railway’s established audience was recognised as a challenge. Despite initiatives such as extensive advertorials in titles that represented audiences we aimed to reach, this challenge was still not overcome as comprehensively as hoped. An additional challenge to comparable projects may be that they will not have the capacity ExploreStation had to target specific audiences. It is, therefore, crucial to have a robust strategy and process in place for engaging diverse audiences, such as disabled and ethnic minority groups and other marginalised communities, as well as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This will help ensure the engagement is meaningful.

Image credit: Eddie Macdonald



Recommended measures include mapping audiences and the organisations that represent them; reaching out to high profile figures among those target audiences, including influencers, who can act as champions and ambassadors for the project; finding out where those communities may gather and incorporating the engagement into their existing schedule and hosting activities within their venues, among others. A critically important measure is to build a relationship with individuals and organisations within, and who represent, marginalised communities at the earliest stages of planning the engagement, so they come on board as champions and any activities can be incorporated into their communications plans in advance. This planning should also consider the value of expertise that different groups and organisations might bring to the process and ensure that engagement does not become an extractive process by having a framework to govern when it is appropriate to provide remuneration for expertise. Contacting organisations and individuals with short notice or after engagement activities have commenced will result in low engagement and the loss of an opportunity to reach a key audience. An overarching recommendation is to create a significant inception period for engagement that gives generous time for outreach, mapping, planning and activities with diverse local communities.

Image credit:
Heather Isobel Photography



Engagement requires specialist expertise to be meaningful in structure, content, and feedback

A particular success of ExploreStation lay in carrying out a variety of activities which created diverse opportunities to engage. This was further strengthened by each activity being led by specialists in that engagement approach. While it may be tempting to have a single organisation or individual, or the design team, lead on the multiplicity of activities this is unlikely to achieve a good experience for participants, consequently harming the quality of knowledge given and feedback received in return.

When planning engagement programmes, there must be conscious consideration of how design proposals, developed by technical professionals, can be best presented in a way that is easily interpreted and understood by a non-technical audience. Engagement is a specialism, and this level of expertise is rarely found within built environment project teams. It is not good enough to just present drawings and plans and expect people to comprehend what is being shown, and what is being asked of them. People may struggle to comprehend what is being proposed. Without a meaningful understanding of what the proposals are, the result could at best be a lack of engagement and at worst undue anxiety about the proposals and a misinformed community.

To create genuine engagement opportunities, engagement must be taken seriously and regarded as integral to the process of developing a good design that will make a positive contribution to the local community. Doing otherwise may result in a tick box exercise that only allows for superficial input from the public, which could compromise the project's design implementation and long-term success. Putting the right people in place, those with an expert understanding of engagement and the activity/ activities, is the first step to realising a robust delivery.

Positive feedback is affirming, negative feedback enables development

ExploreStation demonstrated substantial support and excitement for the HUB Station. The programme also received a lot of feedback that could be interpreted as negative, including criticism of the design and confusion about the new civic role of community stations. The scale of engagement was such that this volume of negative feedback could be seen as intimidating and even unwelcome. However, a comprehensive review of all the content revealed the opposite.

Detailed and collective analysis showed that, while it would not be possible to respond to every individual point raised through the engagement, that is also not the appropriate response. Instead, the feedback contained powerful insights into people's priorities and expectations.

For example, the widespread critique of the inclusion measures highlighted how important this consideration is to the public and demonstrated that it needed to be a continued priority. This also revealed the detail to which the public thought about inclusion – concerns about seating that would not accommodate homeless people's needs were repeated across the two stages of engagement for example – and therefore the standards this design, and Network Rail, were being held to and must meet.

While the positive feedback was useful and showed the design was going in the right direction, the negative feedback provided an opportunity to understand what people felt strongest about, creating a significant strength out of the negative feedback. This critical feedback heavily focused on how well the detailed design manifested the HUB Station principles, as well as providing potential pathways for how these could be meaningfully achieved.

Get the fundamentals right so your engagement can be richer by focusing on detail

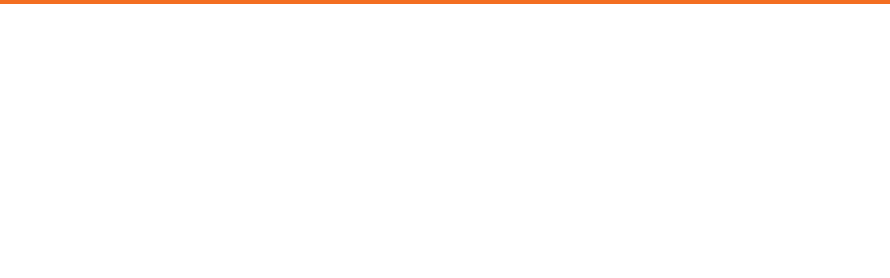
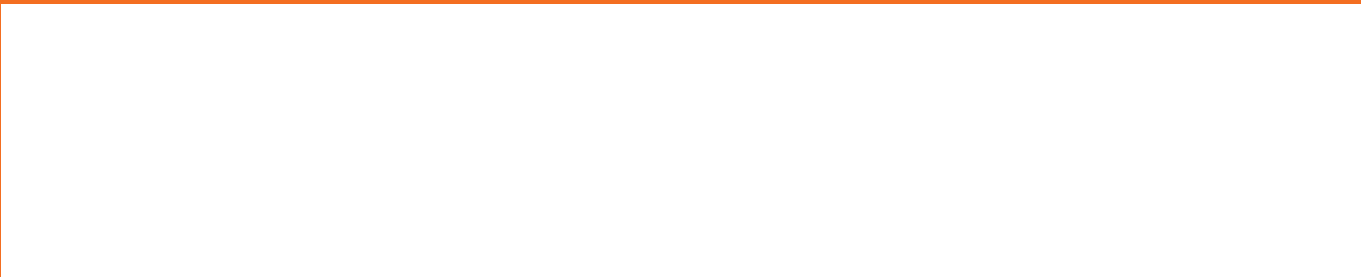
ExploreStation participants shared their thoughts on the HUB Station's principles, which were informed by the ThinkStation priorities, and the granular detail of the design. As the priorities had so strongly influenced the principles and details, it allowed the proposed design to be developed in partnership with the public – as was the aim of the programme – rather than having to be revisited entirely. This was only made possible because, overwhelmingly, the fundamentals of the design were not under question.

Ensuring that a project's priorities align with that of its target community and that these priorities are realised in the concept design, are critical initial steps to meaningful engagement on a proposal. It is important to note that both steps must be carried out for the complete positive impact. For example, ExploreStation's predecessor, ThinkStation, was very effective in identifying the priorities for a new HUB Station but this would not have had any value if these priorities had not then underpinned the brief for the Re-imagining Railway Stations competition.

In addition, while ThinkStation provided the priorities that guided the development of the concept, ExploreStation provided a detailed analysis of how those priorities could and should be realised through the HUB Station design.

Image credit:
eventphotographybristol.co.uk





Impact

A new model for engagement

The ExploreStation approach meaningfully embeds democracy in the design process. The programme shows that not only are people willing and interested in engaging with national infrastructure, but that their feedback and insights can support project teams to better understand communities’ priorities and respond to them in the design.

Its impact demonstrates that this approach creates a new model for engagement. One that is particularly relevant to projects that will affect significant numbers of people. This includes large infrastructure, and especially transport projects. The large scale of these projects can have a presence across several neighbourhoods, if not villages, towns and cities, and often have a national presence, touching many people’s lives and experiences. As such it requires mass knowledge and engagement.

ExploreStation had three key objectives for this programme of mass learning and engagement, which it met successfully:

- 1 Diverse communities and stakeholders are engaged meaningfully in the design process.
- 2 The HUB Station design is tested and improved.
- 3 The story of ExploreStation is shared with local and national audiences.

The way in which success was achieved is summarised overleaf and is evidence that bold and ambitious engagement can transform our approach to built environment design, as well as people’s understanding of their surroundings and how they are shaped.



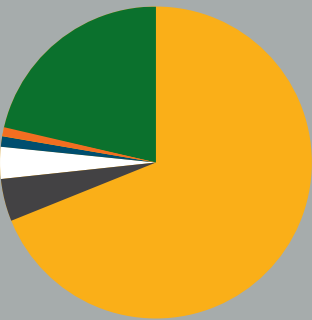
Impact

Diverse communities and stakeholders are engaged meaningfully in the design process

1



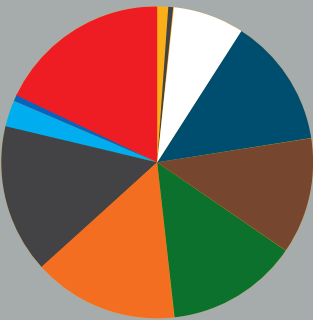
Gender	
Male	49.2%
Female	28.6%
Non-binary	1.0%
Prefer not to say or no response	21.2%



Ethnicity	
Asian	3.9%
Black	3.0%
Mixed	1.1%
Prefer not to say or no response	21.5%
White	69.8%
Other	0.8%



Disability	
Yes	11.8%
No	27.0%
Prefer not to say or no response	61.2%



Age	
Under 13 - 15	1.3%
13-17	0.6%
18-24	8.7%
25-34	15.7%
35-44	14.1%
45-54	15.9%
55-64	17.6%
65-74	18.0%
75-84	3.2%
85 or over	0.5%
Prefer not to say or no response	21.2%

Locations

9

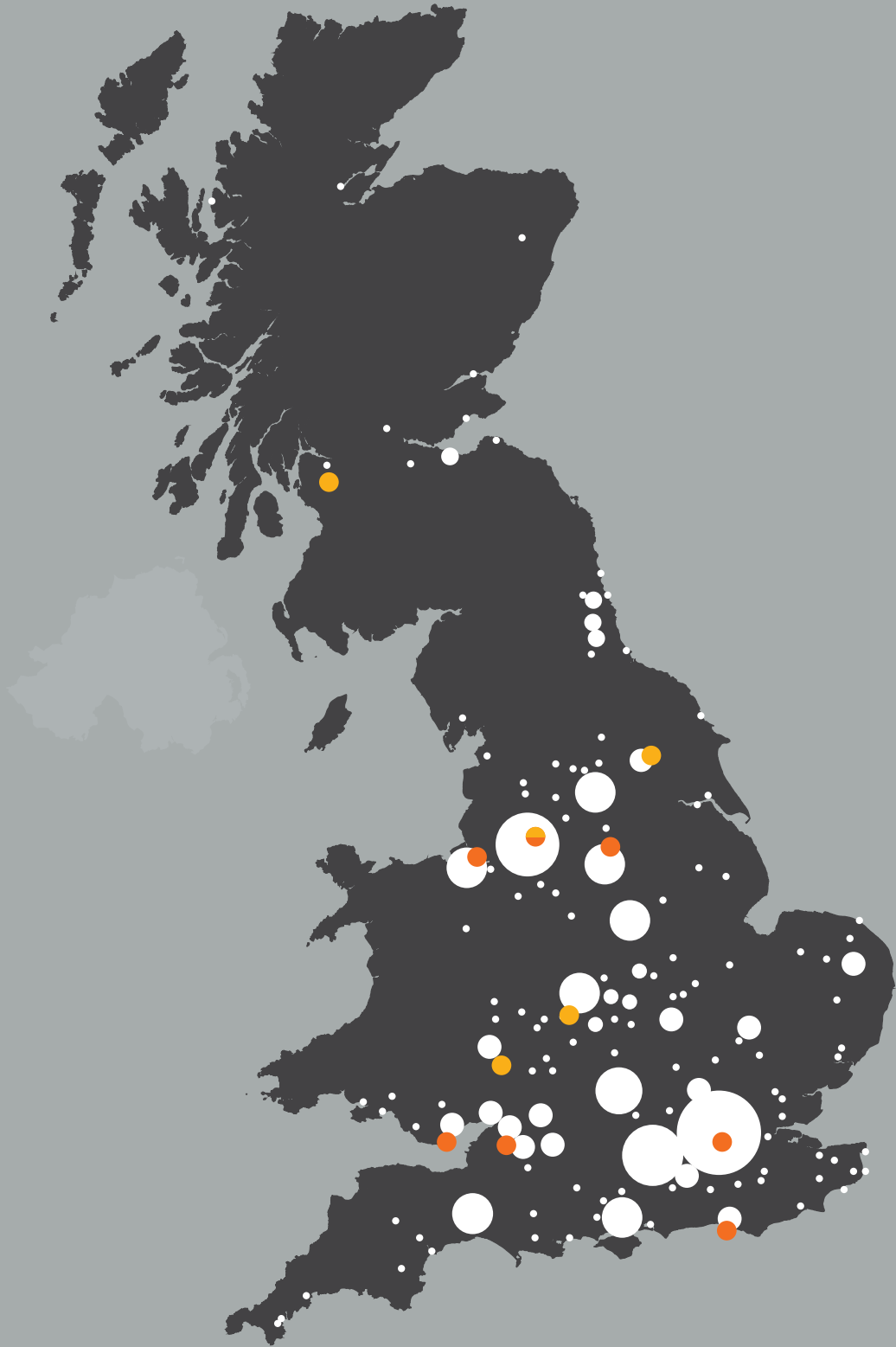
interactive workshops

- Two online
- Sheffield
- Bristol
- Cardiff
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Brighton
- London

5

immersive virtual reality experiences in

- York
- Manchester
- Sheldon
- Hereford
- Paisley
- Commonplace contributors' locations



As a result of ExploreStation, Network Rail can have confidence that the HUB Station has been developed and has evolved in collaboration with the people and passengers among whose communities this design may be delivered across Great Britain. Through this process, it takes into account their needs and desires, ensuring they are heard, understood and considered.

“Great ideas for running a design workshop.”
Participant at interactive workshop

The HUB Station not only has the power to intensely shape people’s experiences of travel, but also Britain’s built environment. There are over 2,500 small and medium-sized stations across Great Britain. The HUB Station design aims to be one that can be delivered in a multitude of these places, and new ones as well. When a design becomes commonplace and can vastly enable seamless travel and thriving communities, it is of crucial importance that it is a source of constant delight to the people who may see it and experience it every day.

At the outset, ExploreStation aimed to create a far-reaching programme of engagement to reflect the HUB Station’s aims to deliver welcoming, safe and inclusive spaces in which communities could thrive across Great Britain. This required hearing from a cross-section of society in large numbers that were as representative as possible of Britain’s diverse places, geography, people and communities.

ExploreStation set an aim of informing 10,000 people of the HUB Station proposal and receiving 1,000 feedback contributions on the design. At the conclusion of the programme, 29,612 people had been informed of the proposal and 4,224 feedback contributions on the design had been received.

Activities were hosted online and in locations across the country, with in-person activities held in venues that attract a range of audiences. Venues included:

- Science and Industry Museum in Manchester
- Israac, a Somali community centre in Sheffield
- The Shell Store Incubation Centre in Hereford
- A pub in Paisley, Scotland
- High Trees Adventure Playground in London

“Very clear presentation, well done.”
Participant at the VR Pop-Up



Participants across all activities rated their experience highly, with 1,343 subscribing to receive regular updates on ExploreStation via the Commonplace online platform.

In terms of certain demographics, ExploreStation was more successful in some aspects than others. There was an anticipation that the programme would attract a large proportion of people fitting the white, middle-aged, male demographic and this was borne out. This was mainly as this demographic has high representation across several railways and railways adjacent stakeholder groups for this programme, such as trainspotting and model railways. However, concerted efforts to reach wider groups through focused workshops and holding immersive experiences in venues that attract school groups, meant more diverse perspectives were included too and reflected in the feedback and recommendations.

This programme presents value to Network Rail due to:

- higher-than-expected levels of engagement
- the degree to which it represents people and communities that are often categorised as ‘hard to reach’
- having this diversity of voices share their thoughts and ideas on national infrastructure and community assets

“ **Very realistic, comes alive”**
Participant at the VR Pop-Up

“ **Learning something while having a great time!”**
Participant at the VR Pop-Up



Image credit:
Eddie Macdonald

Impact

The HUB Station design is tested and improved



Over 4,000 people actively participated in ExploreStation, feeding back online or joining our in-person and virtual workshops and immersive virtual reality experiences. They fed back on the design's principles and individual elements of the design, as well as offering further ideas on how to improve the proposals.

The engagement systematically tested participants' responses to the HUB Station's principles. While these principles were informed by people's priorities as identified by ThinkStation, people's support for the principles further endorsed the ThinkStation priorities, as well as the way in which 7N Architects and its team expressed them in the HUB Station.

This endorsement was particularly valuable to the design team as it consolidated their commitment to strengthening and improving elements of the design that manifested the principles, such as the landscape. An alternative may have been to minimise the landscape or make it an optional element, but the actual result was to bring on LUC as a part of the design team and develop the landscape plan. Accessibility on the approach to the station, including the welcome mat, was similarly strengthened because of the huge support for creating a truly inclusive environment.

The individual elements of the design were also tested at stage one of the engagement and, based on people's responses, the design team recommended a business case be undertaken to explore how the following aspects of HUB station can be provided at all station categories.

- Help points
- Wi-Fi
- Canopy and enclosed shelter
- Public realm
- Electric Vehicle charging

In addition, their ambition is to see the following become mandatory at all D and E stations.

- Accessible WC
- Baby Change

Additional key strategic ways in which the proposals improved between the two stages of engagement are:

- different material options, such as for the clocktower, were developed to enable a design that reflects its location and heritage in the different places where the HUB Station will be delivered
- the design of the platform pod was refined
- the landscape proposals were enhanced and detailed out, to include trees and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and raingardens, where possible
- the amount of seating on the platform and within the welcome mat was increased, with a variety of types of seating specified taking into account diverse needs, such as armrests and benches with backs
- visual transparency from outside the station onto the platform was reduced, in response to concerns about safety
- the visuals showing the extent of parking at the station were improved, to align with the proposal for a less car-focused public realm.

Partaking in the engagement activities did not just allow members of the public to improve the design, the design team participated too. As a result they were able to identify areas for improvement, such as the height of the wall between the public realm and the platform.

The ways in which the HUB Station design changed – in biodiversity, water management and wider environmental measures, reflections of local identity and heritage, safety and accessibility among others – demonstrates the positive impact of the ExploreStation programme and its consequent value to Network Rail.

The recommendations contained within this report, both strategic and detailed, are expected to lead to further improvements in the design and more robustness in the way in which the station is implemented in individual locations.

Impact

The story of ExploreStation is shared with local and national audiences

3

ExploreStation's communications strategy had clear objectives:

- Invite and attract a diversity of people across Great Britain to contribute to the station's developing design
- Make people aware of the innovative work, and approaches, Network Rail is undertaking to better serve communities and passengers alike
- Renew interest and pride in Great Britain's railways, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent public cautiousness about mass transit
- Excite people about Great British design
- Stimulate and inspire conversation about infrastructure and the role it can play in addressing global and local crises and challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss and social isolation

Due to ExploreStation, millions of people in Britain and globally were informed of the HUB Station design. The programme undertook a variety of measures to tell the story of ExploreStation, locally, nationally and internationally.

ExploreStation’s communications team, Caro Communications, created a press opportunity in the launch of the first virtual reality experience in York, which was held at the National Railway Museum. The event was attended by press across national and local media, as well as social media influencers: Ben Clatworthy, Transport Correspondent, *The Times*; Michael Binyon, OBE (Contributor, *The Times*); Mike Laycock (Chief Reporter, *York Press*); Gareth Dennis (influencer); Jayne McLoughlin (Women in Community Rail); Tim Dunn (influencer).

ExploreStation and the immersive virtual reality experience launch was featured twice on local BBC Radio York. The radio segments included interviews with the Director/Founder of Digital Urban, Simon Mabey, and Director of Place at the Design Council, Ed Hobson. The former was part of the station’s morning show, and one of the hosts participated in the immersive virtual reality experience live on air. York Press and the Yorkshire Post also covered the launch of the immersive virtual reality experience.

National audiences

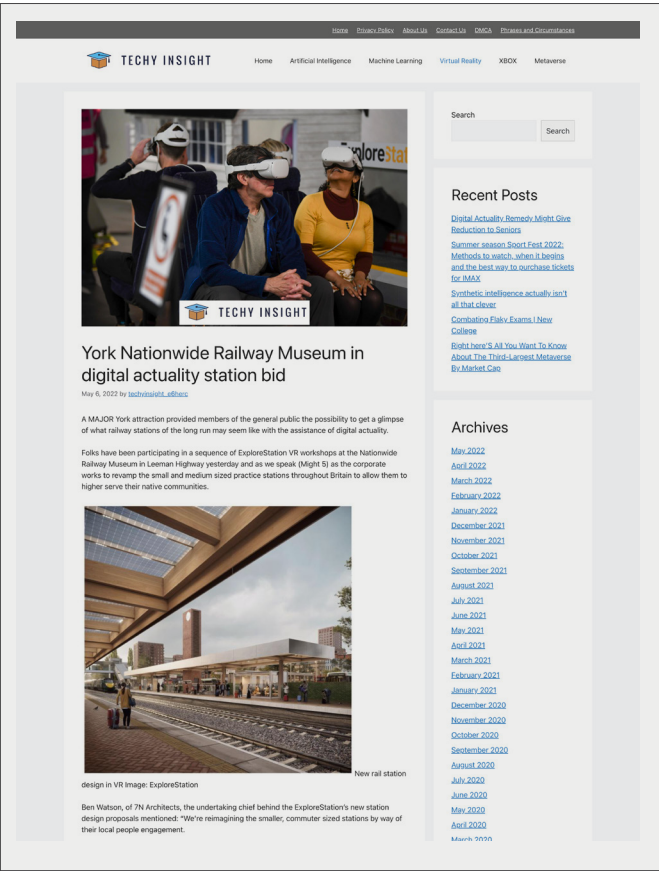
From November 2021 to June 2022, ExploreStation featured in a total of 28 pieces of coverage, with a combined print circulation of 534,000 and an online readership of 299 million.

The Times newspaper included a print news feature (495,000 print circulation) on the HUB Station design following an interview with Anthony Dewar, Head of Buildings and Architecture at Network Rail, along with promoting the stage two ExploreStation activities. The article also ran on their online site (27 million monthly online visitors), accompanied by video material to illustrate the HUB Design and immersive virtual reality experience. There was also a feature on local stations through time, based on the publication *HUB: Making places for people and trains* by Luke O’Donovan, and promoting the ExploreStation programme in *The Guardian*. Luke O’Donovan’s HUB portfolio is also being acquired by York’s National Railway Museum for their permanent digital collection.

Design Week featured ExploreStation, including an interview with Director of Place at Design Council, Ed Hobson, in March 2022.

ExploreStation’s measures to engage disabled, Asian and Black communities included advertorials in the following publications: *Able Magazine*, *Asian Express* and *The Voice*. The features promoted ExploreStation activities, including the Commonplace platform, and summarised the HUB design and journey from ThinkStation to ExploreStation.

Railway engineer, writer, podcaster and influencer Gareth Dennis featured ExploreStation and the HUB Station design on his Railway Natter podcast/YouTube vlog. As part of the programme, he talked about the history of small and medium-sized stations, the background to ExploreStation and the HUB design and promoted the engagement activities.



Gareth also participated in the #GreatBritishStation social media campaign, which invited people to talk about their favourite stations and share a picture on Twitter. He used the opportunity to talk about ExploreStation and why the programme is significant. Posts were made from locations across the UK, from the Royal Institute of Architecture in Scotland bookshop to Peter Murray, co-founder of New London Architecture.

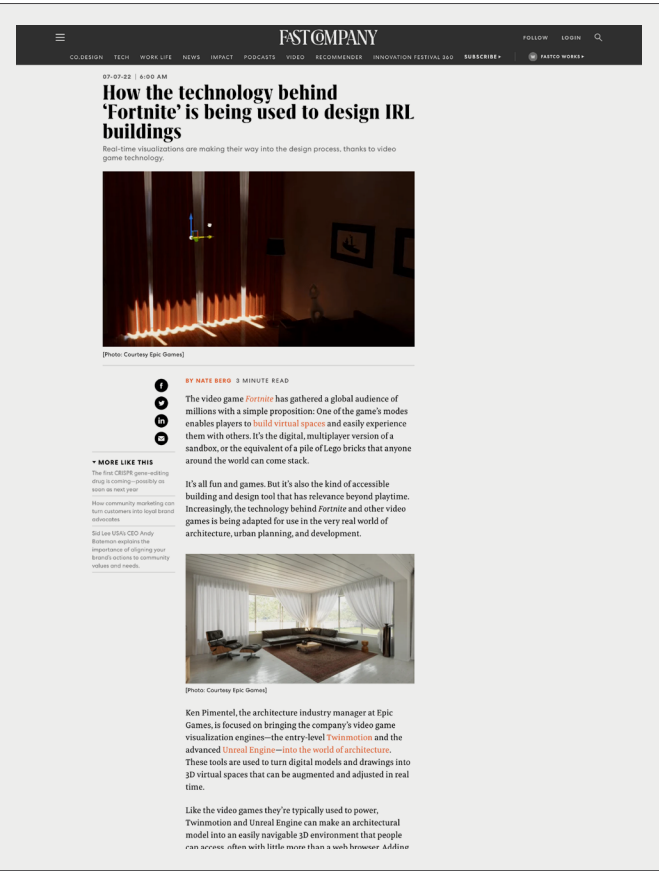
Fast Company, a world-leading business media brand, with an editorial focus on innovation in technology, leadership, world changing ideas, creativity, and design, covered how new technology from the videogame ‘Fortnite’ is being used to inform built environment design and used ExploreStation’s immersive virtual reality experience as a case study. Fast Company has a print circulation of 825,000 and 11 million monthly online visitors.

An attendee at the Brighton workshop wrote a detailed blog about their experience, also giving a background to the programme, such as the Re-imagining Railway Stations competition, and explaining the HUB Station design. The URL for the blog is <https://manyemdash.wordpress.com/home/>, and the ExploreStation post is dated 29 May.

Yahoo News (6.15 million monthly online visitors) and the tech news site, Techy Insight (9,200 monthly online visitors), both featured ExploreStation on their websites, focusing on the immersive virtual reality experience in York and promoting the programme as a whole.

Global coverage

In September 2022, ExploreStation was featured at the London Design Festival’s annual programme of talks – the Global Design Forum. The venue for this event is the V&A Museum in Kensington and an installation of the immersive virtual reality experience, open to the public on 21 September, showcased the HUB Station proposal. In addition, four panel discussions focused on the railways, transport and infrastructure sectors, innovation in engagement, community and inclusion among other themes, each tying back to the ExploreStation programme. The day’s overarching theme of ‘Come Together’ is in line with the HUB Station’s aim to act as a community gathering place. Sessions included panel discussions on the topics ‘Democratising the design process’, ‘Ecological Futures’ and ‘How Can Design Build Stronger Communities’ as well as the launch of the report by Andrew Haines and a keynote lecture by Osman Yousefzada. In addition to being open to the Global Design Forum’s in-person and online audiences of approximately 120,000 and 11,000 respectively, the events were promoted to the Global Design Forum’s 718,000-strong digital community.



Design Council @designcouncil

You can share your [#GreatBritishStation](#) using a ticket below too!

Local small and medium stations can do so much for communities, which is why [#ExploreStation](#) is such a vital conversation on their design. [@NetworkRail](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

Art UK and 9 others

5:18 PM · Apr 13, 2022 · Twitter Web App

1 Retweet 3 Quote Tweets 2 Likes

Design Council @designcouncil · Apr 13

This Thursday, we and friends around the social-media-nation will be sharing a [#GreatBritishStation](#) and recognising the part they play in our stories and lives!

[@networkrail](#) [#ExploreStation](#)

#Great British Station →

We're taking a tour of the country's beloved train stations! →

[#ExploreStation](#)

#

GreatBritishStation campaign

RIAS Bookshop @BookshopRIAS · Apr 14

5 year-old Harry and his Dad are on an expedition in [#Edinburgh](#) today, having come from the magical mystery land of North Berwick by train. 🚂

Harry is a big fan of Iggy Peck!

[bookshop.rias.org.uk/products/iggy...](#)

[#GreatBritishStation](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 4 8

Rowena Hay @the15thfloor

My [#GreatBritishStation](#) for the [@DesignCouncil](#)'s [#ExploreStation](#) project is inspired by childhood memories of the sleeper train to [#Aberdeen](#).

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1:31 PM · Apr 14, 2022 · Twitter Web App

1 Retweet 10 Likes

Yorkshire Post in Pictures @YPinPictures · May 10

The [#RailwayMuseum](#)

[#National Railway Museum](#) in [#York](#) launched an immersive [#Virtual reality](#) [#Station](#) experience. The [#VR](#) experience - 'Explore Station' [#ExploreStation](#) [@yorkshirepost](#) [@YPinPictures](#) [#Trains](#) [#Trainspotting](#) [#FuturePlanning](#) [#StationsOfTheFuture](#) [#Railways](#) [#Transport](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 4

Friends of Altrincham Interchange @FoAltrincham · 31m

[#GreatBritishStation](#) This photo is a few years old now but we still like it. [#Altrincham](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 7 41

London Festival of Architecture @LFArchitecture

Our [#GreatBritishStation](#) is [#VictoriaStation](#) 🚂 This June we'll be visiting 'Over Here' by Iain Jamieson and Zoë Power winners of our 'Pop Up Bike Station' with [@networkrail](#) 🚲 which offers creative bike storage outside London's mainline stations. [londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/pop-up-bike-pa...](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

12:29 PM · Apr 14, 2022 · Twitter Web App

4 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 12 Likes

The Beauty of Transport @BeautyOfTransp

My [#GreatBritishStation](#) is... Liverpool Lime Street!

Little did I know as a toddler on my first train trips from there, that it would inspire a lifelong love of train travel and transport architecture. It's special to me.

[@designcouncil](#) [@networkrail](#) [#ExploreStation](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

9:00 AM · Apr 14, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

6 Retweets 31 Likes

Locomotion @LocomotionSHD · Apr 14

Today we are celebrating [#GreatBritishStation](#) and of course we had to give a shout out to our neighbour Shildon Station.

Here it is in 1927, featuring the historic coal drops in the background [#ExploreStation](#)

[Science Museum Group](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

2 7 41

Design Council @designcouncil

Today is the day!

Tell the story of a [#GreatBritishStation](#) and the part it plays in your life.

Our very own Hugo nominated Bath Spa

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

10:40 AM · Apr 14, 2022 · Hootsuite Inc.

1 Retweet 7 Likes

Open House London @openhouselondon · Apr 16

Surely one [#GreatBritishStation](#) is Paddington. But did you know about all the milk? [@designcouncil](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

0:33 1,436 views

8 19

Citizen Songwriters @CitizenSongs · Apr 14

Today it's [#GreatBritishStation](#) day and we nominate [#Shildon](#) - cradle of the railways, town of skill, ingenuity and possibility. Exciting plans for this town in 2025 to celebrate 200 years. [@BishopLine](#) [@LocomotionSHD](#)

Here's a song we wrote to honour [#Shildon](#)!

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

0:12 138 views

7 10

Bob Price @Huxleyguk · Apr 14

My [#GreatBritishStation](#) is one of those workhorse operations which make up the backbone of many suburban lines. Functional, useful and with a lot of potential. This is a Sprinter at Heath High Level.

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 7

Friends of Altrincham Interchange @FoAltrincham · 31m

[#GreatBritishStation](#) This photo is a few years old now but we still like it. [#Altrincham](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 7 41

Phineas Harper @PhinHarper · Apr 14

I was asked to highlight a [#GreatBritishStation](#) for the [@designcouncil](#). As someone who gave up flying years ago, of course it had to be St Pancras International which is now Britain's gateway to the world.

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

2 3 26

Beam @Beam_ArtsUK · Apr 14

Our [#GreatBritishStation](#) story celebrates [#York](#) stations past & present. Back in 2013 we worked with [#Artist](#) [#JoFairfax](#) on 'Welcome', an interactive artwork for West Offices, a listed former railway station, redeveloped into new local authority headquarters. [#ExploreStation](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

3 9

RIAS Bookshop @BookshopRIAS · Apr 14

5 year-old Harry and his Dad are on an expedition in [#Edinburgh](#) today, having come from the magical mystery land of North Berwick by train. 🚂

Harry is a big fan of Iggy Peck!

[bookshop.rias.org.uk/products/iggy...](#)

[#GreatBritishStation](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 4 8

Mark Southgate @MarkSouthgate2 · Apr 14

My ticket for today's [#GreatBritishStation](#) [@designcouncil](#) campaign. [#StationCros](#). My father, Malcolm, was the youngest station master at Kings Cross in 1964 - see link below. I used it regularly when I lived in Bedfordshire in the 1990s.

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 2

RIAS Bookshop @BookshopRIAS · Apr 14

Our lovely customer today has just shared her [#architecture](#) [#Forthbridge](#) [#GreatBritishStation](#) story with us... 🚂

[bookshop.rias.org.uk/collections/gj...](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

1 3 10

London Festival of Architecture @LFArchitecture

Our [#GreatBritishStation](#) is [#VictoriaStation](#) 🚂 This June we'll be visiting 'Over Here' by Iain Jamieson and Zoë Power winners of our 'Pop Up Bike Station' with [@networkrail](#) 🚲 which offers creative bike storage outside London's mainline stations. [londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/pop-up-bike-pa...](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

12:29 PM · Apr 14, 2022 · Twitter Web App

4 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 12 Likes

Peter Murray OBE @PGSMurray · Apr 14

Here's my contribution to [#GreatBritishStation](#) [#ExploreStation](#) [@designcouncil](#) Littlehampton in West Sussex is thr 46mins from Victoria Station [@EastBeachCafe](#)

Great British Station

Ticket Holder

Station

Reason for travel

#GreatBritishStation

9 21

Appendices

Insights and recommendations related to the design and implementation of the Hub Station

ExploreStation had five engagement themes, which correspond to the nine ThinkStation priorities for designing a future passenger hub. These are:

- 1 High quality inclusive spaces and services for all
- 2 Responding to and enriching local contexts and communities
- 3 Encouraging connectivity
- 4 Addressing climate change and biodiversity
- 5 Responding to future needs

Each of the activities were designed to respond to these themes. The insights and recommendations for the design and implementation of the HUB Station, which emerged from the engagement activities, were matched to each ExploreStation theme. This allows for a clear relationship to, and journey from, ThinkStation to be achieved.

Appendix 1

High quality inclusive spaces and services for all

Corresponds to ThinkStation priorities:

- ‘Provide consistent quality of space and service’
- ‘Be welcoming and facilitate inclusive travel’

Support

There was a huge appetite for detailed access and inclusion information about the HUB Station, from material specifications through to pavement width standards. If provided creatively and accessibly, this will ensure the station is not only physically accessible but becomes a place where those with diverse needs feel welcome.

The kit of parts approach of the HUB Station design means that the design elements which prioritise access and inclusion can be replicated and refined over time.

Concerns

Overall confidence in the HUB Station’s ability to deliver on inclusivity was low. However, there was a notable difference between those who responded based on the visual renders and information, and those who discussed the inclusive ambitions of the HUB Station at the workshop session. Feedback on the visuals tended to focus on the need for the HUB Station to avoid pre-existing concerns based on poor experiences at other stations. This highlights the need for access and inclusion to be a consistent priority, to remove barriers to access.

People most wanted to see the HUB Station get the basics right by consistently providing facilities such as accessible toilets, waiting shelters and comfortable seating.



How confident are you that HUB is an accessible and inclusive environment, providing for a diversity of people and their needs?



Commonplace participants at stage 2

● Confident	30%
● Neutral	32%
● Not confident	38%

Implementing the HUB Station

The HUB Station is an opportunity to set a new benchmark for railway station inclusivity – providing a truly equal and exceptional experience for a diversity of passengers and a range of needs. Its modular design means that any access and inclusion features can be replicated and refined.

Everybody faces some barriers to access, but these can manifest in diverse ways and lead to a uniquely personal experience of a place for different users. There is a huge challenge in design to meet such a wide diversity of needs, and the HUB Station could play a role in communicating, and indeed in shaping, new design standards within the industry. This could increase public awareness and knowledge of inclusive design and help push for more accessible public spaces.

To support participants in thinking beyond the challenges of existing stations it is important to ensure that architectural visualisations reflect real life by including buggies, bikes, toilets, and a mixture of people. Utilising the assets developed through ExploreStation, future HUB Station visitors could explore the station’s accessibility features through a VR model online, or a physical model located in each new station to help visitors unpack the design and wayfinding routes.

The detailed design is as critical to the station’s accessibility and inclusion as the overall concept, and the next stages of development should continue to invite diverse passenger groups to test and scrutinise the design. Building a prototype station would enable intense testing against real-life challenges and scenarios.

Summarised insights and recommendations:

- People expect basic facilities such as toilets, platform shelters and comfortable seating to be provided as standard at all stations. They challenged the HUB Station design to provide more seating and shelter, especially outside the station for those waiting for onward connections. A range of seating should always be offered – some with armrests, some with backs, some without backs, varying heights, somewhere users can lie down etc.
- More must be done to understand and respond to non-visible disabilities — and other groups that are impacted by poor design such as women, young people and people from ethnic minority backgrounds and who might not feel safe/secure when travelling.
- Design and manage the station so that the needs of different groups can be accommodated, and their needs reconciled. For example, provide space for teenagers to gather safely. Make sure the station is a welcoming rather than hostile place for homeless people. There is an opportunity to encourage young people to activate the site, for example, through a playful and inclusive approach to the landscape which invites them into the design, management and use of the HUB Station.
- Staff and CCTV were identified as the top elements that make the station environment safe. Visible staff at accessible help points are crucial to making a space inclusive and safe for everyone but particularly for disabled people, women and other marginalised groups. This is true at all times of day, but particularly at night. In addition to CCTV, and especially where stations are unstaffed, the HUB Station should consider the role of passive surveillance through a mixture of complementary activities such as shops, cafes, or community initiatives to provide reassurance and deter crime.
- Boarding and alighting the train remains the primary concern for passengers with disabilities who commonly experience a lack of step-free access from the street to the platform and crucially onto trains as a barrier to access. To be truly inclusive the HUB Station must be accompanied by a coordinated, long-term and industry-wide plan to ensure a common approach to platform design and rolling stock.

- It is recognised that there will be situations, particularly at remote stations, where the full provision of the HUB Station’s facilities and amenities will not be viable. However, the smallest category F-mini (a proposed new sub-division of category F stations) HUB Station should only be considered where this represents a genuine enhancement to existing provisions. Opportunities to provide facilities and amenities should be taken even at this smaller scale. For example, providing a community noticeboard, mobile charging point, or drinking water fountain.
- Inclusivity should also include the accessibility of service information and moving around the station, not just getting on and off the train. Feedback and suggestions included making better use of contrasting materials and colours to make glass partitions visible; ensuring signage and information boards are in an appropriate font, colour and at a suitable level; integrating audio-visual displays; the use of bright colours to aid navigation for people with dementia; minimising background noise and ensuring the quality and clarity of announcements; providing consistent tactile paving and surfaces on routes to and around the station.

Quotes

- “ Ensure the welcome mat has clear definitions between the paved pedestrian areas and do not impede the use of shared space. This is extremely unhelpful for those using mobility aids such as a guide dog and or a white cane.”
- “ We definitely need toilets, market town stations don’t have toilets at them. This is really not good.”
- “ It can be difficult to access the information in a crowded station as I can get overwhelmed by the people and noise, and it can be stressful locating the platform and checking times. Being able to do this somewhere quieter, not just in the middle of the concourse would help ... Having transient information (i.e. platform info and departure times) clearly signposted and accessible in multiple/calm spaces so getting this information does not become overwhelming/ stressful.”

Responding to and enriching local contexts and communities

Corresponds to ThinkStation priorities:

- ‘Support existing and new communities in their local area’
- ‘Reflect and embody local character and heritage’

Support

The ambition to develop a coherent identity across the network while also reflecting local areas and contexts was welcomed. Participants were generally extremely positive about the potential for a modular design to help update existing stations and to create a place-specific station design.

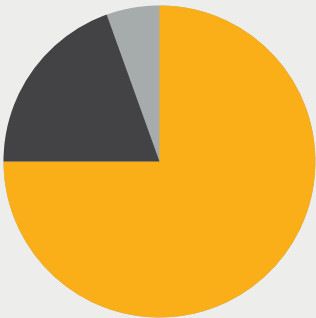
The welcome mat and activity framework represent a significant shift to the traditional station typology, merging the station activity with the public realm and creating opportunities for the local community to inhabit the spaces surrounding the station..

The majority welcomed the aim for stations to be a hub for local communities. The engagement activities produced a wealth of ideas for activities, services, and amenities that local people wanted to see future stations providing and which local groups and organisations could potentially play a role in delivering.

The activity framework was perceived as the element of the station design offering the greatest opportunity for local communities to inform and benefit from the HUB Station design at a local level.



How do you feel about stations playing a civic role and being at the heart of your community?



Commonplace participants at stage 1

Positive	75%
Neutral	20%
Negative	5%

The activity framework can add value at all sizes of stations and locations?



Commonplace participants at stage 2

Agree	64%
Neutral	24%
Disagree	12%

Concerns

Participants understood and appreciated the complexity of delivering and managing the HUB Stations, but some struggled to see where the opportunity for local people to step into activating, curating, or enriching the HUB Station would lie.

Some questioned the viability of the activity framework, and its adaptability to meet the anticipated scale of community and commercialised uses, particularly in smaller and more remote stations. They also sought reassurance that there would be adequate management and support available to communities.

Some participants found it difficult to understand how the sleek modern aesthetic of HUB Stations could be tailored to reflect local communities and felt this risked the stations appearing generic and soulless.

Implementing the HUB Station

Engagement and co-design with the community at each station location will be critical to ensuring HUB Stations reflect the locality and deliver a viable community and commercial offering that activates the station as a vibrant community destination and resource.

It is important that the narrative of the HUB Station as a community hub is clearly communicated, not just during the design and delivery process, but also within the station once built. There is a clear appetite from local people to get involved and to help these stations become a true resource to the community, but people need to understand how they can do this.

It is critical to the success of the HUB Station that these community-focused ambitions be embedded in the business case and aligned with available funding opportunities.

Summarised engagement insights and recommendations:

- To truly operate as a kit of parts, there needs to be greater clarity on how the HUB Station’s components can integrate with existing heritage buildings, both at the station and in the local vicinity.
- Flexibility of use and free/low-cost access to spaces were identified as key elements to achieving the community ambitions of HUB. The commercial viability of activities needs to be carefully balanced, with opportunities for low-cost and short-term leases so that people can test an idea with reduced risks.
- Community activities identified as desirable by participants include community notice boards, food banks and charity drop-off points, book exchanges, craft swaps, plant and seed swaps, gardening and bird watching groups, games rooms, debating spaces, cycle repair workshops, walking groups, car boot sales, meeting space for clubs and community groups, confidence building groups to help people access train travel, music sessions at commuter times and displays of local artwork and performance.
- Commercial activities identified included bike hire stations, newsagents, cafes, pubs and restaurants with outdoor seating, nail bars, dry cleaning services, meeting spaces for hire with projection facilities, co-working spaces, flexible event spaces, tourist information, citizens advice and community groups space, gallery spaces, zero-waste shops, seasonal food and craft markets, parcel and grocery pick-up points, and charging points.
- A realistic management plan should be in place with appropriate resources to support additional uses effectively. Facilities will not be occupied organically by communities, they will need to be invited into the process and how the spaces are activated initially, then managed and curated to ensure their continual usage and success. Approaches to the management of the community hub include coordination with the local authority, elevating the role of station staff in actively managing stations, the use of station ambassadors to greet people and look after the space, the development of a staffing framework on which local communities and businesses can build, co-management with local user and community groups and the establishment of a Community Trust organisation.

- The clocktower is generally recognised as an excellent feature, providing a distinct identity and landmark to the HUB design. The clocktower could benefit from a wider pallet of colours, and a bolder graphic approach. This feature is an opportunity to display the national brand of the HUB Station and bring a freshness to places where the existing context may have a less prominent character.
- More work needs to be done to ensure that individual HUB Stations have a distinct local character, responding to rural, urban and coastal contexts. This could be achieved by developing a mini brief for how each station can reflect the local character and establishing clear ground rules on what is required and where there is flexibility.
- There may be strategic opportunities to align with funding streams that can support community and enterprise activities at many stations, such as the levelling up fund. This would supplement work to engage with local communities to identify opportunities for local businesses and community groups.

Quotes

“ It is good that stations will have a coherent identity, and with the arrival of Great British Railways that will become even more important. London Transport’s Piccadilly line stations designed by William Holden are a good example of how stations can have an identity that clearly signals the presence of the railway, reflects their local area but has a common style that unifies the city. The HUB Station has the potential to do the same.”

“ The proposed stations should be actively managed by station staff who are accountable to the community. It needs people there who will work to make it work. [...] How about a station ambassador as a post at each station (more than one for bigger stations)?”

“ A ‘one size fits all’ design like this with minor tweaks merely plays lip service to reflecting the character of local communities and is effectively a ‘one size fits none.’”

“ [I] want to see more about how local materials will be used — it has been recognised in regional distinctions, but wanting something to maintain those local features and links. So that when you arrive at the station you have a sense of where you are from the station itself.”

Encouraging connectivity



Corresponds to ThinkStation priorities:

- ‘Establish connections with and between the town centre/high street’
- ‘Support and better integrate cross modal transport’

Support

The HUB Station design marks a shift from the traditional function of a train station as purely a transport hub. The ideas generated from the engagement not only demonstrated a wealth of opportunity in terms of what could happen but also how it could happen. Many felt the HUB Stations could catalyse collaboration among groups and organisations in a neutral shared space to make other initiatives possible.

There was a particular focus on working with local partners, like bus services and e-bike/ scooter providers. This is to ensure the HUB Stations integrate other methods of travel, so that they can adapt over time in response to changing behaviour and become more than train passenger hubs. Participants were keen to see the last mile of journeys considered from a sustainability perspective and felt the HUB Stations could support this ambition by providing other transport links to and from the station.

The importance of well-connected stations was also highlighted in support of meeting the other ambitions of the station. For example, the environmental benefits of increasing the attractiveness of rail travel and encouraging people out of their cars could be as critical to achieving sustainability objectives as the sustainable features of the station design itself.

Concerns

Connectivity was one of the more challenging topics for participants to engage with, and many found it difficult to ground the design in the absence of a realistic physical location context.

There was consensus that the design is an opportunity to support the transition away from private car ownership towards more sustainable and active forms of travel, but conflicting views emerged on striking a balance in the volume of parking, particularly for remote and rural areas where alternatives to driving to the station may be limited.

Implementing the HUB Station

At this stage, while the design is still conceptual, there is an opportunity to visualise the station within aspirational landscapes which demonstrate the latest thinking on connectivity – covering everything from car parking strategies to how active transit networks like electric bikes, cargo bikes, and scooters can be accommodated and sheltered/secured. Testing these ideas through engagement will help to further understand people’s priorities and expectations.

As stations take on a new role as hubs for community activity, there was a clear mandate from participants that connectivity be viewed not simply as how people get to and from the station, but also in terms of building the relationships and partnerships that enable the station to become embedded as part of local community life.

Summary of insights and recommendations

- Ensure accessibility and safety of key walking routes to and from the station, including clear signage, lighting, clear sightlines, and well-maintained and level surfaces. Connect neighbourhoods and communities by providing entrances and exits from both sides of the station, accessible routes across the track and pedestrian crossings outside stations on busy roads.
- Provide information and signage to aid navigation locally towards the town centre, shops, services, and onward travel options. Synchronise data between bus and train timetables and ensure that the routes between the different transport modes are easy to navigate and well signposted. Include passenger information displays on the approach to the station and at local transport interchanges.
- Support the transition from cars to sustainable modes of transport by improving the interchange between bus and rail services and prioritising safe storage for bikes and scooters over car parking. Ensure the cars are de-prioritised at the station entrance to create a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Improve cycle infrastructure through generous, covered, lit and secure bike storage located close to the station entrance, bike and e-bike hire schemes, better connections to existing road/cycle infrastructure as, well as new, segregated cycle lanes enabling access to the station from local residential areas. Also include wheeling ramps in stations, especially where lifts may be too small to take a bicycle.
- Provide sufficient parking dependent on the station context, including blue badge, EV charging and free short stay drop-off and pick-up points. Where necessary provide more substantial secure parking for commuters in rural areas where less public transport and cycling infrastructure is available.
- Integrate with the local bus network with more frequent buses/shuttles that stop at the railway station, coordination of bus/rail timetables clearly communicated to passengers, and sheltered bus stops with accessible routes close to the station entrance.
- Coordinate community activities with adjacent stations on the rail network so that passengers can benefit from activities and amenities beyond their immediate station.

- Invite people into shared design decision-making. Through inviting diverse local people and organisations into the design process at their local HUB Station, the implementation of a station design can create an opportunity to help activate local networks and collaborations.

Quotes

“ I’d like to see a stronger focus on the interchange between sustainable modes of travel. The visualisations do not appear to have any cycle storage at all so it would be good to understand how that would be accommodated. The inclusion of a carpark instead of something like cycle racks, an electric bike or scooter hub, or even bus stop is quite disappointing as it gives the impression that most people will drive to the new station.”

“ The link between the railway and the town could be better around public transport. Bus stops should be closer to the station and have covered access so they can get off the bus undercover straight into the train.”

“ The trouble is that many stations aren’t at the heart of their communities — they’re on the edge — and so passing trade can make it difficult.”

Addressing climate change and biodiversity loss



Corresponds to ThinkStation priorities:

- ‘Celebrate and improve the quality of green spaces and open spaces and/or provide access to them’
- ‘Help to address climate change’

Support

The sustainability credentials of the HUB Station were one of the main areas of interest from participants, who were eager to know as much as possible about the what and the why of sustainable design. There was huge support for the environmental ambitions, but a highly informed participant base pushed to see the HUB Station take this even further and expected to see accountability through quantifiable environmental targets.

It was recognised that the HUB Station could be viewed as an exemplar of sustainable design practices, and this creates a real educational opportunity to raise awareness about environmental issues and design and showcase this through the design itself.

Participants appreciated the transparency in communication around design changes between the engagement phases, including discounting grey water collection, battery storage and green roofs. They mostly responded positively to the changes but wanted further reassurance that these decisions were made based on environmental considerations.

Concerns

Some participants questioned the robustness and suitability of the design for British climates, particularly in parts of the country which are cooler and experience high volumes of rain fall and windy weather.

Participants also questioned the landscape plan featuring ‘local species’, and many mentioned that the differences between stations would be very minimal in some cases. While there was an appreciation of proposing British plants, participants felt this approach to the landscape was based on a superficial idea of locality.

Implementing the HUB Station

Individual sites will have unique landscape contexts, and this design must offer the strategies and techniques that inform and allow a local landscape approach to evolve.

Summarised insights and recommendations:

- Increase biodiversity of HUB Stations by integrating larger trees, shrubbery and greening spaces inside the station including platforms. Look to incorporate wildlife habitats, for example hedging, a pond or water feature, and bird and insect boxes. As part of the landscape strategy, identify appropriate tree species and highlight their carbon sequestering capabilities and optimal locations to ensure safe rail operation, in order to maximise summer cooling and noise reduction around the HUB Station.
- There is broad support for the use of timber as a sustainable building material within the HUB Stations. However, participants pushed to see greater use of innovative materials including the use of recycled materials such as plastics, in construction.
- The Photovoltaic (PV) canopy received strong support and is a visible statement of the sustainable vision of the HUB Station. Participants had high expectations of energy generation and expressed a wish for the HUB Station to meet more, if not all, of its energy needs onsite. To ensure the PV panels operate at maximum efficiency, it will be important to commit to a regular maintenance and upkeep regime.
- Make the carbon, energy, and biodiversity narratives visible by showcasing sustainability data within the station’s design. The clock tower or digital screens could be used to display energy demand vs. generation, local pollution levels, the station’s carbon payback timeline, data on carbon sequestering or biodiversity impact, or to inform passengers and communities how the station is working towards meeting sustainability targets.
- The HUB Station has a role to play in building resilience in our water networks, particularly through an alleviation strategy. Incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), rain gardens and where possible increasing surface permeability to limit sewerage discharge and support planting and biodiversity on site. Some participants questioned if grey water recycling may be appropriate for some stations, particularly those with no mains water supply.
- Consider how the kit of parts can be used to sensitively retrofit existing buildings, to avoid demolition and replacement, which will further help to reduce waste and embodied carbon.

- Activities like urban food growing were proposed in the welcome mat, not only as a way to connect to local people’s passions and create social value for the station but also as a sustainability feature of the station.

Quotes

“ Many stations currently have beds and planters which volunteers use for both flowers and vegetables — these are lovely to see and it would be a shame to lose them even if they do not accord with the more modern streamlined vision. It would be nice to incorporate hedging rather than fencing in suitable places, nest boxes and Swift bricks, House Martin boxes in the towers. Where there is space some form of pond/water feature would be good for wildlife.”

“ Having waited at a newly-built station I was shocked to find there was little station canopy except by the entrance. It needs to stretch down the platform as our Victorian forebears realised.”

Responding to future needs

Corresponds to ThinkStation priorities:

- ‘Ensure longevity by accommodating changes of use, capacity and trends’

Support

Participants embraced the kit of parts approach with minimal concerns about standardisation. Many felt a modular approach is the best, and only sensible way, to create a design framework of this size and remit.

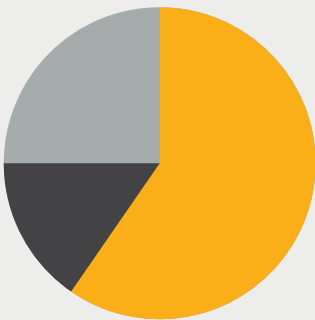
Participants felt that the activity framework presents an opportunity for the HUB Station to be responsive to changing needs and wants, particularly if some elements of the space are utilised as meanwhile or curatable spaces.

Concerns

Many participants questioned the HUB Station visuals and plans that showed the station dominated by car parking, and instead encouraged less environmentally taxing forms of transport, such as bikes or onward public transport.



Has the HUB station proposal progressed positively?



Commonplace participants at stage 2

● Agree	60%
● Neutral	15%
● Disagree	25%

Implementing the HUB Station

To successfully achieve a HUB Station that can respond to future needs, a long-term engagement strategy needs to be developed to sit alongside the HUB Station’s physical implementation, which would shape a system for people to feedback on new and changing needs and wants

The next stages of design will also require a much more robust consideration of maintenance and access requirements, which should include engaging with key stakeholders responsible for maintenance and servicing. These individuals will undoubtedly bring a wealth of knowledge and practical understanding. By working with them at this early stage the design team will benefit from this expertise as well as begin to build internal buy-in.

Summarised insights and recommendations

- Explore further the potential benefits and efficiencies that can be brought by a kit of parts design, methods of mass production and local procurement of materials – both in terms of carbon and cost reduction. Making the most of these benefits would require an industry-level change to procurement processes but, if successfully integrated, could play an essential role in demonstrating the viability of this design. This will also support developing the business case for adopting this standardised approach to station design. Easily replaceable or repairable parts should be available and a key benefit of the kit of parts approach.
- The architectural infrastructure of the activity framework and the welcome mat are not enough for these spaces to have organic sustained use without activating them through measures such as creating a system of use, inviting people into the space and curating a schedule of opportunities. It is vital to manage, and curate continued future use of these spaces to ensure they remain an asset to the HUB Station, and do not become leftover spaces.
- Consider how the appearance of the HUB Station and its materials might change over five years, ten years and beyond, and plan and provide for this eventuality now. Provide reassurance about how the design will age, the durability of materials, and consider whether the structures would be easy to damage or vandalise. Maintenance and cleaning plans for the HUB Station, photovoltaic canopy and landscape need to be thought through, costed and protected in the budget from the start.

- Having staff on site is considered important for good maintenance of the station and landscape.
- Invest in high-quality fixtures and furniture which are sustainable and long-lasting.
- Embed learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic in the pods and communal areas as an aspect of futureproofing, in case of future pandemics and potential social distancing requirements.
- Plan for the potential role of HUB Stations in the future development of sustainable housing, particularly in areas which may be developed around smaller stations which tend to be on the peripheral to their communities.
- Seek to align the HUB Station ambitions with those of other funders. For example, engage with government and stakeholders to discuss how this station design could support priorities like active travel strategies, high street regeneration, and the levelling up agenda.
- Ensure that the landscape’s biodiversity is scrutinised to the same high standard as the carbon impact of the building’s structure.

Quotes

- “ Make sure the station is staffed and maintained again. Has to be low maintenance and low staff or high maintenance and good staffing.”
- “ There is an unkempt piece of scrubland by my local station. I would like to see a protocol to ensure adoption and management of such open spaces that are part of the railway/public authority estate.”

Evaluation

The ExploreStation evaluation had three key aims. These were developed in partnership and with guidance from independent evaluator, Rowena Hay, to help the ExploreStation team:

- Understand and reflect upon the effectiveness of the ExploreStation approach, its impact and value for Network Rail, the design team and other key stakeholders.
- Evaluate the success of ExploreStation in engaging diverse stakeholders effectively, gathering their views, increasing their knowledge and enthusiasm for rail and high-quality station design.
- Ensure the quality and consistency of questions asked when evaluating the station design building on the findings and recommendations developed through ThinkStation.

An evaluation framework and monitoring process were developed, in collaboration with the programme partners, to identify the objectives of ExploreStation and link them to outcomes and emerging indicators of success, and to inform the development of appropriate research methods and tools.

Evaluation methods

In order to evaluate the extent to which these key objectives were met, ExploreStation used mixed methods. A set of participatory evaluation tools were used to gather in-session feedback on the content and delivery of the in-person engagement sessions from participants.

- A participant feedback survey circulated at the end of in-person activities.
- An equalities monitoring survey to monitor participant diversity.
- In-depth interviews with delivery staff to explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and key learning.

The research data produced from these methods, alongside monitoring data from the delivery team, were analysed to draw out key findings against the programme objectives.

Appendix 2

The HUB Station journey

2019
—20

ThinkStation

ThinkStation, an engagement programme led by Network Rail and the Design Council, holds a national conversation where stakeholders from across the rail sector shared their ideas and developed a vision and principles for the future of railway stations in Great Britain.

2020
—21

Re-Imagining Railways Competition

Network Rail and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) launch an international design competition inviting individuals, businesses and collaborative teams from the design, built environment and manufacturing industries to re-imagine what a station could become in the 21st century. The competition was won by 7N Architects with Arup, Lisa MacKenzie Consultancy and Gardiner & Theobald.

2021
—22

ExploreStation

The Design Council, in partnership with Commonplace, Digital Urban and The Glass-House Community Led Design, led a mass engagement programme, asking the British public for their feedback, thoughts and ideas on the proposed design for small and medium-sized stations across Great Britain. Engagement was undertaken across two stages and across multiple types of engagement activity and informed the development of the design.

2022
onwards

Design development

The insights and recommendations support Network Rail to further develop its station delivery guidance. Technical detailed design and specification are developed. When a new station, or station improvement is commissioned there is a local engagement process and development programme to understand and respond to local priorities.

Appendix 3

Glossary

Active travel	Active travel is methods of travel that involve physically beneficial movement, making it a form of exercise. Examples include walking, wheeling (using a wheelchair or mobility aid) or cycling.
Activity Framework	See page 8
Architectural renders	Architectural renders are the images designers create to visualise their design proposals. Architectural renders can be sketches, drawings, CGIs (computer generated images), 3D models and animations etc.
Barriers to access	Barriers to access are the conditions that exist and prevent disabled people from using or accessing knowledge and resources in the same way that abled people do.
Battery storage	Batteries are used to store rechargeable energy. In the context of the HUB Station, the energy created from renewable sources (such as the PV panels) could be stored by the batteries and used to power station amenities such as lighting, information screens and charging electric vehicles.
Biodiversity	Biodiversity is all life on Earth, including humans, animals, plants, insects and even bacteria. Maintaining the Earth’s biodiversity is critical to human beings’ survival.
Canopy	See page 8
Carbon payback	Carbon payback is the time it takes for renewable energy sources, such as windfarms, to be in operation before they start countering the carbon impacts of their construction.
Carbon sequestering	Carbon sequestration is the process of capturing and storing carbon, thereby preventing it from being released into the atmosphere.
Category D, E & F stations	See page 4
Collaborative design workshops	Collaborative workshops are processes through which participants can partake in group activities that help them to understand, as well as give their feedback and ideas on proposed designs for places, services, products and processes.
Democracy in design	Democracy in design is the process by which design, including the design of our places, is developed through collaboration and co-development with the people and communities that will be most affected by the output.

Appendix 4

Design Review	A process through which panels provide independent and expert advice and guidance on built environment programmes to project and design teams, with the aim of achieving excellence and improving outcomes for everyone, including the wider public.
Diverse communities	Diverse communities are groups that demonstrate different demographical characteristics, backgrounds, interests and experiences such as in age, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexuality, socio-economic background etc.
Ecology / ecosystems	Ecology is the study of our environment and how organisms relate to each other. The ecosystem is the environment within which they interact.
Electric vehicle (EV)	Electric vehicles are powered by electric batteries, rather than petrol – as with cars - or human energy, such as with electric bikes and scooters.
Embodied carbon	Embodied carbon is the carbon that is emitted in construction projects, such as buildings. It includes the carbon emitted in processes such as extracting, producing and transporting materials as well as from the construction process itself.
Engagement tiles	Links to webpages on the Commonplace platform that are depicted as ‘tiles’. Clicking on the link, or tile, takes you to a new page that tells you more about the proposed design that participants are being asked about as part of the engagement process.
Equality / equitable	Equality gives everyone equal access to opportunities and to live safely and well in a way that allows them to make the most of their lives. Equitable means being fair, just and impartial.
Futureproofing	Futureproofing is the process through which we create places, products and services that will be long-lasting, not only through being robust enough to not break apart when in use over an extended time, but also by being flexible to accommodate new technologies, changing habits, needs and priorities.
Green roofs	Green roofs, also called living roofs, are roofs that wholly or partly incorporate planting. They can be used as gardens, for growing fruit and vegetables, encouraging pollinators such as bees and butterflies and even for water irrigation.
Grey water collection	Grey water collection is when water that has been used once, such as to wash dishes, hands or in the shower, is collected and used again (or recycled), such as to water plants or flush toilets.
Habitat	Habitats are the natural environments of life on earth, including plants, insects and animals that enable them to survive and thrive.
Hub Station	<p>Network Rail’s new proposed design for small and medium sized stations across Great Britain.</p> <p>7N Architects is leading a design team of ARUP, LUC, and Gardiner & Theobald to further develop their proposals for the HUB Station.</p>

Implementation guidance	The guidance that helps to deliver a project. In the case of ExploreStation, implementation guidance will give advice on how to construct and deliver the station and activity framework in line with its vision and principles and ensure that it is suited to its location and the communities that live, work and visit there.
Inclusive and accessible design	It is important that everyone is able to socialise, travel for leisure or to work with ease and comfort. This means your gender; race; physical, hidden and mental disabilities; sexuality; age or socioeconomic background should not make you feel out-of-place, vulnerable or like your experience is harder or more intimidating than for others.
Infrastructure built environment programmes	Our infrastructure supports the way in which we live our lives, including by providing energy, transport, health services etc. The buildings, such as power plants, rail stations and hospitals, and the landscape surrounding them create the built environment for this infrastructure. An infrastructure built environment programme is the process through which these buildings and places are planned, delivered and managed.
Innovation	Innovation is the process by which a new element is added to products, systems, services etc. The aim of innovation is improvement, whether through streamlining processes, costs or the delivery of the service or end product.
Kit-of parts	Also known as modular design, a kit-of-parts is a design with individual elements that can be assembled to create a whole. Each element is independent of the other, and can be manufactured separately and assembled on site. Modular/kit-pf-parts designs can create efficiency in delivery and cost.
Last-mile-journeys	Last mile journeys are the last leg of the journey when getting from point A to B. Examples include getting from a railway station to your home or from a bus station to the cinema.
Levelling-up	Levelling up refers to a series of Government priorities, policies, and funding with the collective ambition to reduce regional imbalance and support communities to flourish, The Levelling Up Fund includes streams that invest in both national and local infrastructure projects.
Meaningful engagement	Engagement that is meaningful gives those who are engaged with a genuine voice and role in the development of the place, product, process or system that is being designed or created.
Net zero	Net zero is achieving the balance of carbon being released into the atmosphere equalling carbon being absorbed.
Network Rail	Network Rail is the owner of Great Britain’s railway infrastructure, including over 20,00 miles of railway tracks, bridges, tunnels, viaducts and operational buildings. This includes over 2,500 stations which are the gateway to the UK’s railway for millions of people across.
Network Rail’s Design Advice Panel (DAP)	The DAP provides independent expert advice to Network Rail on the design of stations, infrastructure enhancement, development and associated master plans.

Network Rail’s Principles of Good Design	<p>Network Rail has ten Principles of Good Design, which should be analysed, defined and responded to in the development of any Network Rail asset as part of a planned process.</p> <p>You can read about the Principles here: https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NR_Our-Principles-of-Good-Design.pdf</p>
Non-visible disabilities	<p>Non-visible disabilities, also known as hidden disabilities, are those that are not immediately obvious or do not have visible signs. Examples include mental health conditions, cognitive impairments, hearing loss, low vision and autism.</p>
Passenger hubs	<p>Congregation points for passengers where they can obtain transport services, such as buying tickets, getting information, embarking and disembarking from their chosen transport option</p>
Photovoltaic panels or PVs	<p>Photovoltaic panels are a renewable energy source which converts sunlight into energy.</p>
Pods	<p>See page 8</p>
Pollination (Pollinators)	<p>Pollination is the fertilisation of plants through transfer of pollen. The animals and insects that aid this process are pollinators and include bees, butterflies, birds and bats.</p>
Rain gardens	<p>Rain gardens are part of SuDS (sustainable drainage systems) and create planted space to collect water that runs off roofs and other hard surfaces. Water can be held for a longer period of time and while a whole garden can be a raingarden, shallow areas or dips where the water collects, is mainly defined as the rain garden.</p>
Regenerative design	<p>Regenerative design aims to design processes, products and systems that do not just maintain materials and conditions into the future but to enable renewal and restoration.</p>
Re-imagining Railway Stations Competition	<p>The Re-imagining Railway Stations competition was an international design competition by Network Rail and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) to re-imagine transport hubs as an interface between communities and the railways in the 21st century.</p>
Retrofit	<p>Retrofit is the process of modifying an existing building or space with the aim of improving its functionality. The incorporation of SuDS (sustainable drainage systems) and green roofs in existing places or replacing single glaze windows with double-glazed ones are all part of the retrofitting process.</p>
Social sustainability / social capital	<p>Social sustainability is maintaining the conditions for, or enabling existing, communities, neighbourhoods, places and societies to thrive.</p>
Step-free-access	<p>Step-free access is when there are no steps involved when moving through a space, such as using slopes, lifts and escalators when navigating different ground levels.</p>
SuDS	<p>SuDS are sustainable drainage systems, techniques through which water is managed close to where it falls through design that mimics nature. SuDS allows water to be drained back into the ground and has multiple benefits, including reducing flooding.</p>

Sustainable design (Sustainability)	<p>Sustainable design aims to support sustainability goals, which is to preserve our materials and conditions into the future. In the context of the HUB Station, one example of sustainability measures is to generate energy through the design of the station with photovoltaics in the canopy, thereby reducing reliance on the energy grid and reducing carbon emissions into the atmosphere.</p>
ThinkStation	<p>A national engagement programme of eleven workshops where more than 320 people contributed to setting priorities for future railway stations and helped to shape the brief for an emerging national passenger hub.</p> <p>The ThinkStation report detailing recommendations and insights based on participants’ feedback can be found here: https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/partner-projects/place-infrastructure/thinkstation/</p>
Virtual Reality (VR)	<p>Virtual reality is a simulated environment using technology, to create fictional worlds, such as with gaming technology, or to replicate real world experiences, such as a way to understand what it may feel like to travel to the bottom of the sea.</p>
VR immersive experiences	<p>An immersive VR experience places you within a digitally created world, where you can explore and interact with your surroundings.</p>
Welcome mat	<p>See page 8</p>



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