



Podcast Transcript - Sharing insights into successfully reimagining historic railway stations as vibrant city gateways

Karle Burford	AHR, Director and podcast host
Kim Lodge	AHR, Associate Director
Kirsten Durie	Network Rail, Principal Programme Sponsor
David Beale	Leicester City Council, Development Manager

Karle Burford

Hello and welcome to the AHR podcast where we engage in captivating conversations about the built environment and its influence and shape in a more positive future. I'm Karle Burford, the director of AHR and I've worked on many successful regeneration projects around stations, working alongside the public sector and Network Rail and I'm a firm believer in shaping vibrant urban space and the public realm through this work. I have a passion with improving our cities and they are experiencing radical change at the moment, and I think successful stations are central to making these improvements happen. Rail stations and transport hubs are an undeniable driver for promoting economic growth in our cities, opening up new areas for development and enabling much needed wider social and environmental change. We need to ensure that these environments work for our local communities and are inclusive for all. Certainly a challenge. I have friends who do not use public transport and in fact one who's never even been on a train.

In today's episode we'll be discussing how stations can be a catalyst for regeneration and how successful transport hubs are an opportunity to foster sustainable communities which will thrive now and into our ever-changing future. Today I'm joined by Kirsten Durie, Principal Programme Sponsor at Network Rail and David Beale, Development Manager at Leicester City Council.

We are also joined by Kim Lodge, who's one of our associate directors based in our London office and is a key driver for us in this sector. So let's begin. Welcome Kirsten. Can you give us a brief background on your role and what you're involved with, please?

Kirsten Durie

Yes, absolutely. So I'm principal program sponsor at Network Rail working in the Wales and Western region. And my current role is primarily around the regeneration of Bristol Temple Meads station and the Bristol Temple Quarter regeneration area that Bristol Temple Meads itself sits within. And so my role is that interface with the Bristol Temple Quarter team to enable the interface between the station and how the investment comes into the station which will hopefully be catalytic and support the regeneration that's aspired to around the station.

Karle Burford

Thank you very much and welcome David. Please can you tell us a little bit about your role and your current involvement.

David Beale

Thank you, Karle. So I work for the City Council and the Major Development Projects team and the brief normally is city centre regeneration. So predominantly residential and commercial. I've never done a rail project before, but I was lucky enough to have my name on the funding application for a levelling up bid that went in against Leicester and have acquired this project as a result. So it's been a very steep learning curve. Supported brilliantly by Kim.

Karle Burford

And that's a nice moment to move over to Kim and so lastly can you tell us a little bit about your background in this important sector?

Kim Lodge

Yeah, thanks Karle. I'm an Associate Director based in our London office. I've been working at AHR since 2005 and during that time I've worked quite extensively in transport masterplanning projects. These have included looking at use of station refurbishment, some of the cross rail projects, as well as looking at the Heathrow rail on underground links, and most recently, as David said, Leicester Station, which we've just put in for planning.

Karle Burford

That's great. So one of the first big questions then is all about the importance of stations. So Kirsten, why do you think that stations are important to our cities?

Kirsten Durie

I suppose the stations are essentially about connectivity. Connectivity to other cities, nationally, regionally, locally. It's about that connectivity, bringing people into the city, to their workplaces, for leisure travel, for business, and also taking people to other cities and then that interconnectivity of the actual stations themselves in terms of how they then interface into the cities that they are within and that onward journey, so not just your train journey but then how you get to your final destination and how you, so that sort of connectivity locally with maybe your buses, your taxis, your scooters, your bikes, however you're going to move on to your final destination. And obviously that connectivity is essential to the economic growth of those areas. And not only that, the stations also act as a key piece of civic space in a city that can be used for placemaking. So they have a place within the local environment in terms of how they sit and how they support the economy around it as well. So they become destinations in their own right.

Karle Burford

Thanks very much Kirsten for that. You know David you said it's one of the your first projects involving a train station. How have you kind of discovered how important that's the station is to your project?

David Beale

One of the big things that we're grappling with it last year at the moment is market failure and the supply of offices. We've got a lot of market demand for office space, but not a lot of supply. The office market, as I'm sure everyone will know, it's going through a period of rapid change post -pandemic in terms of the nature of offices that employers want. And there's a lot of churn in that sector. But one thing which seems to be a constant is that the employers, occupiers still find railway stations to be an anchor. So, you know, when everything else is fluid and uncertain, there is this point of certainty that we can kind of hold on to. If we're going to put offices anywhere in the city, stick them in next to the railway station, there's a common understanding that that is the appropriate place to do it.

Karle Burford

Yeah, yeah, I totally agree. You know, a station is often the first impression somebody gets as they enter the city or the town, be it somebody who lives there or works there or tourist, etc. Do you think the location of the station has a positive impact on the regeneration of that area? You know, you alluded to that already.

David Beale

Yeah, definitely. I think first impressions really do count. And when we're talking with colleagues in our investment team, so this is either about people looking to invest in the city or perhaps move their business into the city. There's a huge amount of objective statistical analysis that goes on.

People looking at the metrics and the things that are measurable to inform that decision. But often, you know, sentiment is important as well. How do you feel about place? Irrespective of all the data, do you feel like this is going to be a good move for your company to, you know, to base yourself in this, I'd say? In respect of sentiment, first impressions, your first few minutes experience of the city are really, really important. So if we can take the station, which is probably not doing it any favors at the moment, it's a bit tired and depressing, and turn it into a space which is uplifting and optimistic and hopeful, where you can walk into the ticket hall and feel happy that will come through in better economic outcomes for the city.

Karle Burford

Yeah, obviously transversely it's the last thing you see as well before you exit the city. It's your last impression as well. I know Bristol suffered from that a little bit. Kirsten, do you have anything to add on similar topics?

Kirsten Durie

I mean, there's evidence that, that we, I mean, it's quite old evidence now, but there's a report done about the economic benefits of investing in station infrastructure and it shows that for every pound of investment that you put into the station infrastructure potentially you can get three to seven pounds back in terms of inward investment. So we've seen that where we've invested in stations in other core cities, Manchester Piccadilly station, Glasgow has had them but the obvious one is King's Cross. So you know that station has a catalytic effect in terms of the regeneration around it and people wanting to actually invest in the areas around it. So they have a real critical part to play and not only just in the local economy but you know that ripples out into the sort of the regional economy and then UK PLC ultimately.

Karle Burford

Yeah. So to deliver all these successful projects, working these days with between the private and the public sector. Nearly all projects we're involved with have has a little bit of private in them, quite a lot of public sector, regardless of ultimately, you know, where they're located, etc. How have you two kind of dealt with that, working with the private sector or trying to encourage the private sector to be involved and the kind of wide range of public sector partners? And then after that, Kim, perhaps you could share an anecdote or two of how it's been for you working on Leicester with your client on screen and working between the private and public sectors. But perhaps first to David and Kirsten, whoever wants to go first.

Kirsten Durie

I suppose our story at Bristol Temple Meads has been collaboration for a number of years with our key partners, the City Council, the West of England Combined Authority and Homes England in more recent times in the last sort of four or five years, recognising that catalytic effect that the station can have in terms of regeneration opportunity, but the delivery of homes and jobs and obviously sort of places and with a real focus around social inclusion. So working together and using our various means to sort of pull together funding and we've managed to pull together some funding via grant funding from the Homes England, the Brownfield Land Infrastructure Fund. That's given us a kickstart. We intend to go forward with the land holdings that we jointly own between the partners to appoint a private sector partner so that they can bring their skills in as well as the sort of public sector skills and expertise in regeneration and work together to deliver the final output. So we see it's really important to have those inputs from the private sector but also having those inputs from the local community as well in terms of how do we create this place that is inclusive for all and creates a real place that the city can be proud of but also has a greater impact for the region.

David Beale

I think my comment on this is going to start with devolution. At a national level, we're engaging with, well, as national agencies, we're engaging with organisations like Network Rail and Homes England and the public sector. And they're informed by governments very kind of housing -centric policy aims.

So I think under pressure from Delac and Treasury, both Network Rail and Homes England looking at the role of land around stations in solving the housing crisis. When we look at a city like Leicester, actually there's plenty of opportunities to build residential schemes around Leicester, what we really need thinking about the prosperity of the city, the levelling up agenda, economic opportunity for our population as jobs and it comes back to that.

Do we have for purpose accommodation for our economy? And if we don't, where should it go? And the answer is the railway station. So a lot of the conversations over the last couple of years have really been about getting Network Rail and organisations like Homes England on board with our vision of what we want to do at the railway station, which is jobs led rather than residential led. I think we're there now. And I think there's an understanding and support from both of those organisations that that is the appropriate thing to do in Leicester, even if it jars a bit with current national policy objectives.

In terms of the private sector, I mean they're going to be crucial because it's pretty clear that there isn't going to be huge amounts of public money around, at least for the next few years, for this sort of stuff.

So delivering that central business district that we're looking for at the railway station is going to need private investment. I think we've got a really good vision and we can make a really strong case for private investment and that's really the stage that we're at, is to spell out the opportunity. We've got scope for two, three hundred thousand square foot of best in class space an hour from St Pancras, five trains an hour. I'm sure there is something there that will be appealing to the private investment market.

Karle Burford

Yeah. And Kim, I'm thinking kind of the challenge between the public sector trying to create good place, successful regeneration projects. At the same time, there's commercial challenges, and I don't just mean affordability in the kind of public purse, but the evil developer comes along and wants to create something, but in a kind of cheaper way, which might not add to that creation of a place in such a good way. Have you experienced any challenges there?

Kim Lodge

Yes, I mean I think by their very nature stations are incredibly complex projects because they have so many different stakeholders that you have to balance their different needs. For example, you'll have the rail operator, you'll have the client, the Leicester City Council in this case, you have Network Rail, but you also have various focus groups that look at inclusivity, etc. And all of them have different views of how things should be done and different priorities. And I think when I was always trying to balance the place making with, let's say, the efficiency of how a railway station runs, so one has to balance and weigh which is the correct way and what the priorities and what the vision are actually pushing you towards. Because you could say, well, we just want to make it as efficient as possible, which we do by increasing the gate line or making the station just work better in terms of pedestrian flow, but that doesn't necessarily activate retail and create the same opportunities as you would if you look at it in a more holistic sense. So I think, yes, it's always about that balance and trying to find the right tools to do that. I think, Leicester Station, one of the things that's been very, very helpful is that we've had a very driven client in David and his team who have been very consistent in the sense that they've of what the priorities are for the station and what they're trying to do, which is to create a new hub for the city that can then generate commercial activity around it. So in that way, that's been the key driver for us.

Karle Burford

Thank you. Okay, well, talking about retail and mixed uses, the next question I think is about the importance of retail and mixed use to create that destination which a station always strives to be. So Kirsten, how do you ensure our stations perform well as a destination in their own right without competing with our often new struggling city centres?

Kirsten Durie

I mean again there's a tension there around as you say sort of not impacting the main retail centres so I think generally for our stations they are serving in the main they serve the passenger. In creating we want to create them as destinations so that they can serve that sort of wider population. I mean, for example, St Pancras is one where six, well, I think the figures at some point were 60 % of people entering the station are there for the facilities as opposed to using the train services. So, you know, there is again that opportunity to create that destination. So I think certainly one of the things that we're looking at for Bristol and the area is actually having a retail strategy joined up with the regeneration elements so that the station isn't sort of perhaps working in isolation, recognising the difference between retail serving passengers and then that sort of wider serving the locality. And so I think retail strategy and being clear about what your placemaking vision is as well around the station with your stakeholders is probably helpful in terms of getting the right balance.

David Beale

I was just going to say, I think we've got a similar experience in Leicester. It's got a dual role. It needs to serve the passengers and I think there's an expectation from our train operating company that kind of brands that they would expect to see on the concourse are the brands that their passengers would expect to see and that's fine. But we're also very keen that the station is a place within the city and its role to support this central business district that we're trying to create is really important. What employers are telling us is that not only do they want a really nice office but they want really great amenities around these office buildings so that the staff are encouraged to come into the office more often than they otherwise might and the hospitality offers is a key part of that. So at Leicester we're kind of looking to split the project in two so the passengers get the stuff that they, you know, the high quality offer they would expect to have. We've got this 20,000 square foot, grade two listed porte cochere, which lends itself, hopefully, really nicely to something which is a bit more novel and innovative in the form of artisan street food, artisanal food producers. So we're talking and you know really happy to say that we've got the full support of the top around them engaging with very specialist operators who are going to curate a really interesting mix of artisan hospitality vendors to go into this space and really make most of this, probably one of the biggest heritage assets that we've got in the city, in support of making the station a destination for everyone in the city, not just passengers, but particularly for people that might be working in that immediate area.

Kirsten Durie

If I can just come in on that, that's very similar for Bristol is we've done a placemaking strategy that looks at what is Bristol. And what do we want to provide that is Bristol and very much that retail offer using local sort of independent occupiers with new business ideas is something that we're working with our key stakeholders and our Bristol Temple Quarter partners to create that, that it's not just the sort of brands as you described as what we'd expect to see on a station. There's an element there of the level of service that we need to offer our passengers but then it's how do you make that independent as well and how do you offer those local brands. We have something that everybody's very precious about of Hart's Bakery at Bristol Temple Meads.

Everybody's, you must keep Hart's, we can't let, you know, that's got to be kept or relocated or, you know, expanded because that's a real Bristol brand that we all, you know, want to protect. So there's definitely that opportunity to work with independents as well as sort of perhaps some of the more national brands.

Karle Burford

I think other brands are available. I think there's four or five bakers around Temple Meads now, so there's a lot to support there. Every place is very different. In London, the centres are all large and it's kind of south supporting in the way Bristol is very different. The station is slightly outside the city centre, the office hub is outside the city centre. So you know I do feel that it can work complementary with what is the shopping core of Bristol which in itself needs to change as well. But every place is very different and the challenges are very different. Kim you wanted to add something?

Kim Lodge

Yeah, I was just going to say I think we work quite extensively with the planners on trying to find the right sort of level of balance between the retail high street and how we would not compete with that but rather complement it and I think that's why we're looking at a more curated smart market type space with a different type of selection that you would get to say retail high street so it is very much catering to a slightly different market and a different demographic I think, and it's helping to hold people and draw people into the city centre. And the other thing obviously we're looking at a lot is the fact that there's large transitional groups of people that come in on the weekend, let's say for football matches and rugby matches as well, which present an opportunity for the station in that way and having a space that they can then use that transitional footfall is very helpful.

Karle Burford

Yeah, absolutely. Various music venues as well around at the moment causing large weekend traffic in the food station which was really good. I think we had Take That in Bristol yesterday so I imagine the station was busy.

Retail is changing, it's changing in our city halls, it's obviously changing at our stations as well and we've kind of touched on already that the normal brands are also being considered alongside the food halls etc in different ways. You know is there anything else specifically you can think of Kirsten in our stations where you see that retail is changing or will change in the future? Is it size of units or anything else?

Kirsten Durie

The retail, we're not seeing necessarily, I suppose, change in terms of that core element of retail at the station. But we are, you know, looking at the food and beverage offer and looking at more independence and how you create that destination.

But it's also, I suppose, there's also use of the station spaces. For example, under Temple Meads station, there's space there that doesn't necessarily fit with standard retail. But at the moment, we've got a sort of theatre, sort of cultural events type operator using that space. So I suppose there's something around the station spaces aren't always obvious in terms of retail. But how else could you create destination? I mean you just talked about music and things and it's you know how could some of these spaces perhaps be used for events depending on what they are. So I suppose we're seeing more elements of how could we use the space in the stations more effectively and you know Leeds station for example has got a whole undercroft, the dark arch is there which is a huge amount of space.

How could that serve the city? And we're looking at innovative ways to activate these spaces. So I think that's another challenge we're seeing as well. So there's the retail element, but sort of our spin-offs of perhaps not your average retail, but you know, that sort of commercial space and how we can use it and create destination as well at the station. And also work from hub. That that sort of serviced office offer people wanting to just come to the stations. They might have a couple of hours to spend where they want to be able to sit somewhere quietly, use some Wi-Fi, do some work. So creating those sort of spaces and we've got the office group with some space at Paddington and a number of the major London stations, but it's how do we create that opportunity for people when they're visiting the station to help them with planning their journeys and using the space better.

David Beale

Yeah, I'd absolutely go along with all of that. Talking to colleagues that work in the city centre retail environment, they talk about the importance of experiential offer. It's not people coming into the city centre now don't just want to come in and traipse around the shops in the way that they might have done 20 years ago. They're coming in to have a retail experience, looking for events, leisure opportunities and in our sort of early market engagement with the people that we hope to be talking to about taking space at Leicester Station. That's coming through very strongly as well that a lot of these operators it's events led. Be that music, live music or running cooking classes, family stuff is very, you

know, there's a level of engagement beyond just, you know, turning up and buying food and consuming it.

I think the architecture in the station really helps lend itself to those sort of things. It's a fantastic heritage building and there's an inherent romance around railway stations. So it's sort of trying to celebrate that and articulate it and build on all of those positive feelings that people have about really well executed schemes in historic station buildings. To create that overall package.

Kim Lodge

Yeah, I think the other key significant thing is design quality in urban space because actually creating large urban spaces associated with these buildings is actually one of the things that attracts and draws people to their spaces and allows those other functions and retail opportunities to happen off them. I think that if you look at some of the best sort of regeneration projects recently, like St Pancras etc. A lot of it is actually about the space around the building and the design quality of the building and how it's set within that space. So I think that landscaping and all of those other design criteria are also very important in the look and feel of a station and what sort of qualitative experience you get from it.

Kirsten Durie

I mean the historic buildings are a challenge in themselves because you know certainly Bristol we're all dealing with grade one listed buildings but they're a fantastic opportunity as well and so having that relationship with Historic England and their offices to sort of be able to have that innovative approach to putting those buildings into a modern setting and making them relevant for the current generation. And you know when you see heritage buildings that have been done well and you know they're a real draw. People love that sense of history and being sat in that space. It really works well.

Karle Burford

Absolutely, that does move us on to the next question which was about heritage and how difficult it is and the challenges of converting, refurbishing grade one and grade two listed buildings. So obviously Temple Meads is grade one, Leicester is grade two I believe, not that it's a competition but both provide great challenges. David or Kim, do you have anything to add to what Kirsten said?

Kim Lodge

I think I mean I think as Kirsten said there's great opportunity in the sense that once getting to preserve and use these fantastic buildings and bring them back into sort of public life but the challenges are for instance we're trying to put commercial or retail spaces within the structure and we obviously can't insulate or change the walls and things like that. So actually trying to get the buildings themselves to perform as one would want to is a challenge and luckily the heritage officers we've been working with have been very flexible and helpful in what we've been allowed to do but there is also was a balance between preserving a building and actually trying to make it useful in today's society and environment and rules and regulations. So yes, it is a challenge.

Karle Burford

Yeah, I think some of our work at Temple Meads has been challenging at times, but I think Historic England have been very helpful, supportive. They can sometimes get the reputation of being a bit of a blocker, but ultimately I think some good quality has come out of their engagement, I think.

Ultimately it drives a better quality of work when there are these challenges and constraints put across. As long as we're not just preserving, we are moving things forward.

Kirsten Durie

One of the things that we did at Bristol is we've done a sort of asset management strategy which we did work alongside with Historic England to do which identified what was really significant with the assets and what was, you know, what elements were perhaps less significant and so then it gives some sort of help and guidance in terms of, you know, that planning and and working around those issues where you've got those opportunities perhaps to make greater intervention and what's actually

sacrosanct and you really can't touch. Having that agreement upfront allows that sort of conversation, I suppose, and that innovative thinking around what is the art of the possible.

Karle Burford

Absolutely. Starkingham once told me that Temple Meads was the most important station in the country, although somebody from Bristol was saying that. It's certainly one of them. Obviously it was one of the, if not the first, area once. I think that's probably why.

Kirsten Durie

Hahaha, exactly.

Karle Burford

I just want to take a step back to something we touched on but didn't really kind of delve into and that's the incorporation of residential living space around a station. There's obviously a trend for that, we see that and we've got some work with Network Rail around Reading station to incorporate residential, there's plenty of plans at Temple Meads to do the same. One of the key issues I always think is ensuring that a lot of apartments don't just become investments but they also become a place where people will actually live to add back to that nightlife and the general purpose of a place. But David and Kirsten, you know, it's obviously an increasing trend. Do you see that and are you encouraging that?

Kirsten Durie

We're working with our partners. Obviously the funding we have for the station is primarily around the delivery of homes and jobs. So we have been working with partners to do some additional sort of masterplanning, placemaking. And there is a tension between what's, you know, the different uses, I suppose, and what brings value, because obviously with housing, in terms of actually being able to provide it, the economics are often challenging, particularly when we want to see high levels of affordable homes.

So that's one of the tensions we're having more than perhaps just the mix. We want that mix. We want the 16-hour economy. So what we look at with Temple Quay is a development that's probably fairly dead after six o'clock and everyone's gone home from the office space.

There isn't that mix of uses to keep it vibrant throughout. So I think it is important to have some residential, to have the other mixed uses to encourage people and have that area being sort of vibrant more of the time. But obviously it comes with those economic challenges. And also from a network rail point of view, sometimes it's tricky having it immediately around the station with the residential because of residential life living up against an operational station. We have, I say the luxury of having a number of sites that we're looking at and we're seeing that maybe some of the sites immediately around the station becoming more job related and possibly hotel and maybe with some residential and other residential being more around the perimeter of the immediate station area. So you know again it's that balance between viability and planning policy and you know the space and the type of placemaking we want to create.

Karle Burford

And David, I don't know the Leicester scheme that well. Is there residential use in the kind of wider masterplan?

David Beale

We're trying to resist it. So as I said at the beginning, when we started this project there was pressure from Network Rail, Homes England and others to be seen to be delivering residential because it fits the government's policy agenda around solving the housing crisis but I just don't believe that's the right solution for Leicester. The challenge that we have in Leicester is around the supplying good quality office accommodation, the station is absolutely the right place to do that. And the opportunity cost of filling those sites that were residential is just catastrophic for the future of the city, because we

don't have anywhere else to put office space that would be of the right scale, character, quality to draw in the employers that we know want to be here if we had somewhere to put them.

I think we're sort of through that phase now and our partners understand that the priority doesn't need to be jobs. Having said that, I would absolutely go along with what Kirsten was suggesting about the role of residential as an ancillary component of that to activate the space after working hours and potentially is assisting a bit with the viability challenges.

Certainly residential development in Leicester would be more viable than office development. So an element of that just to ease cash flow challenges around the offices wouldn't rule it out.

Karle Burford

Yeah, thanks. That's interesting perspective. I just want to bring us almost to a close, but the last question is about inclusivity, tying in with multimodal use across a station, trying to get as many people using the station, coming to the station. I started off the podcast saying that, you know, I have friends who don't use public transport at all, and even one or two who have never really been on a train, which is shocking.

Do you think the role of the station is important and how do you think we're kind of trying to encourage real inclusivity across our cities and towns and one of those things would be you know multimodal exchange between transport typologies. Any thoughts Kirsten, David?

Kirsten Durie

I can just offer you the fact that alongside the Bristol Temple Meads Temple Quarter regeneration, the Bristol Temple Meads has been designated as a sort of station innovation zone. We're working with the Connected Places and People Catapult, which is a sort of arms length government body that's looking at innovation. We're effectively we're being a test bed for SMEs to come in and test their technologies in this sort of rail and transport space. We've had various challenges within that around making the station social, seamless, safe and sustainable. And within that seamless sort of category, looking at how people use the train, but also not just how they might use the train services themselves, but how do they get to and from the train station so that end -to -end destination and to your point about people using the station that wouldn't normally.

We've got various things around neurodiversity to make that journey more sympathetic to neurodiverse, how they might approach that. Last year there was an app that was tested on the station for people with neurodiversity to see how they, for them, it was more about making the journey comfortable rather than about time and speed. So for them, there was the opportunity to just choose different ways around the station and different ways to use transport to make the journey more comfortable to encourage them to want to use it. So various sort of testing of technology around that to help encourage more passengers that perhaps haven't used the stations before in train services. So I think technology can help us in that area to support people with using the trains.

David Beale

I think in terms of transport integration we've got a good track record in the city around active travel. So we've been putting in a lot of dedicated cycle infrastructure, pedestrianising big chunks of the city centre over the last 20 years and the station has always been part of that plan. So it's becoming integrated into that wider active travel network. And I think that will work really well.

Where it's more challenging is around the buses and taxis and things of that nature. The taxi solution at Leicester, I think we've got a good one, but it's been constrained because we're working within the confines of an existing constrained site. So it's been quite a challenge to fit all of the vehicle circulation in, in the available space.

The bus stations on the other side of the city centre. So when we started this project there was a not unreasonable call from the public to say we need to bring them both together, clearly. But this isn't physically anywhere to put it. And the council's solution has been a free hopper bus service which will run between the two. And that's proving to have good patronage.

But it has been challenging around beyond active travel, that integration is not easy just because of the geography of the city.

On kind of inclusive design, I mean this is the first project where I've really been exposed to that agenda in a big way and we've been fortunate to be supported by a local group of people with various disabilities who are acting as free consultants to the City Council on this project and others to give us some guidance on how the design can be better for people with different disabilities. And neurodiversity is, again, it's the first time I've come up against this. And it's been fascinating. And the number of small, no -cost interventions that you can make in the design, where people that we're talking to, or Kim's colleagues are talking to are saying, well actually if you did this it doesn't cost you anything, but it makes our experience of using the station much better, less overwhelming. Really interesting and I think we are excited about producing something at the end of this process which is actually going to get held up as an example of really good practice, certainly locally. I'm looking forward to that.

Karle Burford

That's great. Kim, can you talk about any of those specific interventions at all, Leicester?

Kim Lodge

Yeah, I think just on inclusivity generally, it's obviously such a key thing, but it's constantly changing. So it's really important that right from the start you consider it as a sort of key driver in the design, but that you actually engage with all of the various groups as much as possible because guidance around, for instance, tactile routes and things like that is always changing. And once one speaks to the beep and network rail and they'll give you very different perspectives of where the right place to put toilets is, how signage should work, all of that. And also even which places should be quiet and should be a place that you can pause in so somebody can sort of sense themselves and actually have some respite from the spaces otherwise feel too busy for them.

But I think coming back to what the key drivers and signs are, I think one has to make sure that the design itself is legible and accessible so that anyone can look at it, understand where the entrance is, understand how to move through the building. Things should seem logical and simple and if it feels that way and if it feels like it's been invested in and it has great passenger experience that should cover people from all walks of life and so to me that's probably the key thing is to place yourself in that position and try and understand what it is to move through the building.

Karle Burford

Often the solution is to ask the people and ask what their view is because we don't always understand. There's a lot of people from different economic backgrounds, don't use stations, don't use public transport at all, from various diverse backgrounds, female safety etc. There's many, many issues here and I think it's all parts of things we can influence. We can't solve all the problems but we can certainly influence many of them I feel.

Kim Lodge

Yeah, and I think that's why one has to engage with all of those different groups, even just to feel like they're involved in the design and have an ownership of what is in the end produced.

Karle Burford

That's great. Well.

That brings us to the end of today's episode of the AHR podcast. A big thank to Kirsten, David and Kim for joining us and sharing with us their experiences. We've heard some fascinating first -hand opinions about how important our stations are to the promotion and survival of our towns and cities, how the private and public sectors could work together to ensure we get things done, how retail is changing and needs to adapt to successfully support our stations. We've heard about the challenges of upgrading buildings within a heritage context.

We hope our listeners will enjoy this episode. You can find all podcast episodes on our website or you can subscribe via your preferred podcast platform. Thank you so much for listening and we look forward to you joining us again next time.