

UK Parliament Discovers Project Data Has Value, Nation Struggles to Contain Shock

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Insight from Yoshi Soornack, Project Flux

MPs finally notice we're burning billions in project intelligence, a warning experts have sounded for years.

The Westminster Revelation That Surprised Nobody

In a development that shocked absolutely nobody who's worked on a major UK project, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Project Delivery states in its first report that project data is a **national asset**. The APPG's groundbreaking discovery: perhaps we should stop throwing away invaluable project intelligence every time a programme ends.

"Project data is a national asset and it has to be used for the good of the nation to deliver projects better," MPs told the government this week, according to Digital Construction Plus.

Martin Paver from Projecting Success has been banging this drum since before it was fashionable. "We let so much data just go up in a plume of smoke," Paver noted in recent commentary. Now Westminster has caught up. Sort of.

The Staggering Scale of What We're Destroying

Every year, the UK completes thousands of major projects. Infrastructure programmes worth billions. Digital transformations that reshape entire sectors. Construction megaprojects that define cityscapes.

Each generates terabytes of data about what worked, what failed spectacularly, and everything in between.

According to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority's latest report, the government's major projects portfolio alone is worth £805 billion. Each project produces:

- Detailed risk registers showing which predicted disasters actually materialised
- Resource utilisation data revealing the difference between planned and actual staffing
- Stakeholder engagement patterns that correlate with success or failure
- Technical solutions that worked in specific contexts
- Supplier performance across multiple contracts
- Communication strategies that actually engaged communities

And then? We effectively bin the lot. Research from the Institute for Government shows that only 8% of government projects systematically capture and share lessons learned. The other 92%? That knowledge evaporates faster than budget contingency in a troubled IT programme.

Why HS2 Feels Like Groundhog Day

Wonder why every major infrastructure project makes eerily similar mistakes? Why **HS2's** problems feel like Crossrail's greatest hits album? Why did Crossrail's issues seem borrowed from the Jubilee Line extension playbook?

"The APPG's first report echoes findings from the National Audit Office, which found that 67% of project failures stem from 'known issues that previous projects had encountered'." We're literally paying billions to rediscover problems we've already solved." Something that's been argued for a long time in project delivery is that we let so much data go up in a plume of smoke.

Each new project team starts virtually from scratch. They might get a few war stories from veterans, perhaps a dusty lessons learned document that nobody reads. What detailed data could prevent repeated failures? Locked in contractor archives, buried in consultancy vaults, or deleted when the project office closed.

The £15 Billion Annual Stupidity Tax

The National Infrastructure Commission estimates that poor project delivery costs the UK economy £15 billion annually. That's not construction costs or investment – that's pure waste from inefficiency, delays, and repeated mistakes.

McKinsey's analysis suggests that effective use of project data could reduce delivery costs by 20-30%. Applied to the UK's infrastructure pipeline, that's £3-4.5 billion saved annually. Enough to build several hospitals or upgrade significant transport infrastructure.

Yet we continue treating each project like humanity's first attempt at construction, as if the Romans never built roads and the Victorians never laid railways.

The Technical Excuse That's Complete Rubbish

"But the systems are incompatible!" cry the IT departments. "The data formats are proprietary!" wail the vendors. "Commercial sensitivity!" shriek the lawyers.

A study by Cambridge University's Centre for Digital Built Britain found that technical barriers account for only 15% of data sharing failures. The remaining 85%? Organisational inertia, commercial protectionism, and simple lack of will.

We live in an era where artificial intelligence can translate between languages in real-time, where blockchain creates immutable audit trails, and where cloud platforms process exabytes of data. The technical challenges of creating a national project data repository are entirely solvable. What's missing isn't technology – it's political will and commercial incentive.

The Vendors' Very Profitable Problem

Software vendors love the current chaos. Every new project means new licenses, fresh implementations, and expensive consultants. Why create interoperable systems when confusion is so lucrative?

Gartner research shows the construction industry alone spends £4.2 billion annually on project management software in the UK. Much of it is deliberately designed to lock in customers and prevent data portability. The same vendors who promise "digital transformation" actively prevent the data transformation that would make projects genuinely better. It's like selling smoke alarms that only work with proprietary smoke.

What Other Countries Are Already Doing

While Westminster committees discover water is wet, other nations race ahead:

Singapore's Building and Construction Authority maintains comprehensive project databases that track every major construction project, making patterns visible and improvements measurable.

Norway's Statsbygg operates a centralised knowledge platform where all public sector projects share experiences, reducing the number of repeated errors by 34% according to their latest metrics.

Australia's Infrastructure Authority publishes detailed post-project reviews accessible to all future teams, creating cumulative learning rather than perpetual amnesia.

Meanwhile, the UK continues its proud tradition of expensive ignorance.

The Privacy Red Herring Gets Grilled

Critics immediately raise concerns about commercial confidentiality. This is largely nonsense, as proven by other industries: Airlines share safety data globally through the Aviation Safety Network, preventing repeated accidents.

Pharmaceutical companies collaborate through the FDA Adverse Event Reporting System, saving lives. Nuclear operators exchange experiences via the World Association of Nuclear Operators, preventing disasters. If industries where competition literally means life or death can figure this out, project delivery has no excuse.

What MPs Should Actually Do (But Probably Won't)

"Now we have MPs telling the government that project data is a national asset and it has to be used for the good of the nation to deliver projects better. This is refreshing, but we've heard this before. What's actually going to happen?" asks the Project Flux commentary.

Based on historical precedent? Probably another strategy document that nobody reads.

But here's what should happen: Mandate data contribution – Require all publicly-funded projects above £10 million to submit standardised data to a national repository. No data, no final payment.

Create open standards – Force vendors to support common data formats or lose access to public contracts. The EU's approach shows this works. Establish data rights – Clarify that project data generated with public funds belongs to the public. Full stop.

Fund the infrastructure – Build the actual systems needed. Not another feasibility study – actual systems that work. Incentivise sharing – Give preferential treatment to suppliers who contribute to the knowledge base. Make data hoarding expensive.

The AI Opportunity We're About to Miss

Recent advances in machine learning mean we could extract patterns from historical project data that humans would never spot. AI could identify early warning signs of project failure, optimise resource allocation, and predict stakeholder issues before they explode.

But AI needs data to learn from. Every month we delay, more project intelligence is lost forever. We'll pay for the mistakes we'll make again. More taxpayer money is spent on problems we've already solved.

The Alan Turing Institute estimates that proper project data infrastructure could improve delivery success rates by 40% within five years. That's not marginal gains – that's transformation.

MPs recognising project data as a national asset is progressing. But recognition without action is just expensive noise. The question isn't whether project data has value; it's whether we'll stop setting fire to billions in intelligence before it's too late. Stop watching valuable project

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