

IT Analysis – Will we come to love the NHS Spine?

By Bob Tarzey, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

History is littered with projects that were lampooned during their execution but later delivered assets that came to be valued and cherished. The early history of the Sydney Opera House was fraught with disputes between architects, builders and the government prior to its opening in 1973—but would Australians be without it now? The new Wembley stadium will, in all likelihood, be a treasured national asset in years to come.

Funding is the underlying cause of many of the problems behind such projects; as they run over budget, those paying the bills understandably start to grumble. But once the asset is in place its true value can start to be appreciated.

Some times it is shareholders who lose out—the building of the UK's rail network left many out of pocket in the 19th Century, more recently the Channel Tunnel did the same—but no one is talking about filling it in and today millions enjoy the convenience of crossing the channel by train whoever it was who paid the initial premium.

Perhaps the most expensive asset that shareholders have ever forked out for without getting a return is the public internet. The biggest losers in the 2000 stock market crash were the shareholders of IT and telecoms firms. But there is an argument that goes, just as with the UK rail network, that such stock market

bubbles are a way of getting the rich to pay for assets to be enjoyed by masses at a fraction of the price paid for them—maybe, although many of the losers in 2000 were investment funds affecting pensioners and other small investors.

But when it is tax payers who are forking out, the attention paid to expensive projects is rightfully at its greatest. Most tax payers are not rich and they expect to see a return on their investment. The huge amounts being spent in the UK on the NHS' National Program for IT (NPFIT) has put it under close scrutiny. But the project, which will create a whole new IT infrastructure for the NHS based on a dedicated network—or "Spine" as the program calls it—is well underway. Most of the cash required to complete it is committed. History will most likely conclude that the project could have been more efficient and huge sums might have been saved if it had been managed differently.

Whatever the overspend turns out to be, UK tax payers will end up with an asset that should improve the long term delivery of healthcare and make further reform of the NHS easier. Unlike the NHS itself, the infrastructure that results from the NPFIT may not become a national icon, but it will be relied on for delivery of healthcare across the UK for years to come. Future beneficiaries will not grumble about the money spent by today's taxpayer.

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Quocirca is one of Europe's leading independent industry analyst firms. One of its biggest assets is the core team of highly experienced analysts drawn from both the corporate and the vendor communities. This team prides itself on maintaining a bigger picture view of what's going on in the IT and communications marketplaces. This allows all of Quocirca's activities to be carried out in the context of the real world and avoids distractions with fads, fashions and the nuts and bolts of specific technologies. Quocirca's focus has always been the point of intersection at which IT meets "the business".

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Quocirca's primary research involves the surveying of many thousands of technical and business end users each quarter, analyzing their perceptions of the possible impact of emerging, evolving and maturing technologies on their businesses.