

Enhancing value through project closure

Highlights

Highlights from the Major
Projects Association event
held on 16th September 2025



**MAJOR PROJECTS
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Effective closure goes well beyond wrapping up a project's activities and moving on to the next job. In this virtual seminar participants focused on closure as a critical, value-creating phase of the project life cycle. Themes covered included early preparation for effective close-out, embedding lessons into future projects and the psychological aspects of project closure.

'Close-out is not just an add-on to asset handover it's a strategic leadership challenge.'

Kim Kapur, Stations Client Director, HS2 Ltd

Starting early

Event Chair, Roger Bailey, Chief Technical Officer of Tideway, reflected that Tideway's use of a classic systems engineering V-cycle embedded consideration of handover and closure from the programme's outset.

Mark Sutton of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government picked up the theme of starting early. He explained that the path to closure for the Electoral Integrity Programme, which among other outputs implemented new voter ID requirements, began when the programme was flagged as 'flashing red' on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) dashboard in February 2022, following its Stage 0 review.

'Start early. Don't wait until the formal closure phase. We were preparing nearly two years out, so when a snap general election was called in July 2024, we were ready.'

Mark Sutton, Elections Programme Manager, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

A concerted effort to address the identified weaknesses was key to delivering the necessary changes in time for the 2024 General Election and achieving successful closure in summer 2025. One critical weakness was a major shortfall in the project team's capacity and capability.

To address this, the programme brought in experienced staff, strengthened digital capabilities, and took advantage of opportunities to serve as Gateway 5 reviewers for other GMPP projects.

This final initiative helped the team anticipate the types of questions they would face at closure and prepare the necessary evidence early. It also instilled in team members the mindset of an external reviewer, which helped them identify weaknesses that might otherwise have emerged too late.

On the Gate 5 closure process itself, Mark stressed the importance of preparing a formal closure report. This report should set out what has been achieved against the original objectives, while also clarifying what remains to be done, who will take it forward, how it will be governed, and the resources required. Lessons learnt should also be captured but more importantly, processes put in place to embed them into practice, alongside clear accountability for ensuring this happens.

Using closure to influence future projects within a programme

James Smith of the Ministry of Justice explained how the learning from progressive project closures is influencing the ongoing programme to transfer tranches of PFI prisons to new operators and the build of a series of new prisons.

'There's a unique opportunity here because the expiring private prisons is a rolling programme, and the new prisons feature sequential delivery. Closure is a real opportunity to understand not just what and how we've delivered but also to take the learning going forward and directly impact the future work that we're starting to deliver.'

James Smith, Deputy Director, Prison Supply Directorate, HM Prisons and Probation Service, Ministry for Justice

James drew out four themes from the closures to date:

One-team approach: With current pressures on the prison estate, effective mobilisation of new facilities and a rapid transition to business as usual (BAU) are vital. Achieving this has required significant investment of time and resources to build strong working relationships across a diverse set of delivery partners and operators. Key to success has been setting clear expectations early in each project, and adopting governance to ensure these expectations are met.

Operator plans and contractual obligations:

The mobilisation phase then demands close oversight so that operators are supported to meet their contractual obligations. The most effective approach has been when the authority and the operator share joint accountability for timely delivery of the activities in mobilisation assurance plans.

Communication culture and change: Lessons learned must be bidirectional. A strong, forward-looking process can shape future projects, but it should also look back and provide stakeholders with feedback that acknowledges their contributions and demonstrates how their insights will be carried forward.

Project closure and handover to BAU: James emphasised the importance of dedicating project resources to handover and closure. This is vital for ensuring that outstanding deliverables and issues are identified and managed properly after the transition to BAU.

Applying enterprise thinking to project closure

Setting the scene for the second half of the seminar, Lucy Howard of Turner & Townsend and Co-Chair Project 13 Capable Owner Workstream, positioned project closure as a strategic opportunity to embed learning and drive systematic improvement across the major projects industry.

Lucy argued that closure fulfils a deeper human need for storytelling and reflection, helping build our self-esteem and reinforcing the sense that we are 'making a contribution.' In this light, openness to learning should also be considered as important for attracting the next generation of talent into the major projects community.

Yet, closure and learning are often undervalued, too easily crowded out by delivery pressures, secrecy and competitive dynamics. Lucy suggested that the **Project 13** enterprise model in which clients, consultants, contractors and key suppliers form an integrated organisation to co-define and co-deliver projects and programmes, was one way to overcome these issues.

Insight from Project 13 adopters such as Anglian Water, Sellafield and Heathrow demonstrates how enterprise thinking creates the conditions for stronger collective learning across long-term programmes and delivery ecosystems.

Lucy closed with a set of questions for applying a Project 13 lens to project closure and generating insights that could be shared at a sector level.

- How well did we set and deliver outcomes?
- How did leadership and capability diversify?
- Did organisational maturity progress?
- Was our track record of delivering value and return on investment consolidated and improved?

Supporting inclusive closure

The psychological impact of project closure can have a disproportionate impact on neurodiverse colleagues. Hannah Wight of Jacobs used the inclusion moment to highlight three groups of practices to support neurodivergent team members:

- **Regular discussion:** including making sure individuals are given the opportunity to express what 'good closure' looks like for them.
- **Support:** e.g. by providing access to coaching or help with career planning.
- **Marking the closedown:** this can take many forms but whatever option is chosen, leaders need to give sincere thanks and ensure team members can celebrate the project legacy.

Three key aspects of effective project closure

The seminar concluded with a joint presentation from Russell Pilgrim of Jacobs and Kim Kapur of HS2 and formerly Close-Out Director at Crossrail. Russell began by stressing that project closure matters, because as a rule project benefits are only realised during handover, close out and operations. Russell and Kim used case studies to highlight three key factors that can underpin effective closure.

The Panama Canal expansion – clear definition of legacy:

The goal of this \$5.25bn megaproject was clear from the outset. The Canal Authority had a clear objective to provide enduring stability and prosperity for the people of Panama. This meant that the project was never seen as 'just' a construction project but rather a national mission, from which sprang commitment to budgets, a passionate client and strong local engagement.

Team2100 – creating, utilising and maintaining the right processes at the right time: For long-term programmes, even the best legacy planning can be overtaken by changing circumstances. Team2100, a 100-year programme to manage flood defences on the Thames Estuary, faced this challenge during the latter stages of its first 10-year phase.

The team found themselves with ‘nothing to hand over’ and ‘no one to hand it over to’, as timelines and delivery structures had shifted. To build the resilience to cope with this kind of change, it was important that the programme had established and bedded in strong processes at the planning and design phase of the life cycle. This included creating and maintaining robust systems for managing information.

Large programmes generate millions of communications, and staff turnover can make it difficult to reconstruct why key decisions were taken. Without robust tools it quickly becomes very challenging to assemble the information required for an effective close-out.

Crossrail – assigning a dedicated close-out owner with cross-organisational authority: Kim explained that handing over the Elizabeth Line assets to Transport for London (TfL) did not mean that Crossrail Ltd’s work was completed. The close-out needed to ensure that the line could be operated and maintained, which required the transfer of contracts, systems, people and knowledge to TfL. In parallel, Crossrail itself had to be wound down.

Kim’s role as Close-Out Director carried delegated authority for the whole process, helping her to bridge boundaries between Crossrail, TfL and the project’s second sponsor, the Department for Transport. To provide structure and clarity, Kim and her team created a framework of ten areas of close-out and transition. Areas covered included:

- **Ongoing delivery of stations and routeway:** including transfer of scope and resources to TfL’s delivery organisation.
- **Health and safety:** with a particular focus on staff wellbeing.
- **Commercial services:** including close-out of contracts with programme and delivery partners.
- **IT systems:** involving major data transfers from Crossrail systems to TfL systems and archiving historic information.
- **Engineering:** including ensuring all compliance and assurance was closed out in alignment with the Crossrail Project Delivery Agreement.
- **Finance:** including closure of bank accounts and funding for final activities.
- **HR:** including managing staff transitions and redeployments, and closing out arrangements with secondees and consultants.

Points for further discussion

- What tools or practices best help teams begin closure preparation earlier in the project life cycle?
- What strategies work best to support staff wellbeing and career transitions during project closure?
- How do we make closure a recognised and attractive leadership responsibility?

Chair

Roger Bailey, Chief Technical Officer, Tideway

Contributors

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BAM Nuttall Ltd

CJ Associates

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The Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, UCL

The Water Services Regulation Authority (OFWAT)

Tideway

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