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DELIVERING INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WORKS: WHY OUTCOME AUTHORITIES MUST COME FROM COMMISSIONING

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Delivering Infrastructure That Works

Executive Summary

The UK Government's Stewart HS2 Review and Crossrail sponsorship reports expose a recurring failure in major infrastructure: fragmented governance, unrealistic forecasting, and late-stage integration. These issues have led to spiralling costs, political backlash, and underperforming assets.

This paper argues that the most credible and capable individuals to lead infrastructure delivery as **Outcome Authorities** are those who have risen through commissioning leadership. These professionals bring systems thinking, cross-disciplinary fluency, and outcome-focused discipline - precisely the capabilities needed to implement the Stewart Review's 89 recommendations (see **Annex** - "Wider Lessons Leant") and restore public confidence in infrastructure performance.

The Problem: Outcome Blindness in Major Projects

Despite best intentions, most projects are still planned, designed, procured, and managed in silos. Governance is fragmented. Forecasts are optimistic. Integration is late. And outcomes - what the asset must do when complete - are treated as an afterthought. The result?

- Delays
- Cost overruns
- Political and public backlash
- Assets that fail to perform as intended

Both the Stewart Review and the Crossrail reports make one thing clear: infrastructure delivery must be governed differently - and led by those who truly understand how systems come together, not just how they're built.

The Solution: Commissioning Leadership as Outcome Authorities

The **Outcome Authority** is a strategic role responsible for ensuring that the project's end-state - functionality, operability, safety, and public value - is achieved. They act as the connective tissue between:

- **Sponsor intent**
- **Delivery execution**
- **Future infrastructure adaptation**

This role belongs to those with real commissioning leadership - not policy advisors or administrators. **Why?** Because they're the only ones who:

- Understand the entire asset lifecycle - from approvals to operations
- Manage practical interfaces across disciplines, suppliers, and systems
- Take responsibility for proving the system works - not just that it's been delivered
- Know how early decisions impact final readiness
- Focus on delivering actual outcomes - not just following plans

Career Pathway to Outcome Authority

Stage	Role	Key Experience
1	Tester / Technician	Hands-on system testing, safety protocols, and evidence-based practices; transferable expertise from engineering, asset management, and operational readiness
2	Commissioning Manager	Multi-system integration, interface handovers, schedule risk, and operability readiness
3	Senior Commissioning Leader	Leadership across contracts, vendors, and owner teams; full-system start-up
4	Outcome Authority	Strategic alignment to Sponsor intent; gatekeeper of operability, integration, and outcome assurance

Only those who have worked at every layer are credible enough to lead projects toward a successful outcome.

Capability Profile: What Sets Them Apart

Capability	Why It Matters
Systems Thinking	Sees the asset as a functioning whole - not siloed parts
Integration Leadership	Aligns diverse teams and packages into one operable system
Risk Realism	Strategic alignment to Sponsor intent; gatekeeper of operability, integration, and outcome assurance
Evidence-Based Mindset	Prioritises proof over optimism
Operability Focus	Centres readiness for Day One - not just handover documentation
Governance Fluency	Communicates with Sponsors, Boards, and Ministers on strategic delivery and value creation

Implementing the Stewart Review: Why These Leaders Are Essential

Recommendation	Why Commissioning Leaders Are Ideal
Clarify governance & accountability	They expose gaps and realign roles toward deliverable outcomes
Introduce maturity gates	They define and enforce readiness checkpoints based on evidence
Improve forecasting	They provide real-time readiness data - not theoretical projections
Build capability & culture	They lead under pressure and foster transparent performance culture
Reform contracts	They understand how commercial terms impact systemic readiness
Integrate delivery	They've successfully delivered fully commissioned systems under fragmented scopes

These capabilities directly address the Stewart Review's call for bespoke governance, outcome-led assurance, and delivery realism.

Lessons from Crossrail: Sponsorship Without Delivery Ownership

The Crossrail sponsorship reports highlight the risks of separating governance from delivery. Joint sponsors lacked the levers to enforce readiness, and assurance mechanisms failed to detect systemic misalignment until late in the programme. Commissioning leaders - those embedded in the delivery lifecycle - are uniquely positioned to:

- Translate Sponsor intent into operable systems
- Govern readiness across fragmented scopes
- Lead integration with evidence, not assumptions

They are not just technical experts—they are **system stewards**.

Call to Action

ICxA urges the UK Government, NISTA, and infrastructure sponsors to:

- Formally recognise Outcome Authority as a strategic project role
- Appoint individuals with commissioning leadership experience
- Establish a structured development path from commissioning to outcome governance
- Partner with ICxA to certify, mentor, and support these leaders

Conclusion

Infrastructure doesn't fail at handover - it fails at the start, when no one owns the end.

Commissioning leaders have long been the last line of defence. It's time to make them the first. They are the only professionals trained to finish infrastructure properly - and that's exactly who should shape how it begins.