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Septuagenarian selected to chair 20-year HS2 project

by MARK LEFTLY

The Government has shocked the rail industry by selecting a septuagenarian to chair High Speed Two (HS2), the much-criticised £32bn megaproject that will not be completed until 2033.

It is understood that the appointment of Douglas Oakervee, right, the former executive chairman at Crossrail, who was considered by many to be semi-retired, may be formally announced tomorrow. He is currently non-executive chairman of the Hong Kong division of the UK construction group Laing O'Rourke.

The chairman will help to steer the project through Parliament next year. HS2 – which will initially run from London to Birmingham but could eventually reach Scotland – is also in the process of selecting a new chief executive, although the incumbent, Department for Transport secondee Alison Munro, has reapplied.

Mr Oakervee led Crossrail when the £15bn link was given Royal Assent in 2008. But it is understood that the 71-year-old was HS2's second choice, which is why there has been a slight delay in the recruitment process, which started in January.

It is not clear who was the preferred choice, but Adrian Montague, the chairman of listed private equity company 3i, was on the shortlist. However, the City grandee has a huge number of other roles, and is leading the Business Department's environmentally dedicated Green Investment Bank.

HS2 has been heavily criticised by those concerned that construction will ruin the landscape.

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