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Effect of Crossrail on Surrounding Neighbourhoods

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Crossrail is a new railway line that is being built to serve London and the Southeast. The route, which runs from Reading through Central London and then out to Shenfield and Abbey Wood, was confirmed in the Crossrail Act 2008 (CA 2008, Schedule 1 s.1). Construction began in 2009, with the first stations due to open in 2018.

The purpose of Crossrail is to provide a significant increase in the capacity of rail networks into and across London. It will relieve congestion, improve accessibility and cater to the expected increase in demand for travel around London (Darling, 2003).

Although the primary function of Crossrail is to increase transportation capacity, economic aims have also been integral to the project (Future of London, 2014). The role of Crossrail in enabling the regeneration of areas, by attracting further investment, has consistently been highlighted (Crossrail Business Case Update, 2010; GVA, 2012). Crossrail will support the delivery of over 57,000 new homes and 3.25m sqm of commercial space (City of London Corporation, 2015). As a catalyst for change around the station areas, Crossrail has the potential to contribute to gentrification.

This dissertation investigates the impact of Crossrail on neighbourhood change. Using Whitechapel as a case study, the research questions are three-fold, examining the extent to which Crossrail:

1. Leads to a change in the retail mix
2. Causes changes in the housing market
3. Leads to gentrification

There is a significant amount of research looking at the impact of a rail transport investment on the retail and housing sectors, but little research, to date, has looked at them in conjunction, and certainly not in the context of contributing to gentrification (Venables et al, 2014).

Whitechapel, a historically deprived neighbourhood, has been chosen as the case study location due to the scope for Crossrail to create change in the area. When Ken Livingstone spoke at the launch of the Whitechapel Vision Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), he hailed Crossrail as the single most important impact to Whitechapel due to its 'potential to attract inward investment of a massive scale' (Future of London, 2014). Jones Lang LaSalle (2015) echoed this perspective, stating that they expect Whitechapel to benefit the most from Crossrail driven growth over the next five years, as it is likely to be a catalyst for further development.

Crossrail has already been a stimulus for new build development in Whitechapel, and this has caused concern amongst local communities. The Tower Hamlets Local Plan Engagement Document (2015) acknowledged that many residents are concerned about the pace of change and the scale of recent developments. It also identified that the borough is likely to become more polarised between an increasingly wealthy home owning group and a reducing group of residents in affordable or subsidised housing. Such polarisation is a strong indicator of the process of gentrification. A process of regeneration is likely to have occurred over time in Whitechapel, as it has done in the surrounding neighbourhoods, but this dissertation will explore whether Crossrail has accelerated the process.

The majority of the recent research uses an hedonic pricing method to measure changes in housing values following a new rail investment. This dissertation will look at the effects at a far more localised level, using a bottom-up, mixed method approach to observe the underlying trends of neighbourhood change.

The rest of this dissertation is set out as follows: Chapter 2 examines the relevant literature. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the case study location, Whitechapel. Chapter 4 states the research methods used and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings. Chapter 6 presents the conclusions.