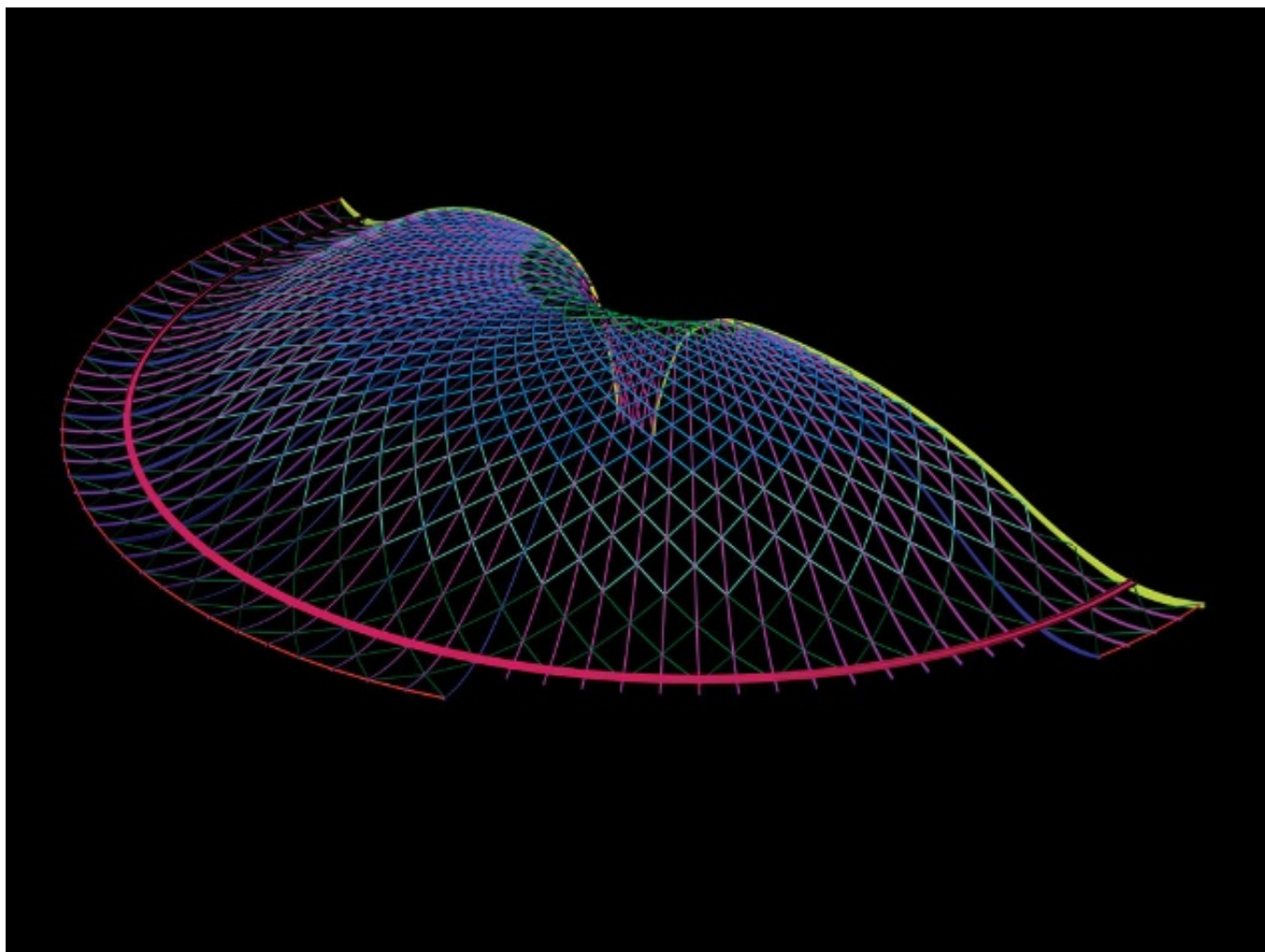


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Bentley's cloud could be a ray of sunshine for bim

7 December 2012 | By Marc Thomas

The company unveiled its latest software innovations at its annual event



Bentley technology was used to design the new roof of King's Cross station by John McAslan.

Bentley Systems' annual Be Inspired press and awards event took place in Amsterdam last month. Several British practices were honoured with awards going to John McAslan & Partners for King's Cross; Robin Partington Architects for Park House; the Taylor Woodrow-BAM Nuttall joint venture for the Victoria Station Upgrade; and Crossrail for infrastructure management. One aspect highlighted by the generative design award finalists was how mainstream parametric methods have become.

Each of them used Bentley's Generative Components (GC) integrated into the design and production process to resolve specific issues.

Tantalisingly light on detail was the announcement of Bentley Connect, one manifestation of the company's cloud strategy.

This sounds like Google Docs or Microsoft Office 365 for bim, offering an individual, project or organisation the ability to use the whole range of Bentley's ProjectWise server tools on a "software as a service" (SaaS) basis.

A specific target for Bentley Connect's facilities are the increasingly common project-based joint ventures. Providing the IT infrastructure for these ventures can be both expensive and a source of delay. The ability to take a group of disparate teams and glue them together, tapping into a ready-to-go IT system, could be very inviting. Pricing and exactly what it includes are yet to emerge, but this is one to watch.

For architects, the major software changes were earlier in 2012 when AECOsim Building Designer was released. This has recently been updated, the first of an approximately six-monthly incremental updated cycle. In development for a future update is a user-friendly interface for creating parametric objects within AECOsim. This will utilise GC behind the scenes as a parametric engine, an interesting and long-awaited innovation. (Note that GC will continue to be a full application — the latest version of this has just been released.) CFD and other conceptual analysis tools for AECOsim are also being developed, although availability dates are not being discussed yet.

Following current IT trends, AECOsim is being tested in virtualised environments; it's already being certified for use with Citrix and further certifications will follow in 2013. While this may sound pretty geeky, software virtualisation gives companies flexibility to deploy and access cad/bim applications quicker and/or remotely.

One decision may become easier. From now on, all of Bentley's tablet apps will be developed with a common base for simultaneous release and deployment on Android, iPad and Windows RT, so whichever one you want, the apps will be available. A selection of all three devices was available for people to try out, and Bentley's Harry Vitelli had the task of giving live demonstrations of apps on all three in a four-minute slot! One example was walking around a 100MB Revit model published to Bentley's i-model format with Bentley Navigator Pano for iPad. ProjectWise Explorer has an attractive interface in the Windows RT version, Microsoft's Surface RT tablet proving an enticing piece of kit.

Overall the news from the event was of incremental development and consolidation rather than radical change. In the current climate, where bim adoption is widening, maybe this is just what we need: a bit of stability in the software environment to leave more brain cells free for the challenges of process change.

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