

## CIHT South West Annual conference 2020

Date – Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Time – 09:00 – 16:00

Venue– Reed Hall, University of Exeter

### Notes from the Unconference session



**Debate:** *"How do we make the appraisal system fit-for-purpose?"*



**Discussion:** *"Can we decarbonise transport and grow the economy at the same time?"*

## The Unconference

As part of the CIHT South West region's Annual Conference 2020, the programme set aside the first part of Afternoon Session 1 for a mini 'Unconference'. This session was co-chaired by Nik Bowyer (Chair, CIHT South West region) and Chris Shipway (Vice-Chair, CIHT South West region).

The unconference provided an opportunity to engage all the expertise in the room, ensuring delegates played a part in setting the agenda for part of the day, in addition to the conference speakers. The unconference provided an opportunity to share ideas and disseminate knowledge, allowing for a true peer-to-peer learning experience.

## Deciding the topics

Prior to the room breaking into discussion groups, an initial 'open-floor' was given for topics to be suggested. Whilst the theme was loosely based around the conference theme of *"Rejuvenation and the Economy"*, any topic that delegates wished to discuss, or debate could be put-forward.

In total, eight submissions were put forward. Delegates then voted on which of these topics they would like to discuss and debate as part of the unconference. The four highest voted topics and the other submissions are listed below:

### Top four voted topics

- How do we make the appraisal system "fit-for-purpose"?
- Can we decarbonise transport and grow the economy at the same time?
- How can we make cycling "King"?
- Is demand management the ultimate answer to address climate change?

### Other suggestions

- Can we quantify the economic benefits of place-making on transport?
- Should future transport strategy development work have less of a focus on economic growth?
- Should public transport be publicly owned and operated?
- How does the transportation industry need to change to address the challenges of 2030?

## The debates

Following voting, delegates from the conference split into four groups to debate the four most-voted-for topics. Despite this being entirely the decision of the delegate, there was reasonably equal representation in each of the four groups. The groups debated the questions for 15-minutes before nominating a spokesperson and reporting back on the topics. A summary of the reporting is given below, along with the group's spokesperson.

### Can we decarbonise transport and grow the economy at the same time?

*Nominated spokesperson: Nick Woollett - AECOM*

The group noted that there was nothing fundamental that meant decarbonisation and economic growth can't happen at the same time. The two are not fundamentally opposed, although the group recognised that doing so may require compromises in either or both areas.

The group considered that there was a potential issue in how funding of interventions is raised. The problem with existing funding mechanisms is that limited available funds are competed for on the basis of existing policies and guidance, which at the moment it was thought lag the current climate change debate. The group considered that a fundamental change could, perhaps, help to ensure that transport professionals do give decarbonisation of the transport system the importance it needs. However, there was a recognition that this may create some 'shock effects' that could cause short-term negative impacts on the economy.

Reflecting on the theme of "*balance*" that had been raised in the conference, the group noted that many policies were derived in this way. There was a feeling that politicians like the concept of balance as it protects them from the risk of having to make bold decisions that could result in them losing a subsequent election. The consequent impact being that often lofty goals towards decarbonisation can be neutered in the means of ensuring both nods to the environment and economic growth are given in policy.

The final point raised by the group was that there are likely many other co-benefits that could be exploited – particularly the health benefits of active travel. These may not have wider economic benefits but could be more important to long-term wellbeing than growing the economy.

### How can we make cycling "King"?

*Nominated spokesperson: Steve Keen – Stantec | Immediate Past Chair, CIHT South West*

This discussion group coalesced views around five key points at the end of what was described by participants as an interesting debate. The five key points relayed to all delegates are listed below:

1. A step-change in funding is required to fund high-quality cycle routes, ensure a cycling vision and to provide better education on the benefits of active travel.
2. Investment in cycling as a priority mode requires strong leadership. This is required at both the local government level and nationally to ensure that officers can be empowered to make and recommend visionary policies.
3. A better joined-up approach is needed in scheme delivery. The example given by the group was that, rather than a piecemeal approach to upgrading junctions in isolation, whole corridor improvements may need to be considered in respect of a wider vision, that deliver benefits across more of the length of cyclists' journeys.
4. More work is required to change embedded attitudes and to truly influence travel behaviour. This should include greater education to target frequent car drivers, providing sufficient information and support to enable those who may be able to switch modes to do so.
5. High-quality cycling visions are required. These should comprise true segregation and safer provision of cycling facilities that will encourage less confident cyclists to use their bikes.

A further discussion point noted that the appraisal processes, such as TAG, may need to change to enable the benefits of cycling to be better captured and for greater weighting to be applied to this in scheme appraisal.

## How do we make the appraisal system fit-for-purpose?

*Nominated spokesperson: Martin Tugwell – CIHT President*

This group recognised that there was a need to make decisions, so having an appraisal system that allows us to consistently appraise and choose schemes is important and a good thing. The group also noted that there are some schemes of such national importance that once a decision has been made to fund and proceed, the focus should subsequently shift to ensuring good quality, rapid delivery, rather than a need to have to re-prove Value for Money every few years.

The group also noted that some flexibility already exists in the system and guidance that is provided by the DfT. Transport professionals need to recognise the flexibility and exploit it in the pursuit of good schemes that provide a benefit to all users.

It was noted that Wellbeing and Health are currently under-represented in the appraisal process and these should be integrated at the very beginning when scheme objectives are set, thus forcing the need to undertake appraisal and putting benefits for these areas on par with more traditionally appraised benefits. The group recognised that this may need some lobbying of DfT to ensure that flexibility in the appraisal system is appropriately recognised.

A further point the group raised was for the appraisal system to be more accessible. The group noted that assessments and reports, even those that are public-facing, are often technocratic and difficult to understand, which can reduce the overall understanding of the appraisal process and reduce public confidence in it.

The group ended its summation by noting that part of the challenge may be transport professionals in general. The transport professionals who are undertaking appraisal can be an insular cohort of people, but the impacts are felt across all of society which is much more diverse. The group concluded that the transportation profession as a whole needs to be more diverse and inclusive to be able to demonstrate leadership in the delivery of schemes which are of real public benefit.

## Is demand management the ultimate answer to address climate change?

*Nominated spokesperson: Nick Simons – Bath & North East Somerset*

The overarching conclusion reached by this group was that demand management will be essential as part of the overall solution, as the current levels of investment in sustainable modes and active travel are not enough on their own. However, the group recognised that demand management needs to be part of a wider package of measures to ensure comprehensive packages of sustainable travel can be reached.

The group noted that the cost of motoring does not include a true reflection of the environmental cost, which ultimately needs to be given more due consideration, to have a key role in influencing motorists' travel choices and behaviour. However, the group recognised that there is a challenge that 'flat' charges, such as Congestion Charging can be regressive and can lead to greater inequality between users of the transport system. However, it was recognised that there is recently been a sea-change in public opinion that recognises actions, and actions far greater than have been undertaken to-date, need to be taken to address the impact of travel on the environment.

The group concluded by posing the question: "Does the UK need a revolution in transport?"

There was a thread of discussion that noted the transportation sector could take inspiration from the recent single-use plastics campaign to attach more of a stigma to inappropriate driving and vehicular use, which would ultimately help alongside packages of demand management and sustainable/active travel to reduce the use of low occupancy private vehicles.

## Thanks

Nik Bowyer and Chris Shipway would both like to extend their thanks to all delegates who enthusiastically got involved in the proceedings and delivered, what they feel, was a useful and worthwhile session as part of the conference.

If anyone would like to keep the conversation going, please get in touch via [southwest@ciht.org.uk](mailto:southwest@ciht.org.uk)