

Local Roads Futures

On 4 October 2016 CIHT hosted an event entitled Local Road Futures.

Feedback received from the breakout sessions

The afternoon was spent in breakout sessions with delegates divided into three groups. Delegates were asked to consider the main challenges currently facing local roads and discuss what will we have to do differently to overcome them in the future?

Possible considerations were given to: How to deliver to customer needs? What we need to ensure delivery of a resilient network? How to best manage public and political perceptions? How to ensure efficient delivery – both in terms of cost and quality of service?

As a results of the sessions, the following areas were highlighted: Communication; Models; Collaboration; Diversity of professionals; Change; Influencing, challenging and vision.

Communication

- Delegates generally agreed that the sector does not communicate the benefits of the network adequately to customers (the social, economic, health etc). The industry/profession needs to find an effective way of communicating with users. It should be noted that all infrastructure is there to support customers.
- The sector needs to change and improve the language it uses when communicating. The sector can learn from other industries like digital or telecommunications. Those industries also use and are involved in transport services. The industry/profession can learn from them in how they organise and present themselves.
- The sector needs to put together simple messages, these can be very powerful. There were several examples discussed including:
 - Northern Ireland was highlighted as an example of where the practice has been to explain to the public that patching and other routine maintenance of roads per head per year was only £10. This was viewed as far cheaper than repairs and accidents. Therefore, there is a case for monetarising the benefits. This relates closely to learning from the techniques used in project management.
 - Why do people (rightly) value buses but not the road it runs on? Is it because they can identify with the benefits of the bus but not the road? The profession is failing to put across key effective messages/communication.
- There is a case for an increase in funding for road maintenance based on establishing an economic case. Why not have a Local Road Investment Strategy?
- How do you take the 'politicians' on the journey? It is not always easy to sell the benefits of '20years later'. Getting them to understand the long-term benefits of asset management is critical.
 - Central government priorities change. Professionals adapt to fit new governments, our language then changes with the change of government.
 - Do local resident expectations change with politics?
 - Engaging and winning over the public would result in improved engagement and decision making with local politicians. Talking directly to the public, being open about how roads are managed.
 - Image: Highways (potholes) are not particularly interesting, they have an image problem. Customers, including politicians, tend to shut off.

- The profession needs to sell itself and products in a more holistic way. This is not just the 'tarmac between the curbs. Addressing the issues in terms of amenity, equality, economy in a language that connects to non-engineers.
 - House prices can/will be influenced by highway quality.
 - There should be more emphasis on safety.
 - Users might find it helpful to set out a timeline (5-10 years), seeing the long term visibility of asset strategy, having visibility of plan. Proper stakeholder engagement

Models

Highways are a universal service that support other services.

- Different areas/customers/characteristics
- Roads should be treated as a public utility, financed through alternative means such as a road use tax. Consideration could be given to making the Strategic Road Network operation similar to the Network Rail. Customers tend not to care too much about the details and are more concerned with being able to make smooth journeys.
- The need for different income streams. Hypothecating fuel duty would be one such mechanism. VED is now hypothecated – the next step could be to do the same with fuel duty.
- The sector needs to properly embrace project management methods. I.e. put in place effective plans, such as benefits realisation plans, business cases and effective modelling. **[also part of change]**
- 'Mobility as a service' should be encouraged. Customers do not have an understanding of the value of the asset. **[also part of communication]**
- It was noted that the Strategic Road Network was more straightforward in terms of stakeholder interfaces as it does not have a particular relationship with residents.
- Utilities – water, gas and electricity are delivered through the private sector with the oversight of a regulatory body. Could the same operation not be applied to the road network?
 - Utility models – five year planning horizon generally works well.
 - Portugal has a hypothecate model for roads.
 - New Zealand's model is a good example. These provide a reasonable degree of confidence going forward.
 - The South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL) can raise funds from the capital markets from its toll roads through the issuing of bonds (Network Rail can also do this).
- The focus for establishing structures of delivery led to examples of how political (and therefore financial) drivers can shape things. An example was given of Ken Livingston (through the GLA) deciding to stop widening roads and put money into public transport. This increased the use of public transport and with incentives/tax breaks there was a link to how behaviour change be shifted **[this point is also related to Change & communication]**
- A constant cycle of re-education is required. The basics often get forgotten (this relates to professionals not just politicians). **[communication and diversity]**
- Good infrastructure should be seen as a facility. Selling infrastructure as a facility could result in better quality and therefore more likely investment.
- It is important to know the asset and condition moving forward. A strong evidence base is required.
- Continuity is vital – Combined Authorities (and others), will they provide new opportunities? Combined regional plans – regional & local levels – multi level plan (economies of scale)
- It was noted that current funding models makes you reactive
 - Asset management/self-assessment



- Should some infrastructure be outside of political remit/influence? – Should the National Infrastructure Commission remit be extended?

Delivery of a resilient network

- Do we know what the definition of a resilient network is?
- What outcomes do we want?
 - Contingency planning
 - Continuity plans
 - Reduce need for future intervention
 - Alternatives if things go wrong.
 - Reliability
 - Accept there will be disruption and build in consistency
 - Risk and recovery
 - Communicating what we can deliver
 - squeezing the last drop from a limited asset
 - Quality information delivered effectively
 - Sharing open data
 - Plan and make changes

Collaboration/Diversity of professionals

- It was noted that professionals tend to work in silos. CIHT can help correct these minor issues by working with RTPI and other transport infrastructure bodies and start to talk about a common message of transport infrastructure. It would be powerful if the sector could put across consistent messages. **[Communication]**
- CIHT need to improve engagement with the LEPs.
- CIHT/industry need to recognise that other professionals bring other skills.
- Is our collective competency going to help improve quality of service? Do we:
 - Train engineers differently from day one?
 - Explain ourselves to the customer better – tell the users there will be disruption but to plan recovery time?
 - Include communication skills and resilience planning within skills and training packages?

Change (We can't keep doing the same thing)

- Why are we only focussing on roads? Should the profession be looking at what the strategic objectives of the economy are? Customers want faster journeys, but they are often the ones contributing to the traffic on roads. CIHT can work on guidance/notes to advice on behaviour management/change of behaviours.
- Could the NI model be applied to e.g. Manchester? Manchester will have HE looking after the SRN, Transport for Manchester and the rest of the road network maintained by the 10 boroughs. With one authority in charge, many interfaces could be removed and single accountability created. This is also related to the issue of fragmentation of the industry. Is the sector trying to serve all these different masters? **[Models]**
- The status quo is not an option. Within the local political context there is a lot of money wasted in council chambers. Political influences skews proper decision making for asset management.
- There is a lack of understanding of the context in which roads operations are delivered. **[Models]**
- There is still an absence of a national transport strategy/policy. Change is occurring: the devolution agenda, STBs, Combined Authorities. Larger geographical areas with a focus on the key route network. Sharing, joining workforces – there appears to be a move to single road authorities as a vision for delivery.
- The establishment of service levels (e.g. Highways England has a licence that it needs to deliver to). The parallel with PFI was raised, an intelligent customer connected to a



delivery agent offered a clear model for delivery if the outcomes are right. We don't build the case often or well enough (PFI used to build the case). **[Influencing and challenging]**

- Change image/diversity of the sector – not just traffic engineers – town planning, transformation/culture change. **[Collaboration]**
- Changes?
 - Structure of 152 Local highway authorities – is the current regime right?
 - 150 HA's, 400 local authorities dealing with planning , thousands of parish councils
 - Other services are very well regulated – they have to meet their obligations
 - More accountability
 - Increased funds to achieve real change
 - Mobilisation of the road using masses
 - Communications/benefit of a plan/not more or less/Central and local problems

Influencing, challenging and Vision

- The influence of disruptive technology. Electric vehicles, for example, in Sweden are becoming more popular and this is leading to looking at new ways of funding roads. **[Models]**
- There is a fine balance to be achieved between a long-term vision and short termism – political cycles and strategies that keep changing
- We have a clear vision of outcomes we are trying to achieve for roads.
- Setting out clearly that it is very different for different areas – local v national
- We can't predict the future, especially around speed of technology – this traditionally affects how we make decisions. Keeping on top of technological changes is vital.
- Every local authority politician is trying to make their area better – it brings in/attracts better investment.
 - Good infrastructure is a facility for that – politicians and the profession need to be selling infrastructure as a facility – the better the quality, the more likely to achieve the required investment.
- CIHT Futures work.