

Profession voices unease over transport appraisal practices

TRANSPORT PLANNING

by Andrew Forster

TRANSPORT PLANNING needs to be much more open about the huge uncertainties about the future transport system, according to a report published by the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation.

The report from the CIHT FUTURES project draws upon discussions held in 11 regional workshops involving just over 200 CIHT members.

It highlights widespread disquiet about current appraisal procedures but also reports that professionals feel they have no choice but to use them.

"The sense of professional impotence and the strong call for change from so many transport professionals cannot be ignored," says report author Glenn Lyons, professor of transport and society at the University of West of England's Centre for Transport and Society.

The workshop discussions were modelled on the New Zealand Ministry of Transport's work on uncertainty about future demand for car travel, which informed the country's transport policy review in 2014. Lyons was a member of NZ's Ministry of Transport advisory team.

Participants in the CIHT workshops discussed uncertainty about the future of the transport system and what concerns they had about current approaches to policy-making. They also discussed two alternative pathways to decision-making:

- a 'regime compliant' approach: this reflects the "way of the world we have known" and involves prediction, weak planning, and



Lyons: profession should acknowledge uncertainty

- cost-benefit analysis, with transport investment linked to economic prosperity;
- a 'regime-testing' approach: this questions the continuity of the past, and promotes scenario testing, strong planning, and a focus on economic, environmental and social impacts.

"A feeling across the workshops was that the regime-compliant pathway suits politicians who need to project an air of confidence in the investment decisions being made," says Lyons.

"Transport professionals do not necessarily believe in the approaches they follow but which they feel compelled to follow nevertheless."

Lyons says they face a dilemma. "If transport professionals reject the notion of uncertainty (or at least deep uncertainty), then they can comfortably continue their work in a professional setting where the processes followed may deny or conceal such uncertainty.

"Meanwhile, if they embrace the notion of (deep) uncertainty, then they may well be uncomfortable in following processes in

their professional lives that seem not to expose or confront uncertainty.

"There is a strong call from transport professionals for change with a need to see more regime testing as either a substitute for, or complement to, the regime-compliant approach that prevails at present. The regime-compliant approach is like looking at things in black and white, while the regime-testing approach equates to seeing in technicolour."

Lyons recommends that guidance be prepared to assist a change towards a more 'regime testing' approach.

"Authorities responsible for strategic transport planning should set aside a modest part of their budget to introduce constructive challenge from a regime-testing perspective," he adds.

Some participants thought the transport sector suffered from a 'rear view mirror' mentality, which resulted in inertia.

"The transport sector is ill-equipped in grasping the extent of socio-technological transformation that the digital age may bring about in the future that may have a bearing on transport," says Lyons. The profession should become more engaged with the IT professions.

"Professional opinion is divided on where car-use trends are heading," says Lyons. "Currently no professional consensus exists on whether car use will grow, remain at a plateau or decline."

On reporting appraisal results, Lyons says: "A very specific way that transport professionals can help nudge thinking and practice towards better embracing uncer-

tainty is to refrain from reporting key quantitative analysis to too many decimal places or significant figures. Current practices are often simply misleading.

"CIHT should consider establishing a 'Know Your Limits' campaign in which it encourages organisations to 'sign up' to a principle of responsible reporting of quantitative results," he says.

The CIHT and Transport Planning Society should review the requirements of the Transport Planning Professional qualification and consider "whether sufficient challenge to dogma and encouragement to contemplate regime testing thinking is apparent or expected".

Professional bodies should ensure a voice is given to different generations to guard against bias, says Lyons. He recommends that the CIHT nurtures young professionals by re-establishing something along the lines of the Transport Visions Network, which operated from 2000 to 2003.

"CIHT should consider seeking funding to establish a 'Transport Revisions Network' that would be run by early career professionals to critically examine the development of the profession and build confidence to engage and challenge."

The project was supported by JMP Consultants.

● **Glenn Lyons will discuss the work at the LTT Summit in November – see page 14**

○ **Uncertainty ahead: which way forward for transport? is available at <http://tinyurl.com/ht7yaya>**

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STB benefits probed

GOVERNANCE

THE CASE for sub-national transport bodies (STBs) is being studied afresh by new transport secretary Chris Grayling.

East Sussex County Council said in July that the DfT was "committed to the creation of a small number of STBs across the country and to ensuring that there are no gaps or 'white space' not covered by an STB within the final map" (LTT 22 Jul).

The first STB is expected to be Transport for the North. The Midlands Connect partnership and the England's Economic Heartland strategic alliance are both explor-

ing the STB model.

One observer told LTT the message from Whitehall was: "The secretary of state is looking for clear evidence that where they are being proposed they are adding value. You have to have a strong case, explaining where it is going to make a difference."

A DfT spokeswoman said: "STBs give authorities the chance to work together to improve public transport for people in their area, and deliver economic growth. If groups want to create one of these bodies, they can apply to the Department. Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis."

Herts explores impact of driverless cars

ROADS

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY Council is exploring how connected and driverless vehicles will change the way road networks are managed.

Mike Younghusband, head of highways operations and strategy, told councillors this week that connected vehicles would be emerging in the next few years and driverless cars could be available for purchase in the mid-2020s.

"Based on these timescales,

Hertfordshire's future major highway improvements emerging from the Local Transport Plan 4 vision will need to be planned to accommodate the mixed use of autonomous and conventional vehicles," he said. "The highways service will need to consider how it needs to evolve our existing roads to meet the challenges."

Topics due to be covered at the meeting included: vehicles and their users; road design, operation and maintenance; intelligent transport systems; and road safety.