



THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT TECHNICAL ADVISERS GROUP **BULLETIN 72 - JULY 2009**

Editor's Introduction.

As some of you will know already, I have recently been volunteered to take on John Holdsworth's role in producing the Bulletin, looking after the website and dealing with public relations and press issues. This is all totally new to me so I hope you will forgive me while I am dragged kicking and screaming into the electronic age.

I intend to publish this newsletter first on the TAG website at www.tagonline.co.uk and then endeavour to circulate paper copies to all registered members of TAG.

So my first message is - please update your authority's records with all key staff that could or should be involved in any TAG activities. Please e-mail Jim Kinchesh (Kinchesh@talktalk.net) to ensure your authority's records are up to date, please include:

title, first name, surname,
council, type of local authority, region
address, town / city, county, post code,
e-mail address
telephone number

It would be great, if you can assist the work of TAG, if you could also specify any particular technical expertise or speciality you could provide. Let us know if you have already given evidence to Public Local Inquiries, Parliamentary Select Committees or written technical papers.

The second message from me and indeed all the TAG Presidential team, is that there is a wealth of information developed by TAG members in all authorities, which could and should be shared amongst all the members. The newish website is still in its infancy so I would appreciate any ideas of how it could be modified and even more I would appreciate any information that would be helpful to other members to put on to the website.

The third message is an updated news from and to all TAG members. The main news in this addition is about the AGM, our new Presidential Team and the very successful Annual President's Workshop held in the Hounslow Council Chamber.



Outgoing TAG President Bob Donaldson congratulates incoming President Martin Low as he takes over lead role for the coming year.

TAG AGM at Holiday Inn, London Heathrow Aerial Hotel.

The TAG AGM was held at the Holiday Inn, London Heathrow Aerial Hotel where ten TAG members attended the AGM on the evening of Wednesday, 19th May. The full minutes are available on the website. Of particular note was the transfer of the Presidency and the Exceptional Service Awards.

The awards this year go to:-

John Holdsworth and Roy Fairclough for their service as TAG officers and their long commitment to the Association of Chief Technical Officers (ACTO) and TAG since its formation; **Andy Morris** for his work rejuvenating the TAG North East region.

Ricky Burnett as the long serving secretary to the very active TAG in Northern Ireland, and **Krishnan Radharkrishnan** for his efforts as Vice President and particularly for setting up the President's workshop at Hounslow, it is a little sad that he could not take on the Presidency in the coming year due to his pending retirement.

In Bob Donaldson's outgoing address, he took the opportunity to thank everyone for the support he had received over the year of his TAG Presidency. In addition to the TAG Council, he especially wished to thank Jim Kinchesh, Roy Fairclough and John Holdsworth for their hard work throughout the year. He also appreciated the work of the chairmen of the TAG Committees and their Secretaries, who provide excellent support. They all play a central role in maintaining and hopefully, growing the TAG membership.

At the beginning of the year, the task ahead seemed daunting. However, Bob had enjoyed his year, which has passed all too quickly. Possibly the most enjoyable part was the presentation of the TAG Exceptional Service Awards and the visit to Northern Ireland.

Bob believes that TAG will continue to face the challenges of maintaining the TAG membership. Many local authorities are already having to face such challenges due to the economic climate and it will be interesting to see the outcome over the next two years. TAG needs to monitor and grow its relationships and dialogue with other bodies. However, for now, TAG should concentrate on its membership issue. He also remains convinced that the way forward is the development of the TAG Regional groups and better communication throughout TAG to the wider membership.

Finally, Bob thanked everyone for having given him the opportunity to be the TAG President.

On taking over the Presidency, Martin Low thanked Bob for the TAG chain of office and all his efforts for the previous year. He said that the current financial picture was affecting everyone and he felt that there was a need to get younger people to join TAG. This was dependent upon TAG having a higher profile and he would try to raise the profile as the TAG President.

He also did not want to duplicate effort with current issues. There is lots of innovative work being carried out across the country and within other local authorities. TAG members should be aware of this and seek to share this information. He would write to all local authority Chief Executives to make them aware of TAG's expertise and explain how they can tap into this TAG expertise. He felt that this was particularly apt in these hard economic times.

Martin would like to see more local sponsorship of TAG events and thought that practitioners and providers should sit around the same table on an equal basis. There needs to be more joined up local government and learning from the right people around the table. There is a need to get prepared for the tough years ahead.

Martin would like TAG to have a robust contact list so that the Secretary could contact the right people when expert advice or consultation is required on behalf of TAG. The list needs to be built up with people being aware of the sensitive issues in local government and the private sector.

He felt it was an exciting time for TAG and he was looking forward to the Presidential Workshop the next day, which would provide an insight into innovation across the country and not just in London.

Martin thanked TAG members for putting their trust in him as the TAG President and he hoped that the trust would have been justified by the TAG AGM this time next year.

For those who don't know Martin is presently Director of Transportation at Westminster City Council. Interestingly he started his career at Westminster as a Trainee Civil Engineer under agreement to the late Alan Cryer, the City Council's City Engineer. He spent time working with the late Max Mussi and then in John Elliott's traffic section at Westminster City Council. He left Westminster to join the London Borough of Southwark where he held several posts and became the Chief Engineer (Traffic and Road Safety). He then spent two years with the London Borough of Bromley before joining Derek Turner as a founder member of his senior management team as Assistant Traffic Director for London overseeing the implementation of Red Routes in the South West Sector of London. He then joined The London Borough of Bexley as Assistant Chief Engineer (Policy) before returning to Westminster as Head of Traffic and Transportation. In 2005, he became the City Council's Director of Transportation.

Martin has been a very active member of professional advisers in London, giving advice to the Association of London Government and London Councils and participating in LoTAG. He sits on the National Traffic Managers' Forum and the Network Management Board. Martin has sat on The TAG Transportation Committee before being elected to Junior Vice President last year.

The Annual TAG Dinner

Following the TAG AGM members moved to the hotel dining room where they were joined by other TAG members and all enjoyed a very sociable evening dinner.



The TAG Annual President's Workshop

This was held on 20th May at Hounslow Civic Centre. The theme was joined up thinking applied to local streets. For those who attended or saw the presentations on the web-cast the speakers and content really provided cutting edge information on the theme for all authorities. The event was well attended with over 50 delegates and ten most interesting speakers. For those who were not delegates hopefully most TAG members were aware that the proceedings were broadcast as a web-cast from London Borough of Hounslow's website. For those who didn't get notice of this event it stresses the importance of registering your details with TAG so that you can be properly informed.

Delegates were welcomed by our new President Martin Low, he stated that he wanted the workshop to stimulate a debate on key issues, so speakers gave short presentations followed by a panel discussion.



Peter Barker OBE from Reading University and Guide Dogs for the Blind then gave an extremely interesting and informative presentation on Innovations to assist visually impaired people and avoiding well meant intentions that do not assist them.

Providing assistance for everybody with a disability is something we should all be considering during all our working activities. Fortunately, now at last disability issues are being thoroughly considered by all local government. Peter stressed the importance of taking time at the design and planning stage of any schemes to get them right, he pointed out the social changes with the predicted growth of the UK population by nearly 17 million over the next 20 years with a large part of that coming from increased life expectancy. With the increased life expectancy amongst the ever increasing proportion of the population, disabilities will occur from Alzheimer disease, sensory and cognitive issues and physical disabilities, furthermore family structures are less cohesive and more and more will be living alone.

Peter outlined the changes that TAG members have had to grapple with over the years including dropped kerbs during the '70s, tactile paving in the '80's and better guidelines from organisations like the TRL together with pelican beepers and rotating knurled cones beneath pedestrian push button units. Even now there is a constant need for new considerations for certain disabilities e.g. diabetic suffers lose some feeling to say feel the rotating cone.

Shared pedestrian and vehicle space is now a spreading desire and Peter remarked that he did not feel there had been adequate research and consideration between identifying the problem and introducing solutions. There are also important social and cultural issues to deal with, as a lot of people seem to have forgotten how to respect each other when travelling by different modes.

His final message was we should all be embracing change but manage that change properly.

Paul Watters, from the AA, started with the most vulnerable road users and went on to give an excellent presentation on the issues affecting motorists and what the AA wants to see happening to improve conditions. He introduced the AA and outlined the changes of ownership of the organisation, the new charitable trust for road safety and the environment and the fact that they had 75,000 members and regularly surveyed the public response.

Most interestingly, he reported that 70% of AA members support speed cameras; 54% agreed that more 20 mph zones would help reduce pedestrian casualties; furthermore the majority supported lower drink driving limits and would report someone they knew to be drunk when driving. Nevertheless 73% do not agree with the shared use concept. (Perhaps cultural change on road use takes longer).

On other cultural issues, he reported 77% in the North West opposed local congestion charging and 58% opposed pay lanes on motorways; surprisingly 67% say roads should be built or improved in towns and cities. This is an area where TAG has consistently advised that new roads in towns and cities do not solve traffic problems but bring a number of other problems.

With the present TAG activities on the Traffic Signs Review it was interesting that he reported that 53% of the AA panel responses required less road signing, but when asked about say parking or road hazards they all wanted more signs. The AA had identified that city and town roads are bearing the brunt of any cuts, road damage and condition problems, this is an issue that TAG has been campaigning about for many years.

For any TAG members wishing to take part and refer to AA events they can join the discussion on www.theaa.com/loan or take part in the popular survey www.theaa.com

Martin Holland from Islington and **Mark Hadley** from “e-digital Consulting” presented the next workshop session, which was about improving communication with customers and the eye-look-about street-scape technology.

The public image of local government generally and when looking after highways is not as good as it should be. We may have a very difficult job being blamed for all the ills in our road system (when many of the ills are really caused by the privatised statutory undertakers) nevertheless anything we can do to improve information and service to the customers is really a high priority for us all in local government.

The London Borough of Islington has really grabbed this bull by the horns by empowering front line staff and providing excellent systems for information and changing the culture. This has been achieved by:

- setting up a truly excellent call centre system with pictures of anywhere on the street that can be picked up immediately by the call centre staff and so able to discuss on a personal level with the customer;
- empowering the operational staff so they can fix a whole range of issues at a local level;
- ensuring the information reaches the operational staff immediately.

This has all produced a great improvement in service.

The response rate now for complaints has been halved to an average of two days from receipt of complaint to dealing with the problem, and the best case has been sorting out a problem within 14 minutes of receipt of a complaint. In 2003 a total of 1751 responses were dealt with and in 2006-7 over 7,000. So real problems are now being sorted out rather than being left. The better maintenance has resulted also in lower crime, more satisfied residents etc.

It is notable that a lot of resource is presently going into asset management and, while this is extremely important for the long term efficient operation of local government, the immediate response and quality of service to our customers is of at least equal importance.

Finally, while the new system, call centre and operative response team has made a real difference on all highways issues in Islington, the look-about system on the street is now proving to be useful to social workers visiting sites, housing officers etc.

For TAG members wishing to consider these sorts of systems in more detail, they are welcome to contact Martin Holland (Martin.Holland@islington.gov.uk) or Mark Hadley (mark@edigitalconsulting.co.uk)

Moving on from dealing with the very real customer issues the next two speakers addressed the practicality of delivering changes to our highway system and ensuring we move to latest developments for the 21st century. Sustainability is one of the biggest issues that we will need to tackle.

Bill Hall from FM Conway, spoke in a very practical way about “How much can we recycle from the highways” and described what FM Conway do at their premises on the outskirts of Dartford with material from the highways that they manage for a number of different Authorities. He pointed out that they now recycled 95% of all highway materials and even on gully waste, 90% is reused. The recycling centre saves 24 million gallons of water, 250,000 tonnes of aggregate, 120,000 tons of type 1 and 30,000 cubic metres of concrete; they also have a new asphalt plant close by which uses 80% recycled aggregate.

From this plant, there are very real savings, with aggregate tax for landfill at £3 per tonne, reduction in vehicle movements and a very big reduction in the cost of water. Furthermore even for vehicle movements the vehicles that come in with waste go out with aggregate, such that Conway’s have increased the normal 40% laden to 60% laden for vehicles.

Keith Firth from Colin Buchannan was the next speaker and his subject was “Considering real savings in the highway and for individuals, by being able to remove traffic lights”. He demonstrated various locations with videos where traffic lights failed - people were much more respectful of each other and traffic (but not necessarily pedestrians – as could be seen in his video!) and re-learned the culture of give and take on the roads. Predictions of chaos with removing traffic lights were often unfounded. However, where traffic lights are removed and shared spaces are introduced it is important that the onus is clearly put on the vehicle driver.

While Keith’s presentation certainly illustrated places where it would be much better to have less control of traffic and allow people to sort themselves out, there are places where sorting out didn’t happen and control was very effective, e.g. Hyde Park Corner signalling. In the past there have been incentives for highway and traffic engineers to introduce traffic lights rather than considering options, e.g. after the GLC abolition local authority highway and traffic engineers could get a significant part of their costs paid for by others (e.g. Department of Transport) if they introduced a signal scheme rather than an alternative priority roundabout or zebra crossing type scheme, so distorting the best solutions, during that period.

Following Keith’s presentation there was an opportunity for various others to describe innovations on local streets:-

Sardesh Khan gave a short presentation on comparison of shared space around the third world.

Trevor Collins for Mouchels reported that in any meeting of different drivers or pedestrians there are different types of people, one who waits for the other and one who goes, potentially this can cause problems if two of the same type occur at the same point.

Kevin Ratisingha from MVA added that drivers behave differently in different areas.

Chris Britton reported that we do not have the flashing amber they have at many places on the continent - this changes the controls at different times of the day. Activities and behaviour tend to differ also at different times of the day.

Tim Walker referred to “lively driving” outside the core of the day.

Peter Barker brought all these discussions together by drawing attention to the importance of psychology of drivers and pedestrians and the time it takes to change peoples’ behaviour. He believes the first issue is control of traffic speed in all locations, second the personal safety of others

and he also pointed out the difficulty for blind people and orientation if street scenes have changed, and the third issue was proper controls in a measured way.

There were three short addresses on other issues such as Enfield has developed a best practice manual handling of slabs.

Martin Low described the issues that Central London faces on security and Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Dave Franks from Westminster described the latest advances on street lighting.

Chris Britton from Chris Britton Consultancy and **Peter Jones** from University College London described a model for network performance using the whole street environment. This centred around the network performance gap concept, management of the whole street environment and link and place classification.

Much of this work was centred around the London Borough of Hounslow and its highway asset management plan. Finance in Hounslow like in many other authorities is extremely tight and they have gained £198 million government PFI credits over five years plus life cycle maintenance on the basis of this work. Interestingly the link place concept considered each street and both carriageways and footways as a movement conduit and as a place or destination in its own right. The place was significantly dependent upon primary land use, cultural and heritage status and whether the whole street environment was fit for purpose.

These whole concepts have been very useful in framing the PFI agreement and ensuring the contractor provides a decent level of service for many years. While this will not always be responsive to changes, it was necessary for Hounslow to sacrifice a level of influence on the street environment in order to secure the required funding.

Mike Slinn from the MVA, was the last speaker of the day and spoke on “The challenge to address freight and local delivery servicing issues”. Mike described the work of the West London freight quality partnership where the objectives were to develop an understanding of the needs for freight and promote a constructive and sustainable approach to managing an appropriate strategy.

He outlined the challenges of freight of inadequate space, traffic restrictions, insensitive enforcement, poor delivery business practices, inertia of business, the negative perceptions of freight, and the low priority given by local authorities to the needs of freight. He pointed out the essential and growing needs for freight of goods and services. Recognising delivery is a joint responsibility involving new approaches in use of road space and delivery and servicing plans. The key issue was learning from experience and achieving a win-win for all.

In the discussion following Mike’s presentation **David Yeowell** pointed out the problems of communicating for example with the white van man not to park on the pavement and with foreign freight lorries and the problem of overnight parking. **Andy Morris** suggested that further sat-nav information could be provided. **Martin Low** identified road safety issues that needed communicating, for example the relevance of blind spots for drivers of some heavy goods vehicles at advance stop-lines for bicycles and **Peter Jones** addressed the issue of providing good information on parking and waiting restrictions to freight.

All in all the whole meeting was highly successful and a large amount of information was exchanged.

All TAG members are invited to add information, through John Elliott, to the web-site, so TAG can improve the general knowledge of the TAG membership on issues that somebody must be tackling somewhere in the country.

TAG Regional News

TAG North East reports 2008/09 has been a very busy and successful year. It has consistently achieved attendance in excess of 12 and had a wide range of speakers and presentations. One of the keys to success has been to make sure that it the TAG members set the agenda for the next meetings. This gives ownership and makes sure that the meetings are meeting the needs of the membership. The meetings always take place on a Friday starting at 10:00 followed by an informal buffet lunch. The locations of the meetings are rotated around the region in order to spread the costs of hosting the meetings and also the travelling costs for the members.

The year started with the Presidential Seminar held in Sunderland on the topic of Street Scene and Street Scape. Around 45 people attended this very successful event, which saw speakers from local authorities, the private sector and Government Agencies.

This was followed by a meeting in September in Newcastle with the main topics being Regional and Sub-regional Government, Strategic Planning and Continuous Professional Development.

TAG NE has been trying to engage with its membership and the University and other institutions to better understand the CPD requirements of the industry and thereby kick-start training local in the North East. This has now taken off and the first Training Forum taking place on the 5th June where all interested parties are getting together to start to pull things together. This could be the start of a north east "Ashton University" style programme of courses.

The last meeting was held on the 24th April at Northumberland County Council offices, the subject being the flooding in Northumberland in September 2008. There was a series of very interesting speakers for the County Council, District Council and Emergency planning authority. They all gave very different accounts and lessons learnt. Again, one of the main issues was communications.

The programme of events continues on the 10th July at Gateshead Council with the theme focusing on the changes to the Regional Funding Allocations and the new initiative of Developing a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS).

TAG Northern Ireland Year-End Reports:

- Another busy year
- Merger between TAG/PSNet is almost complete
- TAG's advice increasingly sought in relation to RPA
 - Major piece of work undertaken on the Transfer of DRD Functions to councils for PDP C
 - Input to PwC research on the "*Future Shape of Local Government*" research
 - Input to NILGA on performance management for the RPA
 - Heard from the European Investment Bank (EIB) in relation to opportunities to access funding
- Received presentation from ARENA on their 10th annual survey
- Received presentation from LASAN
- Lobbied for a review of funding for Tidy NI
- In association with NILGA, responded to
 - DETI on "*the Review of NI Renewable Obligation*" and
 - to the Environment Committee on "*the Financial Provisions for Waste Management Activities in NI*"
- Working with NILGA, TAG
 - attended a meeting with the NIEA on Producer Responsibility
 - attended a meeting with the Environment Minister to discuss "*the clean neighbourhood*" agenda and
 - formed an NI position on the UK PRAG group
 - meet with BERR to discuss amendments to WEEE

- With PSNet, TAG reviewed its earlier advice to SOLACE on risks associated with “ride-on” steps
- Welcomed the TAG (UK) President – Bob Cameron at our Christmas Dinner
- John Quinn was awarded an “*Exceptional Services to TAG*” tankard in recognition of the work he has done for TAG over the years
- The Chair provided comment to Surveyor magazine on behalf of TAG (UK) regarding the downturn in the recyclables market prices
- Lobbied WRAP for clarification on steps they were introducing to combat the downturn
- Entered into discussion with LARAC about acting as a regional secretariat to permit NI to be represented nationally in this important forum
- Continue to input to Strategic Waste Board through NILGA
- Held a third successful regional seminar on “*Practical Procurement*”
- Continuing to work with CEHOG, SOLACE, NILGA on lobbying DOE to address flytipping
- Attended the TAG (UK) AGM in Hounslow, London
- Organised the Open Meeting on COTC regime changes
- SNIFFER research on waste charging – collapsed due to withdrawal of support from Scottish Executive

TAG Committee News

The TAG Transportation Committee reports a busy year with written and verbal evidence to the House of Commons Committee and to Department of Transport on a number of issues. The Transportation Committee meets regularly, dates are on the web-sites together with minutes of meetings, if you have anything to add to them will you please contact phil.moore@medway.gov.uk and johnrelliott@btinternet.com.

A particular activity at present is the review of the Traffic Signs and General Directions 2002. This is being led from TAG’s point of view by Chris Martin at Transport for London, but we also have representatives dealing with other issues at TfL and in other authorities and also maintaining close links with the British Parking Association.

TAG Coastal and Fluvial Management Committee has considered carefully the implications of the draft Floods and Water Bill and the questions set out in the consultation paper and offers the following response to DEFRA.

“The Local Government Technical Advisers Group (TAG) represents many of the local authorities in England and Northern Ireland and has close links with local authorities in Wales and Scotland.

The TAG Coastal and Fluvial Committee is encouraging local authorities to respond individually or collectively where this is relevant to the 180+ questions contained in the consultation document. Many of these questions are so specific and detailed that it is not felt appropriate for TAG to attempt to summarise them. Local circumstances and characteristics will influence each response to a greater or lesser extent.

TAG nevertheless has thoroughly examined the document and strongly supports proposals in the draft Flood and Water Management Bill for both upper and lower tier Local Authorities to work in partnership with the Environment Agency, water companies, sewerage undertakers and other relevant organisations to take the National Strategy, as developed and consulted upon by the Environment Agency, and to develop and deliver local and bespoke flood risk management strategies that take account of all sources of flooding, including surface water run off and groundwater.

Successful outcomes will depend on all partners committing to real collaborative working, delivering plans and programmes within defined timescales and the willingness of the Government to fully fund local flood risk management. Without such a commitment the Bill's key objectives will falter and

result in ineffectual outcomes. Early indications from some authorities suggest that significant additional staff resources will be required in both the lead authorities and their partners. As well as the financial implications TAG has concerns about the shortage of the relevant skills.

TAG would seek assurances that the indicative timescales for enacting the Bill will be reflected in the subsequent timescales for allowing Local Authorities to take this forward. The Bill should also address the allocation of funding, which must, inter alia, allow those authorities, many of whom have not retained the necessary funding from water companies or technically qualified and experienced staffing resources following the loss of agency agreements with water companies over the last decade, to take the necessary steps to address this, as recommended by Sir Michael Pitt.

TAG notes an important role for Maritime Local Authorities and would encourage the continued collaboration with Regional Coastal Groups in the production and review of Shoreline Management Plans and associated coastal strategies as part of the suite of strategies to be used to manage flood and coastal risks. It would also suggest that the Regional Flood Defence Committees should quite clearly reflect, both in membership and name, the relevant emphasis of the coast as well as other sources of flood and erosion risk.

Finally, TAG is aware of the willingness and enthusiasm amongst its Members to play an active role in the future national and local Flood and Coastal Risk management agenda and is committed to working with its Members in making the Bill work in practice.”

Other News.

Joe Field (retired) is trying to organise an **ACTO reunion** and presently considering Friday 9th October in Stratford. Joe has contacted most old ACTO members, however if you are an old member of ACTO and have not been contacted by Joe please contact him on joifields@yahoo.co.uk. He is also looking for contact details for Terry Day, David Reader, Bonner Davies and Tony Lindley, anybody who knows their whereabouts please let Joe know.