



# The Local Government Technical Advisers Group

## TAG Bulletin 74

### March 2011

#### Editor's Introduction



Apologies to all that I haven't produced a Bulletin for a year. I have however been very busy with other TAG duties as I hope some of you will know.

This bumper edition attaches the details of the President's seminar to be held in Hounslow but it also has:

- An interview with our President
- News from the North East and London
- News from the Coastal and Fluvial and Transport Committee including a note on the House of Commons Transport Committee report on Transport and the Economy
- Two topical Blogs, the second from the Senior Vice President leads seamlessly into an
- An article from Phil Moore on term maintenance contracts and last but not least,
- An address by the President with a following note from the Senior Vice President

The **TAG AGM & PRESIDENTIAL DINNER** will be held on Thursday 5 May 2011 at the Holiday Inn London-Heathrow Ariel Hotel Hayes from 6.15 pm coffee / tea followed by the TAG AGM at 6.30 pm. Following the AGM the TAG PRESIDENTIAL DINNER will be at 8 pm in the Holiday Inn restaurant, the cost of the dinner will be around £20; please let Roy Fairclough know if you will be attending the AGM and/or TAG dinner. Roy Fairclough TAG National Secretary, tel 07887 710272 [tag-1@rfconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:tag-1@rfconsultancy.co.uk)



TAG AGM 2010



TAG Presidential Dinner 2010

The **TAG PRESIDENTIAL WORKSHOP** will be on Friday 6 May 2011 at Hounslow Civic Centre, Lampton Road, Hounslow from 9.30 am until 4.00 pm. The theme is ADAPTABILITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT. Details and application form can be found on the TAG website - <http://www.tagonline.co.uk/news.php?n=84>



If you wish to stay at the Holiday Inn London-Heathrow Ariel then please book direct with the hotel – telephone 0208 757 7062 attn: Tina Juttla - ask for the TAG agreed rate. The rooms are £85 for a single or double for b&b. some rooms have been provisionally reserved for TAG members for 5th May. Website [www.holiday-inn.com/hiheathrow](http://www.holiday-inn.com/hiheathrow)



These events are always most enjoyable, very informative and an excellent networking opportunity with experienced practitioners in the field. It is in your own interest to make the most of this event. We look forward to seeing many of you in Hounslow.

There have been some continuing difficulties with the host company for the TAG web site and London TAG has lost the support of their key web site person, who has moved on. In view of this we might have to review our operation of both web sites. In the meantime please use it including the members' pages and the Forum, the latter has proved very useful to the rather too few members who have used it so far. More information on the use of the web site and passwords for the members section are included in the covering e-mail but this should only be available to paid up members (we have at least got an updated members list this year!) If you have any more news on membership changes please e-mail Jim Kinchesh [Kinchesh@talktalk.net](mailto:Kinchesh@talktalk.net) to ensure your authority's records are up to date.

**Please visit the website on [www.tagonline.co.uk](http://www.tagonline.co.uk).**

Unfortunately the cuts on local government are the most draconian seen in any member's lifetime this year and the coming few years, so for many it is going to be even harder to contribute to TAG. However this is probably exactly the time we should be sharing all the knowledge we have in order to deliver savings in our own workloads and to achieve the best quality and value services and contracts for services.

John Elliott

### **Interview with TAG President - Tim Walker**



**John:** Tim I have only known you for about two or three years but, in this time, I've come to appreciate that you are very active in TAG and saw this in person when I visited you in Belfast. You made me very welcome and I must admit I thoroughly enjoyed the archetypical Irish sense of humour. But I don't know that much about you. I know roughly what you do as a job but I think it would be interesting for the TAG membership to know a little bit more about you. So I will start at the beginning – I know you are Irish, but where were you born?

**Tim:** I was born in Dublin,

**John:** In Dublin itself? A beautiful city I gather but I have yet to visit. You presumably went to school in Dublin?

**Tim:** Yes.

**John:** And took whatever leaving exams you had, not A levels – what are they?

**Tim:** I did about 7 or 8 leaving cert subjects

**John:** And then went on to University to do what?

**Tim:** I did Environmental Science in The University of Ulster in Coleraine, north of the border.

**John:** So north of the Border, where you are again now. Funny that, Roy returned to Plymouth where he did his degree. So you did Environmental Science, what grabbed you in that subject?

**Tim:** I've always been interested in nature and the environment, and I liked to know how things worked or could work, so when it came to making a decision about college courses it was difficult; should I study architecture, engineering or science? Ultimately, I was most interested in earth sciences, which was to do with water, wind, waves, the atmosphere, rocks and geology, and at the time the closest course I could find on how the earth worked was environmental sciences at Coleraine.

**John:** Then you went back south of the Border if I am right?

**Tim:** That's right. I went to Trinity College, Dublin to study my second degree, again in Environmental Science. On this course, there was much less opportunity to self select and, as a result, I learnt much more about how man interacted with the environment. In that regard I did more lab work, I looked at contamination in the environment, pollution and ecosystems and how man influenced them. At this stage I got interested in remote sensing and Geographical Information System (GIS) modelling. So I chose for my Master's thesis to look at the carbon cycle of Dublin using remote sensing platforms (i.e. satellites) and to track changes in the levels of vegetation in the city on an annual cycle covering several years.

**John:** The carbon cycle is closer to my heart in Sustainable Transport than probably your present responsibilities in waste.

**Tim:** Yes, I am sure it is. That was over 20 years ago though and, shortly after completing this research, I was offered a PhD in University College Dublin on the development and research of remote sensing and how it could be used to monitor environmental change. This would have been a very interesting career choice.

**John:** But you didn't do that PhD you did another one?

**Tim:** That's right John, I ended up doing a PhD in performance management and organisational change in local government, but way before this, after my stint in TCD, I got a job. I have always been strongly motivated to work and my first "proper" job was as a Field Assistant in the Geological Survey of Ireland. My job was to look at boreholes and groundwater monitoring data which I then had to plot on a GIS system. I looked at seasonal variations in different water-tables across the country. Wow, I'm just remembering that I plotted data sets for Cork which I'm guessing are probably being scrutinised again after the heavy flooding experienced there in November 2009.

**John:** That is much more mainstream TAG work. Most of us are civil engineers but you are not which, in the changing world of local government, is probably no bad thing as it makes sure TAG remains open and broadminded to what different disciplines can offer.

**Tim:** I have always worked closely with engineers. You are right though because in my discussions with TAG over the years I've found my background really useful in giving me an understanding of crucial issues facing councils, such as things like flood control, winter maintenance and water supply. From my studies, for flood control I would consider when there were storm surges so I could see what sort of interventions were a possibility and how they could work to limit flooding. Were they seasonal? Were there particular years when flooding was more prevalent than others and how related might this be to certain weather conditions?

**John:** So, closely related to the work of the TAG Coastal and Fluvial Committee. Have you attended one of our Coastal and Fluvial meetings yet?

**Tim:** Only by phone.

**John:** Only by phone? Their activities are I think hotting up a lot because of carbon emissions.

**Tim:** No pun intended there John, eh?

**John:** There really wasn't – honest! But the link between the different strands of TAG work is really evident there. You are involved in waste, and yet you've done work on water and CO2 which is relevant for other TAG Groups, such as the Transport Committee?

**Tim:** Yes, that was one of the joys of Environmental Science it gave me an understanding of the science behind many of different issues. It has to be said that when I was in college I never really foresaw that I would be working in waste management.

**John:** And it shows that we need to get out of our silos and make sure we are connected.

**Tim:** I think it also shows that any which way you come to these areas of work you have to be flexible, and be ready to move as both times and circumstances change.

**John:** Yes, and last year's President's Workshop on Nudge and behaviour change was very new to a lot of us, but you floated that notion of change. So, what do you think were the salient points?

**Tim:** Well that's a big question and one which I haven't got a direct answer to. Last Tuesday, I was talking at the joint Northern Ireland Environment Link/NI Environment Agency annual conference on behaviour change and how I was trying to use it practically to help deliver Belfast's waste targets. And again this morning, I was at a local conference about sustainable communities where behaviour change was raised by both of the keynote speakers – Tony Juniper, ex-Friends of the Earth and Alex Hill who is the Met Office climate change adviser for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



They both made compelling arguments that things had to change and that we all were going to have to do things differently in future. We are going through a difficult period at the moment, we all have to recognise that we cannot get more of the same forever, and that is going to be tricky – both politically and personally. In behaviour change terminology, our problem is apparently called the normalcy bias – there's an inertia to change; we think that tomorrow will be the same as today, and for every day thereafter. And while that is true in the short term, it is not true in the long term. We are not good collectively or as individuals at looking further ahead

than a couple of weeks, so we assume it is going to be much the same as it is today.

We are becoming increasingly aware however that just doesn't hold true on a number of fronts, be it climate change, or the financial crisis or getting petrol for your car. Whatever it is, things are changing – and with increasing speed.

So, in that regard I just thought behaviour change would be an appropriate topic for us to focus on and, as I had heard some interesting speeches on it and had read a book or two, I saw parallels to what TAG was doing. Given that I had been given the opportunity to sit in the presidential hot seat I used it as an excuse to get some good speakers that I wanted to hear on the topic.

**John:** You did a good job at last year's Workshop and produced a very informative and interesting event, I must admit.

**Tim:** I hope people came away from the event with some new thoughts as I think behaviour change has a relevance for TAG which we need to consider.

**John:** And it does stress the importance of people getting involved and using the combined knowledge of all those in TAG, doesn't it?

**Tim:** Yes, I think that's one of the points I've been making during the last year. TAG members are good at the "hard" stuff, by which I mean designing roads, bridges, flood alleviation schemes and the like.

But while this may be difficult, ultimately it's quite easy being a matter of calculations, building works, contract management and the like.

The thing we are less good at is the "soft" stuff which is how we engage the public, our members, our communities and our politicians to encourage them to do something different. That is the challenge I had hoped to pose at the Workshop last year.

In my year as President, I visited many of the regions. I have to say without hesitation that I have been really impressed with the knowledge and understanding that TAG members have. I don't think we share that amongst ourselves enough either as points of reference, or to get information or knowledge or to share our latest thinking.

**John:** So, that is partly back to me as Information Officer to make sure the website works and I get information from all and we get a sort of library together of things within the members pages that we can share.

**Tim:** Well John that is brave of you to say, I wasn't looking to cast aspersions. I was going to say it is up to the members within TAG to recognise there is a resource at their fingertips that they could contribute to and use better.

**John:** But for me to 'broadcast' it, they have got to give it to me before I can put it up on the web site or elsewhere.

**Tim:** Yes, there is excellent practical knowledge of how to do things but we have not been good recently at sharing this.

**John:** I have been concerned about this as well. So there is a big message from both of us, please send the stuff in so that we can share it amongst the wider TAG membership.

**Tim:** And I think it would be worthwhile highlighting that there is a great opportunity. It isn't like we have to generate stuff simply for TAG, but there are consultation responses and guidance notes which we produce anyway in our organisations which could be circulated to a wider audience. So, with members' help and with little additional effort they could forward their regular work to TAG to be uploaded onto our web-based Library that could be used by others.

And I will quote the example here of the NI waste storage guide which we produced last year for builders, developers and architects. We formed a local government partnership with the Department of the Environment (DOE) to produce this guide to provide information on how best to manage waste at a micro level – from house refurbishments through to multi-storey apartment blocks and, having been completed, it's now available on the TAG website for all to use.

**John:** I think you will be saying a little more on that in your address within the same bulletin issue. You have a full-time job dealing with waste in a major UK city and you have the TAG Presidency which I know you have thrown yourself into. What do you do in the remaining minus 2 hours a day, apart from sleep?

**Tim:** Hmm, I have a variety of interests. I love the cinema and go as often as possible. And I have an allotment.

**John:** Like Roy, he has an allotment too!

**Tim:** Yes, I've called Roy and on occasion found he's outside on the allotment and we've discussed issues such as what's the best soil for potatoes – typical I suppose...

I'm also regional chair for the Royal Society for the Arts (the RSA) which gives me a chance to broaden my horizons and, just like with TAG, I've used this as an excuse to get interesting people to come and talk to us on topics like how Galileo became a poster boy for the



enlightenment as reflected in how he was painted by different artists over the centuries. One recent talk considered the more immediate issue of how the Big Society and localism could affect communities in NI. These are classic RSA issues which, as a region of an established think tank with a long-term objective of fostering civic entrepreneurship, we consider and debate and occasionally contribute to nationally.

**John:** I can see that at the end of your year you will have a hole to fill but it appears you will fill it rather readily with all your other activities.

**Tim:** Having spent a year visiting the regions and talking with TAG members, I think there is some work that I could usefully contribute to TAG with Satbir's endorsement. I would look at how best to position TAG to be fit for purpose for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The local government landscape is changing and therefore, in many regards, local government organisations are going to need to change as well. Notwithstanding political perspectives or personal views, the money has disappeared which means that changes are coming about by hook or by crook and I think that TAG and others must get their heads around what that may mean which includes greater levels of collaboration and joint working. There are several organisations which I believe we could usefully work with or contribute to which could make our voice stronger and clearer.

In early May however I shall be a father for the first time! So there is probably going to be a race between being a Dad and handing over the presidency to Satbir as both these events are due to happen on the same day.

**John:** So your time is more than 100% accounted for next year as well.  
Thank you very much Tim.

## News from the North East



**TAG NE** continues to go from strength to strength and regularly attracts over 20 attendees at each of its regular quarterly meetings. This year has seen the chair change from Andy Morris (ex Sunderland City Council and ex Jacobs) to Nick Clennett from Gateshead MBC. Andy has stayed on as the regional secretary to assist Nick.

So why is TAG NE bucking the trend of the other regions? Well it has not always been this buoyant and about 5 years ago attendance was low with meetings only taking place sporadically. It was at this point that Andy Morris stepped in to take the chair and started to reinvigorate the region. He took it back to basics and on the back of what the national Tag president was trying to achieve started to communicate with the grass roots in the regions. The formula was simple – ask the TAG membership and local government officers what they wanted from regular meetings; let the membership drive the agenda, thereby keeping meetings relevant and vibrant. Andy says that all he had to do was listen to what was wanted and then arrange for a couple of relevant speakers to give presentations, advertise the event well and sit back and let the attendees take it from there.

The format is kept the same. Meetings are always on a Friday starting at 10:00 and finish at 12:30 with a buffet lunch. At each meeting the agenda and topics for future meetings are discussed and agreed. TAG NE has a rolling 12 month calendar of meetings along with venues and tries to get agreed subjects for the following two meetings. This means that everyone can get dates in their diaries early and make the necessary arrangements. The venues for meetings are shared between the authorities in order to share the financial burden. Also the venues are alternated between the north, south and middle of the region so no one has to do all of the travelling.

Andy continually stressed when he was chair, that the meetings were not his nor were they TAG's meetings. They were the memberships meeting and he was just the catalyst to make it happen. Topics covered over the 5 years have been wide and varied and has included:

- Sustainable developments
- CDM
- Involvement of the third sector in service delivery
- Regional spending allocations
- Local Transport Funding
- How to solve utility servicing for new developments
- CPD – attempts to get regular CPD events running in the north east
- Water Management Act

In addition to the local agenda there is always a space on the agenda to discuss the work of TAG nationally through the topic committees.

The attendance at meetings has not been restricted to TAG member organisations but obviously if they attend regularly they are encouraged to join. It has been heartening to see quite a few younger officers attending and this is sure to benefit both TAG and their individual organisations. Because people have seen the benefits of TAG at a local level some have been spurred to take a more active role nationally to the benefit of the Transport and Water Management committees.

It would be wonderful if the regions that are currently inactive could adopt the simple game plan of the north east, however what is critical is finding one or two people who can be the catalyst to roll out the model:

- Yearly calendar of meetings
- Keep the format constant
- Share the venues
- Ask the membership/prospective attendees for the relevant topics
- Communicate effectively

So what is the future for TAG NE? Well it is intended to make better links with the other two strong organisations in the north east i.e. the ICE and also the CIHT. There are a number of common issues that would be best addressed if duplication was avoided. There will also be benefits in arranging some joint sponsored events enabling more high profile presenters etc.

The futures look bright although a little more challenging.

Andy Morris

## [A London View from the TAG Junior Vice-President – David Yeoell](#)

**The London Technical Advisors Group (LoTAG)** maintains its technical network between all the London local authorities and Transport for London (TfL). Meetings are very well attended and meet usually every 10 to 12 weeks and discuss policy development and service delivery on a London wide basis.

The network of technical sub-groups through LoTAG Group 2 (Infrastructure) in London was specifically designed to reflect and directly feed into the Roads Liaison Group and UK Boards:

[David Yeoell](#)

- Highway Maintenance Steering Group (HMSG) – this group deals with all aspects of roads, footways and cycle lanes; it includes four subgroups with practitioners from all boroughs who share good practice.
- Roads2000 - ROAD2000 was set up in 1999, as a sub-group of HMSG, with the remit to oversee and coordinate the collection of condition and asset inventory data, on the London Borough Principal Road Network.
- London Bridge Engineering Group (LoBEG) – leads on the development and dissemination of bridge management activities and is recognised nationally for its innovative work.

- London Lighting Engineering Group (LoLEG) – leads on the development and dissemination of street lighting practices in London.
- London HAUC – provides a forum for authorities and utility companies to debate issues of mutual concern and to develop ideas that will improve road and street work management.
- LoTAG Asset Management Board (LoTAMB) – This group leads in the sharing of innovative developments in Asset Management across all assets. It also co-ordinates LoTAG's successful £1m bid for 'Element 2' Funding in respect of Asset Management.

These groups are very active and have lead boroughs that act as the champions/centres of excellence for developing and sharing good practice. The groups hold regular meetings (normally quarterly) to discuss and disseminate good practice and normally have sub-groups to progress specific initiatives. Regular seminars are held and are open to organisations outside London.

The work of these groups has been very pro-active in developing common asset management practices across London over several years and much of the work is referenced and included within national guidance and Codes of Practice.

### The current financial situation

London is no different to anywhere else in the UK as it has to face up to substantial reductions in both revenue and capital expenditure. Fundamental Service Reviews are the key now to develop proposals that still deliver 'acceptable' levels of service.

However:

- What Level of Service is acceptable and/or appropriate?
- What are the priorities?
- What impact would reduced expenditure have on service levels?
- Can you justify the funding you need?
- Are the services Statutory or Discretionary
- What are the service delivery options? Should services be delivered In-house, Public/Private, Pure Private
- What are the current Levels of Service and future targets?
- If insufficient funding is available to meet targets then political decision is needed to accept lower Levels of Service – This may create a 'negative' funding gap (backlog)
- Need to assess effect of 'reduced funding' in terms of the deteriorating condition and reduced asset value – resulting in increased claims, lower satisfaction levels, increased future costs

We all face similar 'options' to deliver reductions in revenue expenditure, and are a combination of:

- Efficiency savings without service impact
- Reduction in the frequency of routine maintenance activities
- Reduction in the volume of reactive maintenance activities
- Stopping some services

The application of asset management techniques, using Life Cycle Planning, has been able to provide the 'robust justification' for maintaining an asset with the aim of providing the required 'Level of Service' while minimising whole life costs. It has also assisted in justifying expenditure based upon 'need' for both Revenue and Capital (this is 'Zero based Budgeting' and in line with 'Whole of Government Accounts').

The difficulty for all of us is trying to determine what level of service represents the 'Statutory minimum'.

Much has been said about 'efficiency savings' in recent years and there are many 'case studies' available from the Highways Efficiency Liaison Group (HELG) covering innovative highways and asset management and procurement.

In London, the big talk is about 'joint procurement', 'framework contracts' and 'common specifications' to bring in efficiencies and drive down costs. Work is well underway to develop 'standard specifications' and a good example is the London wide Asphalt Specification which has been introduced to minimise the number of mixes needed from the asphalt plants and thereby reduce costs. Model Contract clauses are under development together with model framework contracts.

Large regional framework contracts are also being taken forward. Many boroughs are only signed up 'in principle' as most want to see if they really will be cost effective when tenders come in. Much is said about 'big is beautiful' and there are some concerns that tier 1 contracting may add costs rather than drive costs down and remove 'local contractors' that have been carrying out work cost effectively in the past. 'e- Auctions' are also being used e.g. Lamp column supply and electrical integrity testing.

They say that 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating' and we will only be convinced once one or two successful contracts are in place, working and delivering savings.

Some boroughs are seriously examining 'joint organisational structures'. Westminster has already published its link up with Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham councils. This has many merits, will need good political support and will happen to each service if it is cost effective and in the interests of the individual borough.

There is an awful lot more going on in London and I would need many more pages to set out what is going on and do it justice.



A new LoTAG web site is under development, which will be live soon, and this will allow LoTAG and TAG members to see what is going on in London and access a wealth of reference data. Both LoTAMB and LoBEG already have established web-sites.

LoTAG can only function with the hard work and dedication of the many council officers and others who give their time freely in support of others. Quite a number of individuals have been active in chairing and contributing to the activities of the UK Boards, LoTAG and the various sub-groups for many years. The personal concern I have is that many of these individuals are getting older (me included) and we do need some younger members to take over before the grey army retires. As local authority staff numbers reduce and more externalisation occurs we will need to rely on our 'service providers' to be active in LoTAG to continue with the excellent work.

David Yeowell

## News from the TAG National Transport Committee

Bob Donaldson, Chairman

In the last year TAG Transport Committee has tackled many issues including:

- evidence to various House of Commons Transport Committee inquiries (more later on their latest report on Transport and the Economy),
- snow and winter resilience (at both the beginning and end of the year!),
- safety issues from 20mph speed limits to guardrails, cycle safety in London and drink and drug driving
- Traffic management Act implementation including the particularly live issues at present of enactment of moving vehicle enforcement provisions where we are working closely with ADEPT, BPA and the Traffic managers Forum and Permit Schemes
- The continuing Traffic Signs Review
- Sustainable transport and tax issues



- Planning guidance and parking standards
- Highway Asset management and efficiency in maintenance (picked up elsewhere in this edition of the Bulletin)
- Priorities for investment and the spending review

The agendas and minutes have been widely circulated and the latest appear on the TAG web site. Future meetings are to be held on Friday June 17<sup>th</sup>, Friday September 16<sup>th</sup> and Friday December 2<sup>nd</sup> at LGA Smith Square.

The most topical issues at present, apart from highway maintenance, are possibly the links between Transport and the Economy and Transport and Sustainability. The recently issued report of the **House of Commons, Transport Committee on Transport and the Economy** is particularly relevant so here follows a briefing note:

It may not necessarily provide the answer to some fundamental questions, however it raises key issues for government which are also relevant to all local authorities. The full report can be found at the parliament web site (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmtran/473/473.pdf>). A useful summary is provided in page 3 of the report and the conclusions with recommendations are contained in pages 44-45.

The report affirms the importance of investment in the transport system to support economic growth. Transport investment needs to be aligned with economic investment if this benefit is to be achieved and clarity is required regarding the economic solutions which it is intended to deliver. It is widely accepted that economic strategies should take a relatively long-term view, however the focus for transport all too often is short-term. We should be now considering our proposals for the next spending review period and beyond to support our economic development policies and strategies, however few may have the resources available to do this important work. In financial terms it is all too easy to defer investment, particularly where benefits only accrue in the longer term, but failure to invest in transport will invariably impact on the economy.

Many of the discussions we engage in on a daily basis focus upon the impacts of transport, with strong lobbying around the impacts on place and urban design. These are important issues which contribute not only to quality of life but also to local economies. However these important decisions which often relate to specific locations, should only be taken with a clear understanding on the impact on the wider transport network and consequential economic impact.

No single mode or type of scheme will provide an answer for economic growth in all areas and local solutions will be needed, which requires local control of both budgets and decision making. Many smaller schemes including the most sustainable investments are likely to produce high benefits but are potentially at greatest risk in the current financial climate. We have heard much talk of devolved powers however there is little evidence of further devolution of transport budgets. Indeed, recent decisions regarding the allocation of Sustainable Transport funding to the specific Bikeability scheme may protect this sustainable transport project, but does not appear consistent with the objective of providing greater local control. Furthermore, the announcement that the Sustainable Transport fund is to be delivered as a challenge fund retains direct central control over local spending and is also a wasteful process encouraging use of scant resources with likelihood of only limited success.

The report highlights that government remains committed to using transport investment to reduce regional economic disparities and seeks clarification how policies will achieve that end. It points out that, rather than working from policy objectives, decisions have been made to support certain major schemes and to rule out others. It is unclear how these recent transport project decisions will assist achieve the reduction in regional economic disparities.

The report highlights concern regarding the abolition of the regional planning bodies and loss of regional strategies, at a time when we all have reduced resources. This however does afford an opportunity to influence the shape of the new processes and direction of regional decision making. Clarity is requested regarding the government's view that Local Enterprise Partnerships will have a key role in the local and sub-regional decision making process. Their ability to deal with cross-border issues

is also questioned and concerns are raised that they may not be effective until after the current parliament, creating a vacuum.

Concern is raised regarding the lack of prominence of the UK's international gateways in the government's strategy for transport and the economy and the lack of clarity regarding how business's needs for increased international connectivity is to be provided.

Access to London and capacity constraints at London airports will inevitably impact upon the national economy and simultaneously tax increases are impacting on regional airports. A clear policy statement is required and one which considers interchange between modes for both passengers and freight.

Appraisal and Decision Making

The report makes a number of references to the appraisal process, its systems and role in decision making. The statement that decision-making cannot and should not be reduced to a numerical calculation is welcomed. The need for a robust and widely accepted (as possible) process is recommended, although the latter is likely to be the most difficult element as pressure groups will continue to attempt to direct the process to deliver their view of the acceptable answer.

More comprehensive information and greater transparency in the decision making process are suggested to enable both technical and ministerial judgements to be explicit. However, it is to be hoped that this does not result in requirements for even greater levels of supporting information to be submitted with projects, it is one thing to have the most robust system in Europe, however our costs are also the highest. It is acknowledged in the report that the benefit to cost ratio is important however an over reliance on ever increasingly more elaborate traffic models, which do not necessarily result in more accurate results, needs to be avoided. Proportionality needs to be applied and where possible simplification should be introduced, which would inevitably result in reduced total costs. And, whereas increasing the threshold for major schemes is suggested, this could result in fewer "intermediate" cost schemes being delivered as they are beyond the modest sums available for funding from integrated transport blocks of local transport plans.

The report of the HOC Transport Committee raises important issues and questions for government. There remains an appearance of a lack of clear policy direction and government should take the opportunity to respond with a multi-modal transport policy statement.

Bob Donaldson

### **News from the TAG Coastal and Fluvial Committee**

TAG's Coastal and Fluvial Management Committee is currently considering various options as to its way forward, mainly as a result of various initiatives recently taken by central government which has effectively altered the emphasis within Local Authorities relating to the management of flood risk. In England, County Councils have been designated "Lead Local Authorities" (LLAs) effectively leading to a change in orientation in Flood Risk Management away from the traditional District Council management of those similar risks to a County-based system.

New committees are also in the process of evolving in the Local Government Group (ex LGA) which may duplicate some of the work of this TAG committee, but it is too early to tell. ADEPT may (should) also have a role to play in this new arena and initial discussions have been held with their organisation. Coupled with the fact that there is an inherent "age" problem in as much as many members of the committee are nearing retirement age, the whole sector of the fluvial/pluvial industry as well as the committee is in a state of flux.

From a coastal perspective, the committee has concluded that it does still have a role to play working with the Regional Coastal Groups and the Environment Agency.

The committee will be meeting twice over the next 6 months or so and are trying to ensure that TAG still has a continuing voice in both the coastal and fluvial sectors in both advising central government and TAG's members. The difficulties in achieving this should not be underestimated and any TAG members

with an interest are welcome to contact the chairman, Martin Wright at [martin@martinwrightassociates.com](mailto:martin@martinwrightassociates.com) to discuss their possible involvement with the committee. Alternatively Martin can be contacted on 01244 677656.

## **Special TAG Blog on Norman Baker letter and Government White Paper**

In January, Norman Baker, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, wrote to the Leaders of councils. The primary purpose of the letter was the announcement of the Government's White Paper on local transport – Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon: Making Sustainable Transport Happen. The letter also announced the launch of the of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, including the award of funding to local authorities for bikeability to provide cycle training for year 6, primary school children.

The White Paper is a lengthy document, which provides advice for local authorities regarding the delivery of sustainable transport solutions. It contains a number of useful references and helpfully brings together a number of transport related topics into a single document.

The White Paper continues to emphasise that the focus of transport investment should be supporting economic investment within a context of reducing carbon emissions. The government's approach is said to be based upon a concept of enabling choice following the provision of better information and education and is presumably therefore to less likely to resort to regulation. "Nudge" is the newly adopted term to describe this approach (interestingly the theme for last year's TAG Presidential Workshop).

Regarding decision-making, the White Paper reaffirms the government's stated commitment to decentralising power to enable local delivery. The government views local enterprise partnerships (LEP's) as the vehicle to promote economic growth enabling local authorities and businesses to come together and represent functional economic areas. The government envisages LEP's having a strong role in determining transport priorities and involvement in major transport scheme funding decisions, with future potential for devolving decision making. There is also an indication that the Department for Transport (DfT) will likely engage directly with LEP's regarding specific (but unidentified) congestion hotspots to identify a joint approach. The LEP's are also expected to have a co-ordinating role with regard to Regional Growth Fund bids and be engaged in the development of Local Sustainable Transport Fund bids.

On finance for transport, the White Paper indicates that funding for transport is now simplified into four main streams, major schemes (capital over £5m), highway maintenance block (capital), integrated transport block (capital) and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. The maintenance and integrated transport blocks are to continue to be distributed on a formulaic basis, and the major schemes and Local Sustainable Transport Fund are to be determined by bidding processes.

Other potential areas of funding are identified in the White Paper, Regional Growth Fund being the most significant, however consideration of the bidding guidance implies that funding for "pure" transport schemes would be unlikely to be successful, but transport proposals could be considered as part of a component of a broader project.

The allocation for Bikeability (£11m nationally) is to be welcomed although when viewed against the level of revenue cut and reduction in Local Transport Plan funding of the order of £millions for each authority, it is not particularly significant. The funding for Bikeability has been taken from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund is to be welcomed, particularly the inclusion of a revenue element, however the overall level of funding available, £560m over a four year period is low.

The guidance for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund invites bids up to £50m and indicates that in metropolitan areas bids are anticipated to be made by the Integrated Transport Authority. Submissions are required to DfT in April. The White Paper indicates that discontinued funding streams (Rural Bus Challenge, etc) should now be considered as part of bids for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. If

eligible authorities (outside London) receive similar levels of funding from this source, the likely outcome could be of the order of an additional £0.5m per annum for each authority.

Notwithstanding the indicated commitment to decentralising power this is not being matched, at this time, by decentralisation of financial control for transport spend. Additionally, the reversion to a bidding competition for The Local Sustainable Transport Fund is a retrograde step, not only being wasteful of resources but also likely to unduly raise expectations with the necessary partners.

The White Paper indicates continuing support for electric vehicles as part of governments approach to reducing carbon emissions by encouraging people to make sustainable transport choices. The progressive electrification of the passenger car fleet, supported by policies which will both increase generation capacity and decarbonise electricity generation are anticipated to deliver reductions in transport carbon emissions in the longer term. The web link to the White Paper is - <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/regional/sustainabletransport/pdf/whitepaper.pdf>

### **Blog from Satbir Gill TAG Senior Vice President**

Snow – as luck would have it, Hounslow’s heaviest December snow for many, many years coincided with my visit to India, lucky for me that is. I’m pleased to say that all reports indicate that my deputies for the call-out role and our contractor performed well, with all the treated routes remaining passable at all times. I wonder if I can pull the same trick next time.



The amount of money available for local government services is of course uppermost in all our minds.

As I see it, we in highway maintenance and network management will do what we’ve always done in similar situations; we will continue to press for the resources we know we need to keep our network fit for purpose and if those resources are not forthcoming we will apply the resources that are available in the best way possible to keep our network available, and safe.

As you all know Hounslow is well into the procurement process for transferring our highway services to an external provider under a PFI arrangement. This process too was not immune from the effects of the spending review. DfT informed us that it wanted to reduce its hitherto promised contribution.

Myself, the rest of the internal procurement team and our external advisors all rose to the challenge and with some deft adjustments to the service standards and a degree of reigning in of some of our ambitions for new works and improvements, we managed to submit a report to DfT offering them the savings they needed. We are receiving priced bids from three shortlisted bidders on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

The programme for our PFI is for the eventual Provider to take over on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. So that we can get an advantageous and firm price from those still in the bidding process it is essential that the bidders know what condition the highway assets will be in when they take over. To this end we have committed to ensuring the condition does not deteriorate from where it is now.

Another serious challenge then. I’m confident my team and I will apply our engineering ingenuity to target the right treatment to the right parts of the network over the next two years.

As ever, never a dull moment in highway network maintenance and management; we try our best to plan whilst always knowing that an element of the unexpected is part of our “business as usual”.

## Experiences of a New Unitary Council for Highways Maintenance Contracting

### Background

Medway Council was formed by two previous district councils, within the overall area of Kent County Council, of Gillingham and Rochester.

This area in highway terms has a little under 900kms of roads and 286kms of Public Rights of Way and not forgetting the Medway Tunnel. A current population of around 250k is likely to increase to the 300k mark by 2026.



One of the main issues for the new council was the procurement of a new highways maintenance contractor as the existing term contract was due for renewal, a story not unfamiliar with many councils.

Medway wished to explore not only what work would be included in the next contract but what form of conditions were most suited to delivering this kind of work and in order to assist them WSP Civils Ltd (now WSP UK Ltd) was appointed.

It was decided that one overall contract would be procured providing all highway maintenance works including small new schemes. The contract would include:

- Responsive maintenance to carriageway and footways
- Street furniture (excluding street lighting as this was under a separate contract)
- Structures maintenance
- Emergency call outs
- Drainage cleansing and works
- Small new schemes
- Winter service

Annual budget expected to be £4.5m with the contractor being required to establish a depot within or very close to the authority.

In addition to the specifications of the works, Medway was keen to work with a set of conditions that were performance based and stimulated close working partnering with the chosen contractor. This contract would ultimately be for a 10 year period was very clear on output performance delivery.

Medway was very clear in that all communication and systems would be based on the CONFIRM system and incompatibilities between systems will be dealt with by using CONFIRM data as the definitive answer, which meant that tenderers should ensure that their systems were either compatible with or utilise CONFIRM on this contract.

The contract would be awarded for an initial period of five with annual extensions able to be awarded based on performance after each year of contract duration.

Having reviewed all appropriate contract conditions, WSP and Medway chose the NEC Term Service Contract (TSC).

One of the big issues the team had to grapple with, was being able to quantify the assets held, for although the authority implemented CONFIRM asset management software early this century, very little work had taken place in recording its assets accurately. The actual highway network was fairly well recorded, as drainage, signage and street furniture etc was known by existing council officers reasonably well (Silver Knowledge), however the data was unreliable in so far as location and attributes of the assets.

The standard TSC conditions were tailored to suit Medway's needs using appropriate optional clauses and a full schedule of rates were collated and prepared into contract documents.

Following the OJEU notice, a select list of tenderers was established and in late 2006 the contract documents were distributed, with a 12 week turn around.

Tender evaluation was on a quality/price split with 70% being awarded for quality. Following an evaluation period by two separate team's one dealing with quality, the other dealing with price, the figures were combined and the contract was awarded to Fitzpatrick Contractors (now VolkerHighways) in May 2007, with a contract start date of 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007. VolkerHighways established a site for their depot in Medway and the contract was mobilised by the start date of 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007.

As well as the usual communication issues a lot of work was also a lot of work undertaken on integrating and developing the interface between CONFIRM and VolkerHighways IT system. This is an on-going process as the contract evolves.

Although known well in advance, Medway officers really had to rethink the way they worked to comply with the TSC conditions eg the audit trail had to be maintained on each and every Task Order.

The contract is managed at various levels:

- Weekly meetings held with the operational
- Monthly meetings are held between the contractor and managers of the various teams..
- Quarterly meetings are held with the contract Service Manager and the contract management team within the authority

### Progress During Year 1

Year one saw VolkerHighways working well in Medway and Medway's staff changing their sometimes deep rooted ways of working to coincide with the new, relatively unfamiliar, contract conditions.

Issues concerning some areas of planning, performance and supervision needed to improve so Medway and VolkerHighways worked together to resolve these concerns early with the result that by the end of year one VolkerHighways was performing well. Based on the KPI's that were specified in the Incentive Schedule, officers made recommendation to the procurement board and cabinet to award the first yearly extension which was subsequently approved and (contract year six) awarded.

However Medway and VolkerHighways worked together in a full review of the KPI matrix to reflect better and more tangible results going forward.

### Progress During Year 2

VolkerHighways being keen to use this contract to show exactly what they can deliver, agreed readily to establish a revised set of KPIs, focusing more on physical deliverables, rather than systems and procedures. Much tighter control on Task Order completion and start dates and getting it right first time was embraced by both parties, as we all wanted this contract to deliver a good quality service to the residents of Medway.



The strengths of VolkerHighways continued to be reflected in their call out service and their winter service, where Medway was one of very few authorities in the south east who were able to deal with the inclement weather during the winter of 2008-09. Salt stocks remained good throughout.

Steady progress was made on the civil works side with more and more work coming in house to VolkerHighways including the drainage and road markings services which had previously been subcontracted.

Clearly some of the larger resurfacing schemes will continue to be subcontracted, but the benefit of having one contractor managing, programming all of the works for Medway are clear to be seen, especially around the noticing under the Traffic Management Act 2004.

An addition to the contract in year two was the establishment of a "Workshop development group". This group was bought together and made up from staff and officers from both VolkerHighways and Medway at all levels in the delivery chain to develop the contract further. During year two this group delivered a number of changes. A flavour of the changes is:

- Simplified system in dealing with compensation events saving time for both parties.
- Electronic transfer of vehicle crossing quotes avoids lost paperwork and saves time
- Setting up of High Street gangs/Highways Inspectors results in greater efficiency and monitoring of works, with all repairs being undertaken with the correct material first time, rather than implementing temporary reinstatements.
- VolkerHighways Health & Safety officer assists both VolkerHighways & Medway to ensure safe practice. VolkerHighways is programming works effectively, resulting in more Task Orders being completed on time (nearly 100%).
- More realistic planned timescales now being applied to Task Orders by Medway officers assisting completion of works on time.
- Notes of weekly/monthly contract meetings now contain greater detail.
- Implementation of photos for completed works (linked to CONFIRM Payment Request) for easier verification of completion.
- New design for Daily Whereabouts Sheet with more detail (allows filtering by individual or work groups).
- Notice boards at VolkerHighways' depot and Medway offices now display KPIs and graphs showing achievements.
- Increased number of computers available to VolkerHighways to allow greater level of data inputting.
- Better design information and early contractor involvement by Medway officers prior to commencement of work.
- Utility Statutory Undertakers maps now provided electronically and linked to Task Orders in CONFIRM
- Master manual for CONFIRM created and distributed to all VolkerHighways and Medway staff.
- Confirmation of Verbal Instruction (CVI) pads utilised on site to record verbally requested changes to Task Orders.
- All appropriate Medway highway employees invited to attend weekly contract meetings at VolkerHighways' depot.

Year saw many changes to the way the contract is delivered and also a greater bond is being formed between Medway officers and VolkerHighways staff and operatives. The revised KPIs have proved very beneficial to focus on delivery both at management and operational levels.

Based on the revised KPI's, officers again made recommendations to the procurement board and cabinet to award the second yearly extension. Officer's recommendations were agreed and the second yearly extension (contract year seven) was subsequently awarded.

## The Future

The team look forward to building on their achievements and continue to work together "in a spirit of mutual trust and co-operation" as they embark on the next stages of the journey.

Phil Moore

## Where is TAG Going? Thoughts from the TAG President – Tim Walker



As ever, the last year has proved interesting and challenging to all of us involved in delivering local government services, although not necessarily in that order. Like most organisations, TAG needs to be constantly looking to the future in order to meet the needs of its members today.

As councils come under increasing financial pressures, there will be greater scrutiny of all “*additional costs*” and membership of organisations such as TAG will be one of them. I would argue however that TAG is just the sort of organisation you can’t afford not to be part of in these times of austerity when you’re looking to develop and share best practice, and find better ways of working – both aspects of which are core to TAG – fully demonstrated by the Blog from Satbir and the experiences of Phil Moore of Medway as described above.

In terms of refreshing our collective memory and providing you with details, if needed, to remind others – I’ll pose a simple question, what is TAG’s main purpose? Some time ago, the TAG General Council reviewed the organisation’s constitution and agreed that it was

- *To provide coordinated and comprehensive advice and support to technical professionals employed by local authorities directly or indirectly to manage and advise on their services.*

We do this by providing a network across the country where professionals can come together to develop good practice which can then be disseminated as relevant. We also respond to appropriate consultations and engage with other local government organisations, such as the LGA, to introduce change which will improve our technical services and to influence Government.

There are a number of other organisations fulfilling similar roles in other councils, such as ADEPT. What I have been actively doing this year is to make sure that TAG connects with these organisations so that we don’t duplicate our efforts or give out conflicting information and advice. I also believe that we can have a stronger voice if we collectively make the same points to those in authority and, in this manner, convey the essential nature of many of the services which we provide. What I’m striving for is a situation where we can work together to strengthen and deepen our effect, while also retaining the uniqueness of TAG as a member-focused organisation which can provide an opportunity to realistically address issues facing each of the organisations we ultimately serve.

I feel that one of the key strengths of TAG is our membership structure. One annual fee means that an organisation is not restricted in member numbers and can have many staff taking part in TAG activities. By encouraging younger staff members to take part in TAG meetings, events and activities, organisations have the opportunity to tap into a useful and cost effective development opportunity and to influence and shape the provision of local governments’ professional services. And, as with all organisations, the future of TAG lies with its more youthful members. We all need to encourage junior members of staff to attend meetings and get used to meeting with and engaging with other professions and more experience colleagues; ultimately there is no substitute for this.

This year, I committed to visiting as many of the regions as possible and I have seen this philosophy in action. In the process, as I’ve said at each meeting, I have been struck by the knowledge allied to passion of the TAG membership – I really have witnessed pockets of excellence in action.

Where active, TAG is highly effective and provides a resource which feeds the work of the TAG working committees as well as delivering their individual local requirements. What I want to do is take as a template where the TAG regions are successful, and roll this out. The more people we can get involved and engaged, the easier it is to deliver the ever more challenging agenda from Government; or as the electricians motto says “*many hands make light work*”.

Life does not get any easier in delivering local government services but all the more reason to use TAG for support and making sure our voice is heard. Tim Walker

## Facing the Challenges Ahead Thoughts from the TAG Senior Vice President – Satbir Gill



My year as President starts at perhaps the most challenging time for local government in recent memory. The measures that were announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review will cut deep in 2011/12, and if we are to rise to the challenge, and to address the opportunities that this presents, it is essential we, as technical professionals, work together to support each other and to exchange ideas and best practice. In this scenario, whilst in some respects each of us is required to deliver more for less, the temptation can be to treat initiatives such as TAG as a luxury. It is my view that, if anything, the role of TAG will become more important, by providing a mechanism for mutual support and the exchange of ideas and innovations that will help us to ensure that the impact of reduced funding upon service delivery is minimised.

In my year as President, I want to consolidate and build upon the excellent progress that has been made by Tim and his predecessors, and to introduce some new measures to support the aims of TAG. In particular, I want to ensure that all local government technical professionals are aware of TAG, and understand its objectives, and what it can do for them.

Part of this involves ensuring that TAG is well-positioned in relation to the UK Roads Board and ADEPT (formerly CSS). This will ensure that these organisations are able to serve complementary functions and ideally, work in a collaborative and co-ordinated way, such that the advice issued from all three is completely aligned for the benefit of communities in the UK as a whole.



A particular theme that I want to address in my year as President is the development and application of asset management principles into local government. In recent years, there has been much activity promoting asset management as an approach for both property and highway assets, driven by moves to calculate asset value and depreciation as part of whole of government accounts. Indeed, technical professionals have played an important role in this respect. In the coming years, the focus needs to move from “theoretical” asset management to its practical application in the management of local government assets to help deliver efficiency savings, and to ensure that we can minimise the impact of budget cuts on service provision.

Furthermore, some particular initiatives I would like to pursue over the coming year, in support of TAG’s aims to provide advice and support to technical provisions and to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences in our technical community include:

- a. The creation and up-to-date maintenance, of a best of breed website
- b. The operation of an on-line bibliography of technical publications and advice for highway professionals (with links to the documents if freely available), with a facility for readers to review and comment on each document.
- c. Employment of all modern methods of communication, such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.
- d. Offering a “suggestion box” facility for highway professionals to post constructive ideas, suggest topics for research or volunteer advice/services.
- e. The maintenance of a list of training courses available for highway professionals across the UK, leading to the development of a “TAG approved” scheme; this facility would also offer the opportunity for members to review any of the courses they have attended.

- f. Engaging with the other organisations, including ADEPT and the Roads Liaison Group, including participation in research and consultations with such groups

As Tim hands over the baton to me, I would like to thank him for his enthusiasm and hard work over the past year. I am relishing the prospect of playing my part in ensuring that the vital role of technical professionals in local government is recognised, remains relevant and continues to develop, and am confident that by supporting each other through TAG, we can rise to the challenges that all of us in local government now face.

Satbir Gill

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