

Foreword

TRANSPORT CHALLENGES FACING THE UK

Major Scheme Funding and the Environment

Perhaps the two most pressing yet intractable issues facing transport professionals today are those of providing funding for major schemes to enable the network to grow and operate in a satisfactory way whilst protecting the environment. The UK is fortunate enough to have a growing economy and, as a consequence, is seeing increasing pressures on the transport network with associated environmental impacts both locally and globally. Throughout the country, especially in the major provincial cities, demand for transport is growing and this is leading to congestion on the road network and overcrowding on public transport.

Government has sought, over recent years, to devolve decision-making to the English regions following those enacted in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Initially, this was through the development of Regional Spatial Strategies (previously Regional Planning Guidance) and the obligation to produce a list of transport priorities for investment *and management* across all modes – clearly emphasising to Regional Planning Bodies that simply building in more capacity was not an option either economically or environmentally. Latterly, this has been given additional emphasis through the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) process through which English regions have been asked to provide the Department for Transport with advice as to which schemes they wish to see prioritised to deliver regional economic and transport objectives.

This has required a significant change in approach from that of lobbying ministers and the DfT which was the usual approach in the past. Regions now have a 10-year indicative budget and therefore know how much funding is available for the next decade. They also know the

schemes which, if constructed, would contribute towards delivering regional objectives. However, it is inevitably not possible to deliver them all within the confines of the RFA. Consequently they have to square the funding circle. It is not a straightforward task and has required a significant change in approach from all those involved. Nevertheless, it has been completed and overall, the Government has indicated that it is satisfied with the advice.

Unfortunately, however, this budget has not even remained static in real terms. Whilst, on the one hand, the government has given regions the opportunity to determine their own transport priorities, this is with a decreasing budget (regional funding allocations are increasing at only 2% per annum – below both the general rate of inflation and that of the construction industry) and provides only limited opportunity for investing in the rail network – the part of the system which is facing perhaps the greatest pressures of all.

Consequently, there is a need to “think smart”. How can the limited funds available be used to deliver maximum benefits both in terms of improving mobility and protecting the environment? A number of approaches have been considered across the country. Perhaps the most bold is that taken by Greater Manchester to submit a £3 billion bid to the Government to revolutionise public transport funded through the introduction of a congestion charge. By the end of 2007 we should know whether they have been successful and, in all probability, we will know whether there is a future for local road pricing schemes in the UK. Furthermore, with continuing driver (and voter!) dissatisfaction regarding both the condition of the transport network and the cost of using it (both in terms of fares and in terms of fuel costs), bold leadership is required in order to implement these controversial yet essential initiatives. As has been quoted many times in recent months “doing nothing is not an option”.

This book explores a range of measures which could be used to contribute to this end. From the policy side it examines in detail the opportunities presented by the new regime and the details of regional funding allocation. It also looks at how improvements can be delivered within limited budgets through innovative developments. It also looks further afield at ideas from outside the United Kingdom such as the innovative fuel tax/road user charging regime being developed in the United States of America. From the breadth of the concepts being discussed in this book it is clear that there is no “magic bullet” to solve this conundrum. Nevertheless, these innovations in both policy and practice are undoubtedly part of the solution. One must hope that the decisions necessary to enable them to be implemented will be taken without delay in order to secure our transport network, our economy and, most importantly of all, our environment.

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