



TAG Presidents Blog – June 2016

It is a great honour to have been elected President of the Local Government Technical Advisers Group on 16th May this year. TAG is a highly regarded body within our local government services industry and I look forward greatly to my year as President and the challenges it will undoubtedly entail.

There are many challenges facing our sector currently; revenue funding reductions for maintaining our networks and assets, coupled with the pressures on local authorities to continue to deliver high levels of service and to manage capital renewals and improvements. This slightly paradoxical aspiration is also laced with the long-term needs of our infrastructure and how we account for it over the greater lifecycle, invest wisely in its fabric and truly understand the medium and long-term maintenance and operational requirements that in turn will require funding. This asset-based approach however is a true area of expertise for our engineering sector.

With Whole of Government Accounts and the Incentive Funding initiative recently launched through the self-assessment approach, this allows us a tangible measure and an approach to work towards, with clear results available for the next few years. With this incentivised approach it will also provide our engineering fraternity some much needed financial metrics that can assist us all in getting the investment message across. “If we do the right thing now, together with improved long-term asset understanding, funding to local authorities who plan well, can and will be available”.

This is a hugely important part of the next few years in our highways and transport sector. The quality and functionality of the infrastructure is however only part of the wider needs and appreciation of our built environment. For my year as President I hope to maintain a theme of Connectivity and Quality of Life.

The functionality and robustness of our infrastructure is undoubtedly key to the efficiency of connectivity for people and businesses. This is a critical factor in journey-time predictability and hence the ease with which business can do business. It also enhances the everyday user experience. However, the “place” that we create with our infrastructure is also a critical factor for us. We need it to provide movement and accessibility for users, but the quality of life of those inhabiting it must also be attractive for an area to maintain an element of growth or improved prosperity. This links directly to asset quality but also to the issues of environmental cleanliness and community safety, particularly in densely populated urban areas. Through extensive work in recent years in populous areas, I have seen myself how these dual aspirations can co-exist and be delivered, and the principles can apply, of course, to any transport network.

Well-built and managed networks are inherently easier to keep environmentally sound as well. That said, the efficiency and quality of cleansing services and waste management must continue to develop and to push the boundaries. With that, the ability to re-use and recycle must take greater leaps forward, otherwise greater efficiency in removing waste will only result in acceleration towards disposal becoming unmanageable. The principle of total asset management ultimately takes on a wider meaning, wider constraints and hence may presents wider opportunities.



Through the wide skills and experience base of TAG and its members, I look forward to a year of “joining the dots”, hopefully linking the various aspects of Connectivity and Quality of Life, to highlight still further the greater potential our infrastructure holds, to deliver in many different ways, to many different users.

Rob Gillespie

President - TAG