

Onwards and upwards at Asphalt '99

Delegates were given an insight to the importance and value of the modern asphalt industry in the next millennium at the Quarry Products Association's Asphalt '99 conference on 11 November. The Asphalt Now & Tomorrow conference – held at the local Motorcycle Museum in Solihull – was divided into morning and afternoon sessions, which covered the development of asphalt to the present day and the future role for the asphalt sector and its products.

The keynote speech on the milestones and achievements of asphalt in the twentieth century by Tarmac Director and Chairman of the QPA's asphalt committee Peter Rothwell was followed by a presentation on lessons learned with asphalt by the Transport Research Laboratory's Civil Engineering Programme Director David Powell.

"Thirty years ago the length of the UK's motorway network was around 1000km and the maximum capacity for a 20 year life was 20 million standard axles. But as economic activity was increasing so too was traffic volume and weight and more durable roads capable of withstanding 200MSA over 20 years were needed," Powell said.

"Since then, asphalt research carried out by the TRL and funded by the QPA, the Refined Bitumen Association and particularly by the Highways Agency, has achieved major improvements in improved safety, reducing congestion and environmental impact and of course, giving better value for money.

"We now have more than 3000km of motorway

alone and we can design asphalt roads to carry in excess of 200MSA during their lifetime. We have come a long way."

The combination of these changes with the shift in philosophy from minimum initial cost to least whole-life cost is already producing major benefits to the travelling public, said Powell, who outlined the TRL's vision for future asphalt research.

The theme of looking at the challenges and opportunities for the asphalt industry in future was continued in the afternoon. Highlights of the session included delivery of the importance of modern asphalts to the future of integrated transport systems by the RAC Foundation for Motoring's Traffic & Safety Manager Kevin Delaney.

"An integrated transport system does not stand a chance without high quality roads," said Delaney. "For instance, the alternatives to car use, such as cycling and walking, rely on good and improved road surfaces. What may be an apparently small pot hole for a car driver is potentially life threatening for a cyclist and a trip hazard for pedestrians.

"High quality road surfaces are also essential on environmental grounds," Delaney said. "Modern asphalts that reduce noise are important for reducing the nuisance effects that have been traditionally associated with roads and have increased as traffic levels have risen.

"The latest generation of highly skid resistant asphalt surfaces are increasing the margin of safety on our roads, particularly at junctions and pedestrian crossing in urban areas," Delaney added.

Signing code to set the standard

Masures to ensure the continued safety of road users and operatives at surface dressing sites have been drawn up by the Road Surface Dressing Association (RSDA) and the CSS. A new code of practice for signing at surface dressing sites is being considered by the Highways Agency and is due to be published in the spring.

The code outlines the appropriate manner in which vehicles should be informed of and kept safe during surfacing work. It describes the frequency and type of signage needed on the approach to, around and beyond surface dressing sites according to road width and typical traffic speed. A risk assessment should be carried out for each site and the recommended signing amended accordingly.

For instance, motorists approaching a site on a road wider than 7.3m should first see a loose chipping warning sign at between 50m and 200m from the site depending on the statutory maximum speed limit of the road. Sites should be no longer

than 500m and advisory speed limit signs should be situated every 100m alongside a site.

Carriageways between 6m and 7.3m wide should be treated as mobile roadworks with stop/go board operators walking with the advancing surfacing train. On minor roads less than 6m in width, traffic should not be allowed to pass the surface dressing train until it is safe to do so and drivers should be notified of possible delays and diversions up to two days in advance.

RSDA Consultant Director Eddie Bracewell says: "This guidance code should give consistency of signing at surface dressing sites on a nationwide basis. The final document is due to be published next spring when the code will set

the standard for sign placing and content across the country."

The code also says that signs warning of obliterated road markings should remain in place until markings have been reinstated and traffic signs, barriers and cones should be removed when of no longer use to prevent further obstruction.

