

Client Side

Delivering real road improvement

Client Side is a new section within Modern Asphalts, featuring articles produced from the client side of UK road and airfields maintenance. In this issue, Modern Asphalts reports the progress of the UK Roads Board.

There is a group of highly qualified highway engineers and representatives doing very good work for developing road maintenance from the perspective of all UK clients. Its members are nominated and serve on behalf of represented organisations in addition to their normal duties. Nonetheless, they provide the expertise for steering groups delivering projects of importance to all UK highway engineers.

Entitled the UK Roads Board, the group represents central and local government and highway organisations across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It was the first board to be set up within the UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG) in 2001 (followed shortly after by UK Bridges, Street Lighting and Traffic Management boards) and good progress has followed since.

Central to the efforts is an underlying aim of ensuring harmonisation across the UK's regions. The UKRLG and its boards were initiated by the Department for Transport to draw expertise back together after fragmentation of UK government, as well as to make heard the voices of a large number of non government organisations. From that start point, the Roads Board, reporting to UKRLG, has been working on projects related to furthering standards of highway maintenance, performance and surface condition monitoring, to name a few.

"The Liaison Group really delivers and is a fantastic engine room of resources and expertise," says the current Chairman of the UK Roads Board Matthew Lugg. "The Roads Board has government representation and practitioners representing everyone with an interest in UK roads. There are parallels in streetlighting, bridges and traffic management and a lot of interaction and work goes on across all four boards."

Matthew Lugg represents CSS on the Roads Board and is also Leicestershire County Council's Director of Highways, Transportation & Waste Management. His county and all highway authorities, their partners, contractors and material suppliers are likely to benefit from the Roads Board's work in some way.

In the background is the UKRLG's 2005 report Maintaining a Vital Asset. Its foreword is from Government Ministers of each UK region, recommending in certain terms that all authorities take heed of its contents. These include codes of practice developed by the UKRLG boards – including the Roads Board's code for highway maintenance – and a list of key practices authorities should adopt.

Among them is adoption of Highway Asset Management Plans (HAMP) – a big subject and a big task but also what UK highway authorities should be aspiring to. In simple terms, the principle of HAMP is improvement of highway management (and maintenance) through long term plans based on the value, condition and whole life cost of the asset. This brings in SCANNER (Surface Condition Assessment for the National Network of Roads) and several other Roads Board projects linked to valuing road networks.

"Asset management is not a short term fix, but we are making good progress," says Lugg. "The principles are embedded and we now have to bring the benefits to life, by using the data for the benefit of road networks."

A new SCANNER user guide and specification will be published this year. Most authorities have completed their automated surveys and the Roads Board's SCANNER implementation group is being wound up. More research on use of the survey results will continue though.

"There was a need for a better handle on condition because Government could not

properly measure road maintenance backlog. General concern was that, from a political stance, evidence was all very anecdotal. It was possible to say more maintenance funding was needed, but not how much," Lugg says.

"There were processes for automated measurement in Scotland and at the Highways Agency and now it has all been brought together. Local engineers have a more comprehensive picture of the condition of their roads and soon, with good use of the data, engineers will be able to say 'this is the implication of taking away funds'."

Other projects are continuing. Seminars and conferences are being organised and although the Roads Board is not a lobbying group, says Lugg, it does need more dialogue with the private sector. "Greater communication is very much needed within the highways industry," he says.

The UK Roads Board, representing:

- CSS (County Surveyors' Society)
- LoTAG (London Technical Advisors' Group)
- Highways Agency
- Northern Ireland Roads Service
- Footways and Cycletrack Management Group
- TAG (Transport Advisory Group)
- Welsh Assembly Government
- SCOTS (Society of Chief Officers of Transport in Scotland)
- Scottish Executive
- CSS Wales
- Transport for London
- Department for Transport

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