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DELIVERING EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER-ORIENTATED SERVICES

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Abstract

The World Road Association (UK) Executive Committee has arranged for the preparation of this National Report for Strategic Direction Session B of the Mexico World Congress in 2011.

For transport, responsibility for certain high level and legislative issues (for example, vehicle safety) is retained by the UK Government and administered by the Department for Transport (DfT). However, most transport policy and operations are the responsibility of devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England this responsibility remains with the UK Government in the form of DfT. Consequently, the road networks are managed by the following organisations:

- England: the Highways Agency (HA), an executive agency of DfT is responsible for the trunk road network, with the remaining network managed by local authorities;
- Scotland: Transport Scotland, the Scottish Government's transport agency, is responsible for the trunk road network with the remaining network managed by local authorities;
- Northern Ireland: the Roads Service, an executive agency of the Northern Ireland Department for Regional Development (DRD), is the sole authority for the public road network; and
- Wales: the Welsh Assembly Government is responsible for the trunk road network, with local authorities taking responsibility for local roads.

This National Report compiles information from all four organisations in order to achieve a broad and inclusive perspective on the challenges that they face in the coming years and their approaches to meeting those challenges.

This paper specifically summarises recent developments in the delivery of customer-orientated services in the UK for the following areas:

- Within the road network – from the planning stage through to the operational stage;
- Regarding integration of transport modes and services.

The topic is set within the context of the trend for road authorities to increase their focus on the delivery of customer-orientated road transport services.

1. Transport Policy Administration in the UK

For roads in England, the Highways Agency administers the trunk road network with the remaining network managed by local authorities and Transport for London. In Scotland, the Scottish Government's transport agency, Transport Scotland, undertakes delivery responsibilities for trunk roads. In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government manages the trunk road network through three public sector agents with local authorities taking responsibility for local roads. In Northern Ireland, the Roads Service, an Executive Agency within the Department for Regional Development, is the sole road authority for the entire public road network.

Whilst each of these Agencies have similar aims and objectives for the efficient management of its road network, each has developed specific processes and systems for

the delivery of customer-oriented services at planning and operational stages, examples of which are set out below.

England, Highways Agency – 'National and Area Customer Satisfaction Surveys', 'Customer Beacon Networks' and KPI;

Transport Scotland – use of technology during public consultation, the 'Intelligent Transport Service', 'Trunk Road Incident Support Service' and 'Traveline Scotland';

Northern Ireland Roads Service – electronic street works register and customer interface improvements.

Welsh Assembly Government – the provision of services tailored to the specific needs of the road user via Traffic Wales, Traffic Link and Traveline Cymru and dedicated traffic officers.

2. England – The Highways Agency

2.1. Planning and Operational Stages

Since 2003, the Highways Agency has had a key performance indicator (KPI) target for improving road users' satisfaction within its Business Plan. The Agency has several well established feedback channels from which it obtains valuable information from its customers for use in the management of its network from improvement planning through to operations. These include:

- The National and Area 'Road Users' Satisfaction Surveys';
- the 'Customer Beacon' network;
- customer correspondence;
- talking to customers at scheme planning exhibitions and events; and
- telephone calls and e mails from customers.

Results from the national and area Road Users' Satisfaction Surveys are also used by teams across the business to improve customer services, and road user Focus Groups are regularly held to assess how successful the Agency's communications and traffic management measures have been. Action plans have been developed to address issues that have been raised, with the Customer Beacon network then used to help deliver these improvements.

The Road Users' Satisfaction Surveys and Customer Beacon Network, which are specifically designed to improve the focus and efficiency of the Agency's service, are described below.

2.2. National Road Users' Satisfaction Survey

The Agency has been monitoring the awareness and satisfaction of network users through the National Road Users' Satisfaction Survey (NRUSS) since 1995, and uses the results to compile its KPI on customer satisfaction.

The NRUSS supports the Government objective that modern public services need to be customer focussed; putting the customer at the heart of what it does. The survey provides

reliable statistical information, representative of the adult population of England who have used the network in the last 12 months.
The survey enables:

- tracking of satisfaction over time;
- identifies what the Agency to identify what it is doing well and not so well; and
- helps to focus its efforts.

The questions from which the KPI is derived were developed from road user views on what is important to them and consultation within the Agency. In 2007 the survey design was changed from a quota sample to a random probability sample. This has improved the robustness of the KPI, enabling trends in road user views to be better tracked over time. The views of road neighbours or intensive business users are consulted in other ways.

Examples of how the Agency uses the results to increase efficiency include:

- informing communication planning across the Agency;
- improving consistency; through clearer processes, better planning, targeting and co-ordination of the Agency's programme for campaigns and exhibitions;
- sharing best practice and results across the Agency; and
- promoting an increased understanding of customers.
- informing marketing campaigns for example – 'Don't be that Guy' and 'Driving in Winter Weather'.
- understanding road users' perceptions of variable message sign accuracy; satisfaction with messages; usefulness of information and changes to journeys as a result.

The results of the national survey are published on the Agency's website:
http://www.highways.gov.uk/aboutus/14125.aspx

2.3. Area Road Users' Satisfaction Survey

The Area Road Users' Satisfaction Survey (ARUSS) has been running since 2006 and uses a quota methodology. Each of the Agency's thirteen network management areas has questions which are specific to their area as well as questions which are common to all areas. The survey provides information about what customers' think about the network closer or where they live.

The questions were developed through consultations with representatives from across the Agency. Questions can be added to the survey to obtain specific opinions of customers quickly. Benefits of the ARUSS are:

- it provides regular measures of performance which allow the Agency to respond to areas of poor performance and monitor their improvement in these areas as a result of their actions;
- it provides teams with reliable statistical information at an area level to enable actions to be taken to improve and identification of best practice; and
- it tells us what customers are saying so we communicate with them more effectively.

2.4. Customer Beacon Networks

The Customer Beacon Network has representatives from across the Highways Agency. The network supports the Agency's vision of being recognised as the world's leading road operator. Customer Beacons have a strong commitment to improving services for customers and reacting to feedback.

Those in the beacon network are responsible for ensuring that feedback is gathered, and reported both to their teams and the Agency and used within their teams to improve services to customers. Examples are:

- in response to user frustration that they often see no work being carried out at road work sites, the Agency has developed information signs to explain the purpose of road works and to advise when they are being carried out;
- when customers complain about vegetation and litter, the Agency is mapping the location of complaints to identify problem sites, and these areas are targeted for regular inspection and clean-up;
- the analysis of responses from 'mature drivers' is helping to understand their needs and inform driver information programmes; and
- A customer panel has been set up to evaluate and provide feedback on existing services and validate customer needs for new or emerging services. This also provides an understanding and insight of information services and marketing tools from the customer point of view, and how services are used and perceived by customers.

3. Scotland – Transport Scotland

3.1. Planning Stage

At the planning stages of any new trunk road project the needs of the customer are captured through wide consultation, including the needs and views of specific user groups such as cyclists and equestrians. Recent developments that now feature more strongly in the consultation process include:

- the introduction of computer generated virtual reality models to provide the ability to explore and visualise the proposed scheme in 3D;
- the 'future proofing' new trunk road infrastructure, such as by building-in comprehensive ITS systems at the planning stage and providing the ability to actively manage the network as the demand to travel increases; and
- the increasing use of the latest in technology, such as the use of variable speed limit control and hard shoulder running.

3.2. Operational Stage

Transport Scotland has formed a comprehensive package of customer information, communication and response systems to support a traffic information and control system seen as one of Europe's best. This is operated through 'Traffic Scotland'. The package includes the:

- Traffic Scotland Web Service;
- The Trunk Road Incident Support Service;
- Traveline Scotland; and
- Traffic Customer Care Line.

3.3. The Traffic Scotland Web Service (http://www.trafficscotland.org)

Since 1999 this has been an integral component of the system and was developed to provide real-time information about the Scottish road network to the travelling public. The service has been continually developing and improved to meet the demands and needs of the public, network managers and stakeholders and has undergone a number of significant enhancements, especially during the 'EasyWay' years.

Traffic Scotland has undertaken an original and innovative approach to information delivery by:

- providing content that users require in an intelligent and cost effective manner;
- striking the balance between a passive provider of information and an active influencer of travel behaviour; and
- continuing to evolve with changes in technology, user preferences and the commercial landscape

Developments have included:

- performance upgrades to provide improved service and to ensure maximum availability and accessibility in times of high demand to functionality;
- enhancement to include journey time, mode emission comparison and public transport information.
- expansion of network coverage has enabled access to more CCTV images;
- inclusion of greater event specific information;
- the provision of user-tailored data available through a range of media;
- the adoption of DATEX2; and
- the provision of cross border information.

Some recent original and innovative developments are:

- integration with the Traveline Public Transport service;
- integration with data sources from Northern England;
- the development of Journey Time and predictive Journey Time information;
- information services for the freight sector;
- traffic information services for mobile users;
- expanded and customised information for large events (e.g. music festivals) and;
- a move to provide data to key private sector partners including Google.

Recent surveys have proved the Traffic Scotland web service to be very effective and useful to the travelling public. It was found that key usage statistics have increased significantly year on year, whilst user surveys indicated that 82% of respondents had changed their journey as a result of Traffic Scotland information and 24% of users have made long term changes to their travel choices, with 22% having switched to public transport for at least some types of journeys.

3.4. The Trunk Road Incident Support Service (TRISS)

On road Transport Scotland operates a fast response service. This service ensures that incidents that occur on the network are dealt with in timely manner to ensure the safety of its customers and the optimisation of journey time reliability. TRISS is concentrated on the most heavily congested parts of the network where small disruption can lead to major

implications for travellers and businesses. It operates on a 12-hour basis covering the AM and PM peaks, and provides a valuable additional first response service to assist the police in carrying out their road policing duties. The current service does not take primacy away from the police and is very much delivered in a supporting role.

3.5. Integration of Transport Modes and Services.

A. Traveline Scotland

Traffic Scotland works in close partnership with external providers of public travel information, including Transport Direct and Traveline Scotland (TLS), for which Traffic Scotland is a key stakeholder. Transport Scotland is not only driving the development of the Traffic Scotland Website but also those of its strategic partners.

Traveline Scotland is unique in the UK in that it operates a 24/7 all year around service including public holidays. Transport Scotland provides support for marketing focussed on creating brand awareness of Traveline Scotland where enhancements are targeted on making it easy for the user to access.
It also provides direct and indirect support for data management, promotion and marketing, and investment in Traveline service enhancements which are then integrated into the Traffic Scotland web service to support policy objectives around demand management and encouraging modal shift.

The service is advertised on all of Scotland internal rolling stock on its strategic rail network, within which ScotRail passenger numbers totalled 83.9 million in 2008/09, providing significant market exposure for the service.

In 2009, the number of unique visits to Traveline Scotland's website increased to 3.3 million; an increase of 96.7% on the previous year. The Traveline Scotland call centre took 12,000 calls in 2009. The system is accessible in user friendly formats in kiosks at key transport nodes (railway stations and airports), on mobile devices, direct to Digital screens and soon on Google Transit.

B. Traffic Customer Care Line

Traffic Scotland's Customer Care Line provides a 24 hour Traffic Customer Care Line dedicated phone service that can be contacted by calling 0800 028 1414. The call centre operators have access to the Traffic Scotland Web Site and can provide this information over the phone to the caller. Through this service users will be able to access traffic information whilst on the move giving them the power to plan and manage their journey to greater effect. This service provides users with the ability to:

- enquire about current road conditions and roadworks, planned roadworks, planned events and severe weather conditions.
- report road surface defects, issues relating to Variable Message Signs, carriageway obstructions, breakdowns, diesel spills and other emergencies.
- access information regarding alternative routes and transport modes for regular journeys disrupted by roadworks.
- register complaints and third party damage claims.
- provide feedback on any aspect of the Traffic Scotland web service.

In recent years, Traffic Scotland has integrated the provision of this service with Traveline Scotland, so uniquely in Scotland if users call about long term roadworks they are also offered the choice of a public transport alternative for their journey. Use of the service has

grown from 9,000 callers annually in 2007 to 28,000 in 2009. For travel across Great Britain, Transport Scotland supports the Transport Direct web portal providing a one-stop-shop for users to make intelligent travel choices based on its rich set of travel and transport information and services.

C. Increased Efficiency of the Road Transport System

Although it is not possible to directly link activity with journey time reliability, there is a strong case that early intervention and plan setting, results in less disruption to journeys. Over the course of 2009 the control centre has dealt with 19,000 unplanned incidents, with control room interventions increasing from 2008 to 2009; dealing with 25% more accidents 25%, 36% more hazards and 33% more breakdowns.

4. Northern Ireland – Roads Service

4.1. Management Structures

The province relies almost solely on roads to meet the needs of industry, commerce, public and private transport. It is essential, therefore, not only to preserve this important asset but also to make the best use of it. Maintaining such a valuable asset is of paramount importance and the Roads Service's top priority continues to be maintaining the surfaces and underlying structure of our roads. This has significant implications for present day maintenance management.

4.2. Operational Stage

A. Street Works

Roads Service is committed, through the Departments Regional Development Strategy (RDS), to develop a modern, sustainable, safe transport system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life.

The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland, for the ten year period 2008 to 2018, has indicated an investment of £3.1 billion in roads infrastructure. This aims to improve the strategic road network and to provide a wide ranging programme of local road improvements and road safety schemes. The planned investment is intended to reduce journey times and improve the transport infrastructure, to promote safer roads and enhance accessibility to regional services and facilities.

The past 12 months has been particularly challenging year for Roads Service, with staff and resource budgets being progressively cut. However, these challenges have given it the opportunity to take a fresh look at the way maintenance work is procured and to consider alternative arrangements.

Roads Service has recently introduced an upgraded electronic street works register and notification system, aimed at improving coordination of street works by utilities and improving processes for following up defective reinstatements. The objective is to reduce the disruption experienced by road users arising from street works.

As part of this improvement, Roads Service has also reviewed its arrangements for communicating the work of utilities to those affected by them, and for recording customer

complaints and feedback on the work of utilities. Improvements and additions to these systems were considered, to improve the customer interface. The outcome of this review was an action plan recommending changes to the Roads Service website, information leaflets, and other corporate publications, such as our Business Plan and Annual Report. Formal communications with District Councils and utility companies are also to be enhanced, and systems for recording correspondence and complaints are to be revised, to include a separate category on street works.

A question on street works has also been added to the Roads Service element of an 'omnibus' customer survey which is carried out in alternate years by the NI Statistics and Research Agency.

B. Public Safety

In recognition of its duty of care, Roads Service has put in place a set of maintenance standards for safety and has an inspection programme to ensure that roads remain in as safe a condition as funding levels permit. These standards, which are designed to ensure a consistent service level and a safe highway, while offering value for money, are based on best practice, research and consultation with both the public and other professional bodies and Industry.

5. Wales – Welsh Assembly Government

5.1. Planning Stage

At the planning stages of any new trunk road project the needs of the customer are captured through wide consultation, including the needs and views of specific user groups such as cyclists and equestrians. Consultation with key stakeholders at an early stage in a project is mandated by Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG).

5.2. Operational Stage

Services tailored to the specific needs of the road user are provided via Traffic Wales, Traffic Link and Traveline Cymru and dedicated Traffic Officers.

5.3. Traffic Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government via Traffic Wales provides travel information to the general public via its two traffic management centres in north and south Wales.

The traffic management centres also manage and maintain the Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) within Wales.

The travel information services include:-

- Website which is currently being updated and programmed to go live in October. Improvements include better mapping facilities, journey time advice, carbon calculator, clearer roadworks and disruption advice

- Customer Information Line.

- The adoption of DATEX II protocol means that cross boundary information will now be provided together with links to Cardiff City UTMC

5.4. General Travel Information

In addition to that provided directly through Traffic Wales, travel information is also provided through:-

- Traffic Link. This company broadcasts to local and regional radio stations directly from the Assembly's traffic management centre in south Wales.

- Traveline Cymru. This provides public transport journey planning and travel information in Wales and also supplies the UK's Transport Direct with regional information.

5.5. Traffic Officers

The Welsh Assembly Government is currently undertaking trials of a Traffic Officer service in north and south Wales.

The north Wales service is trialling combining the traditional Traffic Officer role with that of a route steward. In north Wales, this service is supplemented by Tunnel Incident Support Units.

The south Wales trial is to combine the Traffic Officer role with that of safety inspection. Concurrently, it is trialling different types of vehicle plus IT equipment such as on board cameras and variable message signs.

6. Conclusion

All four of the UK's executive agencies see the provision of customer-orientated services as essential to the successful delivery of its services. Customer involvement in decision making, feedback on service performance and responding to customer needs and views ranks highly amongst the priorities of each agency. Accordingly, the level of investment made by road authorities in the provision of customer-orientated services has increased in recent years, in line with the development of communications technology. This has led to greater customer involvement in planning and management decisions, and subsequently, to improvements to the service standards provided, greater customer satisfaction and greater network efficiency.

At scheme planning stage, methods of customer involvement are similar within each agency, and tend to follow consultation methods laid down by the Secretary of State. As shown by the examples described above, for the operational stage, each agency has developed specific aspects of its customer information, communications and feedback systems.

In England, the Highways Agency has a vision of being the world's leading road operator and, to help achieve this, has developed a comprehensive series of road users' satisfaction surveys and strong internal commitment to customer service and response.

In Scotland, Transport Scotland has developed an 'intelligent' approach to customer communications, forming a comprehensive package of customer information,

communication and response systems to support its traffic information and control system. This package makes use of a combination of travel information databases, web and telecom communications, marketing techniques and user surveys to influence travel behaviour, including switching to other modes.

In Northern Ireland, the Roads Service has developed an electronic street works register and notification system, as well as communications with customers that include the Roads Service Website and customer surveys.

Whilst surveys clearly show that there have been improvements in customer satisfaction, and that in Scotland there has been a substantial impact on the journey route or mode, there is insufficient evidence available at present to enable the full impact of customer-orientated services on the efficiency of road transport system to be assessed.