

## **UK Roads Board minutes from 4 September 2020 – held on Microsoft Teams**

### **Attendance**

#### **Present:**

James Bailey (Chair)  
Chris Cranston

Jason Jenkins

Arash Khojinian  
Conor Loughrey  
Martin McMahon  
Donald Morrison  
Amanda Richards

Graeme Ferguson (for Douglas Hill)

Justin Ward

#### **Representing:**

Staffordshire County Council, representing ADEPT  
Devon County Council, representing the National Winter Service Research Group  
Bridgend County Borough Council representing CSS Wales  
Highways England  
Infrastructure Northern Ireland  
Transport for London  
Transport Scotland  
Surrey County Council, representing the Road Condition Management Group (RCMG)  
Perth & Kinross Council, representing SCOTS (and Transport Scotland)  
CIHT (Secretariat)

### **Introduction, apologies**

Apologies were recorded for Douglas Hill, David Kinsey, Richard Morgan. The Board noted that David Kinsey is standing down from the FCMG, initially for 6-months, and that Andy Pickett was going to take over Chairing the Group. The Board thanked David Kinsey for his leadership of FCMG.

#### **1) Welcome, introduction and apologies**

#### **2) FCMG – supporting DfT with advice note on considerations for e-scooter trials**

James Bailey noted that the FCMG might be able to support the DfT with a set of guidance note for those authorities running trials. This involved participation from Mark Stevens and John Lamb from LGTAG. James did note that he had emailed David Kinsey regarding the FCMG working on leading this.

#### **3) RCMG – DfT road condition monitoring and review;**

Amanda Richards said on the 13th August there was an email from Steve Berry on the results of the road condition survey (following the Transport Select Committee review). Amanda relayed key findings from the survey and asked if further engagement with sector bodies would take place prior to a decision being made, if the changes were put in place what would this mean for consistency across the UK and finally questioned the role of RCMG vis-a-vis policy decisions by DfT.

James Bailey said that he understood the principals of a competitive market, but noted the risks of being able to compare data, benchmarking and consistency – if this was lost, then that was of concern. James added that targeting potholes was more a symptom of a problem but if money is targeted at pothole hotspots then there was a risk that funding would focus on rewarding areas that had fallen into disrepair as opposed to rewarding preventative maintenance.

Chris Cranston asked about the use of artificial intelligence in terms of identifying asset condition, Chris noted that his understanding the technology did require human interpretation and that this was resource intensive. Chris added that highways inspections also needed to take account of ash dieback.

James Bailey noted that there would be value in engaging with Garry Sterritt's Asset Management Board on: if they have a focus on AI in their work. Donald Morrison said Transport Scotland was looking at road condition monitoring and would engage with Highways England on the latest technology they are using.

**Action: Donald Morrison to raise the question if AI is a focus of their work programme for asset management/data collection within the Asset Management Board**

Conor Loughrey said that Northern Ireland are looking at the issues discussed above on asset management and data collection and would share any relevant information from this.

Martin said that he would discuss with Garry Sterritt the issues raised on AI in advance of the next UKAM meeting. Arash Khojinian asked if anyone from Highways England (HE) attend the asset management board and Donald Morrison confirmed there was participation from HE on the Board. Arash said that HE was doing a lot of work on capturing data (from mobile data, from their own road scanning) but there are additional issues of data validation.

Jason Jenkins said Wales had been introducing visual inspection surveys whereby all LA in Wales run their accreditation to feed into overall road condition data and inform a state of the nation report.

Amanda concluded that the RCMG has been aware that technology is progressing but the question of consistency and agreement on what is being collected, how you compare it, and how you accredit it need to be answered. For highway authorities if there were limited capabilities in terms of knowledge/skills then this posed a risk to make informed decisions to undertake good asset management did pose a risk to the sector.

#### **4) COVID-19 response and recovery issues, learning and future opportunities**

James Bailey said that ADEPT had undertaken some benchmarking and that information had been shared.

Amanda said that they were considering a second wave and planning for winter. Chris said that the next Vaisla group had a Covid seminar. Chris said that boosting the business continuity plan, beyond that, what else could be done. Amanda replied saying the Vaisla group meeting next week could be useful to explore this. Amanda welcomed any other ideas for how to manage with potentially 30/40% less drivers for managing winter gritting. Chris said that the NWSRG guidance on resilient networks does include staff shortages. Chris said it is, as best applying, your business continuity processes at the moment; but did note that due to contracting and austerity there were limitations on what additional resources could be levered in.

James Bailey noted communication and managing expectations will be important. Chris said that he expected a focus on essential services, for example, in Devon during Covid-19 staff were allocated to key priority areas; i.e. you look at what you can legally do. Chris said that people do need to make sure their business continuity is good at this point and that you have minimum winter networks.

James Bailey noted as we are encouraging active travel – walking and cycling – and implications for winter service. Chris said there is the focus on this, but a risk-based approach if authorities are under resource constraints should the priority be focused on the carriageway. Chris did note that Devon could have a different risk-based approach to London for example. Chris added that guidance was underway in this area.

Conor Loughrey said that initially A routes would be prioritised if staff resources were constrained. Martin said if there was a perceived risk for cycling during winter due to safety concerns (of routes not being treated) then people might drive instead of cycling. He said that TfL is looking at deploying specific cycleway gritters.

**Action: Justin Ward to share details of International Winter Road Congress winning paper was focused on winter treatments in Sweden with Chris Cranston**

James Bailey did ask about understanding the economic impact and how this might affect local highway authorities for future capital allocations. James added that the impact of Covid-19 could be detrimental to future funding. Amanda Richards noted that the five-year funding allocation was from 2015/16 to 2020/21 for capital allocations, James said that, until future budgets are set then there was a challenge to highway authorities in terms of forward planning.

**Action: James Bailey to raise with DfT if it would be useful for UKRLG to carry out a survey of lessons learnt from Covid-19 and on potential impacts for a second wave**

**5) Actions on flooding/drainage, tree management - what it is UKRB needs to achieve/contribute to these agendas (if anything?) and how best to go about it;**

James Bailey noted that ash dieback had been raised a number of times and he was aware of inquires around blocked gullies. James added that there was a question about the role of the Board within this.

Jason Jenkins said in a previous meeting there was a discussion on a sub-group on drainage. Jason said that in Wales drainage is a massive issue and the inventory awareness was a challenge. Sewer authorities and storm drainage issues was a challenge in terms of responsibility/accountability.

Arash said that if a sub-group was established then Highways England would very much support this. Arash added that the drainage asset awareness could be stronger and a research was underway within HE on the impact of the drainage asset on other assets. Government designated fund – Arash said that HE has been allocated significant funding including the category of environment then he would be able to put forward a proposal to gain some funding in this area.

Chris Cranston noted that flooding was currently not within the scope of the NWSRG, Chris added that he recalled the Pitt Review. Chris then noted Ash Dieback was a significant issue and on the exponential rise currently, adding that they were looking at funding from Defra to manage this.

James Bailey summarised noting: John Lamb's work on resilience.

1. Initially starting with John Lamb's work on resilience
2. Then looking at flood risk management roles and responsibilities
3. State of nation on highways drainage – to understand what others are doing on flooding including
4. Planning for new developments and drainage infrastructure – e.g. funding for sewer upgrades
5. Enforcement action against landowners

**Action: Amanda Richards to share a short briefing from the Surrey CC flooding and drainage team covering issues above – starting point on what is out there and the challenges**

**Action: Donald Morrison to share details of review by Transport Scotland on flood risk**

**Action: Justin Ward to invite John Lamb to the next UK Roads Board meeting to focus on flooding**

**Action: James Bailey to review evidence and explore establishing a Sub Group on Drainage**

Donald Morrison said that two roads in Scotland are currently being reinstated. Donald said there have been a number of flooding issues and with the recent train derailment he said that drainage might have been a factor.

Donald said that Transport Scotland was going to undertake a review on managing risk of areas vulnerable to flooding. Donald said he would be happy to share the outcome of this work and any recommendations that come out of this.

Chris Cranston said that he felt drainage was a bit more important.

James Bailey noted the issues of trees and that within his authority he would be looking to learn from authorities that have been managing challenging issues really well – for example Devon CC. Chris said that Ash Dieback was an agenda item on the National Traffic Managers Forum. Chris asked if the Asset Management Board was dealing with trees and asset value. Chris said that Ash Dieback was costing Devon millions of pounds so the impact of this needed to be recognised. James summarised that a lot of work was focused on trees so the Board would keep a watching brief on this area.

## **6) UKRB sub group updates**

**NWSRG** – Chris Cranston said since the last meeting the Weather Forecasting Guidance is in the process of being published. Chris said he was bringing the Decision-making and Risk section to the Board for approval.

**Action: UK Roads Board endorsed the Route Selection and Optimisation and Winter Service Decision Making (subject to any objections – deadline by 18 September - by email to all Board members).**

Chris raised concerns about proposed government changes to Red Diesel which could exclude the use for Winter Service operations.

**Action: DfT to confirm if Red Diesel cannot be used for Winter Service vehicles from April 2022**

**RCMG** – Amanda Richards said they last met in May and are due to meet shortly. There was a discussion on various aspects as surveys were then due to recommence so there is an unlikely impact on surveys. DfT would publish data in Autumn 2021 (publishing two years of data then).

**Action: James Bailey to explore sharing a note from FCMG**

Asset Management Board – Donald Morrison said that at the last meeting the focus was on the final pieces of work by TRL on the Highways Maintenance Economic Assessment Tool. The tool was being tested by the Welsh Government using the Strategic Road Network as the test and validation network. The presentation ran through all the inputs for the economic assessment tool. TRL are undertaking some fine tuning with a target to publish on UKRLG website shortly.

Donald noted that there was uncertainty around funding for the next State of Nation report and Justin Ward noted that the 2<sup>nd</sup> State of Nation report was due to commence as funding was in place.

#### **7) UKRB mins**

**Action: Justin Ward to set-up meeting with Chris Cranston to update UKRLG website with Code additions/amendments on Lantra scheme and tree inspections**

#### **8) UKRLG mins**

The minutes were noted.

#### **9) Any other business**

No further business was recorded.