

My one dream for London

John David has a dream – to run the capital's transport and highways operations as a single entity, with boroughs sharing resources and the public playing their part

'I have a dream' was preached by the American civil right leader Martin Luther King in the 1960s. He defined a vision that, for its time, was ambitious, and full of obstacles and challenges. Nevertheless, it was the right vision, which went on to deliver some of the greatest social changes in the world which, in turn, have led to huge benefits for society as a whole.

The beauty of dreams is that we are all allowed to have them. As far as mine are concerned, I often wonder what it would feel like to wake up one morning to find that all London local authority transport and highways departments are working together as one large team. While this dream is based on London, it could equally apply to all organisations which want to join up across the country.

My dream for London – the blueprint

This dream would be based on a single, integrated strategy for the four following groups:

- one single, integrated London transport strategy
- one strategy for people
- one strategy for processes
- one strategy for procurement.

If we had one of each of the above, we would not need to repeat it 33 times for each London borough – just think of the savings.

One single, integrated London transport strategy

I would like to see a simple, 24-page integrated transport strategy which unifies all major strategies. The setting of this strategy would be by the creation of a new London transportation board, with input from all key stakeholders including the mayor, Transport for London, the Department for Transport, local authorities, supported by organisations such as ADEPT, AIA, the Campaign for Better Transport, Sustrans, LARAC, the Local Government Association,

APSE, pteg, CABE, and the Carbon Trust. In addition to this group would also be ordinary users, including disabled people, mothers and older people. This strategy would also be offered to consultants, contractors and suppliers to offer their comments before finalising.

Essentially, the best thinking from this group would feed into the single strategy. Within this, perhaps we could improve further the concepts of Streets For All – and not just cars. We could develop the concepts of shared space, sustainable transport and travel by working with social enterprises and local communities. The opportunities are endless and are only limited by our imagination and desire.

For one strategy for people

I would like to see the levels of current multiple hierarchical systems broken down to just four key elements:

- management
- specialist/technical
- contract management/supervisors
- administration staff – supported by a social enterprise model.

Management/specialist and technical staff. With the number of managers and technical staff from 33 boroughs, we could reduce these by 60% and use them elsewhere more purposefully within one London concept.

With the 40% who remain, they could be housed in a central location offering their services to north, east, south, and west London boroughs.

Contract management/supervisors. These staff could remain at their own boroughs to manage the day-to-day activities of contracts and services. They would be multi-skilled in contract management, and would have the ability to work across a range of contracts – for example, streetlighting, highways, CCTV and parking.

Administration staff. These employ-



ees could conduct a routine administration support function, and be supported by a social enterprise model, where some of the administration functions can be carried out by the local community.

Within the social enterprise model I would encourage local people to take on the role of inspecting their local streets, helping with surveys, site visits, supporting travel training and travel options and areas such as conducting road safety training to children in schools

For integrated policy of processes

Within this, I would see one set of common processes which all local authorities adopt. The designing of these would be from a series of workshops, attended by the councils, with

a view to streamlining and eliminating duplication and waste.

The starting point in this exercise will be to find the processes of the best-performing authority and use that as a benchmark.

Within processes I would also consider the need to create a single, integrated design centre which would be based in a building within which all those who design schemes for the councils would be housed – in one place. The idea would be that all design works would come to a central point and be worked on by appropriate engineers and users of the infrastructure – including; the blind, disabled people and mothers – to ensure a design that is truly fit for purpose.

It also makes complete sense

that we all procure almost the same goods and services across London.

Many authorities are now looking at partnering with others, and this will naturally bring x level of savings and returns. However, if we were to purchase on the scale of 33 boroughs joining up, what level of economies of scale could we achieve?

One strategy for procurement

How difficult is it to realise that in London, every local authority has to procure streetlighting services, highway maintenance and design works, and yet we are duplicating this effort 33 times. Instead, to support the single integrated strategy would require the creation of a number of new teams which could be more purposefully deployed into new, centralised

roles managing. These teams will be made up from the forecasted 60% saved as outlined earlier:

1. Performance team – this team would continually measure the performance of each area (borough) and chart their progress and publish. Its members will devise and implement performance-improvement programmes to ensure all 33 boroughs are performing to similar levels. The vision is to narrow the gap to a point where the performance is consistent across London.

2. Workload management team – influenced by the performance data, the workload team will manage the resources across all London boroughs, and have the full authority to divert and change resources as

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needed to support the performance team in ensuring balanced performance across all councils.

3. Quality management team – the quality management team will ensure all services and goods procured continually pass the fitness-for-purpose test. From my experience, while organisations are quick to aspire to ISO 9000/1/2 and other quality marks and charters, very few have the time to invoke the quality control aspect – the actual sample checking of the works, standards, health and safety, and environmental aspects. Through this central model, this will be perfectly achievable, as this will be their prime role, unlike now, where sample checking continues to be a luxury and more often than not, works done are taken in good faith as per the invoices paid, and not confirmed that value, quality and standards have been met.

4. Customer care team – again, by aligning our services through this model, we will free up more staff who, after being trained, will manage customer care better.

5. Governance team – this team will be put in place to ensure the new model delivers all the benefits it sets out to do, and delivers these continuously along the timetable that it is set to deliver against.

6. Projects and programme team members will manage all the projects and programmes from a central point. All expertise will be housed in one place. From my experience, across London, there is a huge spread of indifference and approach to formal project/programme management.

7. Green team members' role will be to ensure all green ideas and initiatives are carefully co-ordinated and fed equally across all London boroughs. Currently, there is a considerable variance in green intelligence, thinking, sharing and resources.

8. Training academy. We need to set up a training academy, and quickly, to teach people what we do in highways and transport.

My dream is very much needed, as the current economic climate is forcing us to look at ourselves critically.

We have little choice but to sit down, aspire, re-motivate, and change our thinking and start delivering through innovation, ideas, and working together.

As such, we have an opportunity. We are in the right climate to pull to-

gether and say that by joining up to a single London philosophy and integrating with social enterprises, we can lay out our services more clearly and have them aligned for the customer'. With this model we can take the best of centralisation and localisation and create a service that is for the community and run with community support, and delivers major benefits that will be enjoyed by the community.

If further evidence is required as to why this dream is needed, con-



sider some of the following examples which remain taboo in our industry.

Bad practices

Having been a freelance worker for more than 20 years across nine London local authorities, two county councils and central government, I have witnessed a range of areas where improvement at basic levels is needed to drive out further efficiencies. These include:

- better management of staff. I am aware of contract staff being paid £50 an hour to design local implementation schemes – 20mph, CPZ, safer routes to schools, etc. Within this, I have noted that some were charging a local authority up to 800 hours to design and implement a standard 20mph scheme.

When challenged through a simple business process engineering exercise, by their own admission, we managed to reduce this down to 75 hours, thus saving the council – more than £360,000, which could deliver more benefits on the ground

- budgets. I have witnessed a housing department offering £750,000 to spend on anything, as year-end was approaching, otherwise this money could not be recovered in the following year's budget

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was paying amounted to an almost £500,000 loss to the council

- skills shortage. Due to cutbacks in training and investing in young talent, we are now starting to pay the price. As Project Brunel conducted by the Government last year showed, we will have 30,000 fewer engineers over the next 10 years. Last year, the average age of an engineer in the UK was 54. This year it is 55, and next year... yes, 56. We are getting closer to a massive skills gap.

Conclusion

From my experience, there are real benefits of not duplicating the efforts 33 times for each of the 33 London boroughs.

We need to get the best from centralisation models – efficiencies and savings of scale – and blend this with the best from localisation – driven by social enterprises, communities, and local suppliers. The model I am proposing can work, if we decide to set our services out in a new way so they are all customer-facing. The services we now need are the type where all users of transport and highways across London receive the same high-quality services, as some of the current premiere boroughs are providing. We are now facing one of our greatest opportunities since the Second World War to consolidate and rebuild.

Twelve months ago, I had a small dream, to start a share and support campaign – with no resources – with a view to helping local authorities work even more closely than ever, to support their business transformation, savings and efficiencies, as well as getting unemployed people back into work. With the help of range of organisations, one year later, this campaign is about to be launched nationally. It has already made the front cover of this magazine (8 October 2010), and is now being discussed in government departments and local authorities across the country, and also at meetings at director level and now, shortly, at ministerial level.

A year ago not many would have given this dream a chance, and now large numbers are buying into this dream (www.uktsc.co.uk).

It certainly is not beyond us to pull together and work as one London.

If this has been your dream too, contact me at johndavid@amnick.com or 07886 837410.

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