



David Bonn

What are the basic building blocks of mobility?

I recently enjoyed a couple of days meeting up with ITS or should I now call them mobility colleagues from across the globe at Intertraffic in Amsterdam. It was good to hear the ground swell of opinion that opportunities were becoming more plentiful, perhaps slow in materialising. There was a general feeling of optimism from many companies that things could be improving after a few years of slow and in some cases non-existent order intakes.

The optimism of new work needs to be balanced with the fact that the industry has lost many of its experienced practitioners either from within the client domain or from the supplier side. Will these practitioners come back or is this an opportunity for some bright new thinking to take this industry on to a new level of delivery? My personal view is that new ideas, new ways of doing things will be good for the industry but (and it's a big but) we must learn from what has gone before.

Going back to my Amsterdam visit many of the stands were showing end to end mobility solutions and those of us who have been around a while may have seen them as ITS solutions under a different badge. I have no issue with that as these solutions are geared to solving today's problems, learning from what has worked in the past. I may question whether the industry is big enough to sustain as many suppliers offering very similar solutions but I wouldn't like the number of suppliers to be reduced too far to eliminate true competition and innovation, which has been the lifeblood of this industry.

Has the industry taken one of the main lessons from the past 10 years forward into all the solutions on offer? – I wasn't convinced based on what I saw in Amsterdam but perhaps industry can tell us differently. In recent years interoperability was demonstrated as a significant step forward for the industry over the last 10 years. Please, let's not go back to



the days of a client being forced into using products from the one supplier who is offering an attractive up front capital cost. Full consideration needs to be given by the procuring authority of the through life costs of maintaining, expanding and replacing products during the life of that solution. The consultancy industry that support clients by producing specifications need to understand these issues and have it tested as part of the tender response evaluation.

In the UK, considerable effort was spent developing and implementing the UTMC standards and in many cases they delivered tangible benefits to clients. Perhaps the issue for the supplier community was compliance with this standard. It did not open up the international market as much as had been hoped. Will DATEX II deliver the international market and is it fully backward compatible with UTMC? Will the international suppliers want to adopt this standard when selling into the Middle East, Far East or Australasia? Have we as an industry demonstrated the benefits of interoperability enough? Why can't a traffic counter from one supplier work alongside another? After five years of use why can't I replace a camera with a higher resolution camera from another supplier? Why can't I replace my loops in the road with above ground detectors? All of these I will want to do without worrying

Intertraffic Amsterdam, in David Bonn's opinion, saw many suppliers offering very similar solutions

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about how I am going to change my back office system to accommodate this new supplier. Indeed if the effort required is disproportionately high to making it non-cost effective am I then forced into using an inferior product from the original supplier?

Overall, I thought the mobility industry, the suppliers and product sets I saw in Amsterdam shows that there is still life in the industry, new ideas are coming along and many are putting the user needs at the heart of their solutions.

We all hope that the investment in the management of our highway networks continues to be smart, learning from the lessons of what has gone before. Bringing new ideas into the solving of highway problems that themselves are evolving. We can't stand still in the development of new ways of managing our networks and perhaps there is a greater role for travel demand management in the future which isn't based solely on a systems solution, but I'll talk more about that in the next publication.



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