



Making the Case for Transport Planning: Adapting to Change Research Findings

Transport Planning Society

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Preface and Next Steps

As explained in the Introduction, this report is the outcome of two Seminars and three Workshops held under the Chatham House Rule and attended by 50 of the most senior transport planning professionals in the UK from the public and private sectors, academia and the training sector. These meetings were arranged to understand the key changes experienced by the transport planning profession and industry as a consequence of the recession and austerity measures, and to consider how we should respond.

At the end of the report, we set out our aim to finalise an action plan to address the specific issues raised in this initiative and elsewhere, and the need to explain to a wider audience what we, as transport planners, do, and why it is so important.

Above all, we need to look to the future, and to look outwards and not make this just an internal conversation. The role of TPS has always been to act as a forum, to be open and transparent, and not to shy away from difficult issues.

We would welcome involvement in this process, as well as comments on the content of the report, through the summer with a view to taking specific actions in the Autumn. We are setting up a working group which will help to take this forward by the end of June.

If you have any comments, or would like to be involved in this process, please contact info@tps.org.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Acknowledgements

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- all the senior professionals – totalling just over fifty - who have given their time to participate in the Seminars and Workshops, and to contribute their views, expectations, hopes and fears.
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Introduction

Transport planning is a dynamic, diverse profession which touches almost every aspect of daily life. It adds considerable value to the economy at home and abroad, and enables projects to be delivered which make a real difference to people's lives. Despite the economic headwinds of the past four years, there is still great potential for transport planning to play its part in meeting the challenges we will face in the future.

However, transport planning has undergone considerable upheaval as project funding, and the work which supported it, has been severely reduced. Staff numbers have fallen dramatically and the skills base has been eroded, at the same time as clients and employers have demanded higher levels of efficiency and service. The potential impact should not be underestimated. The extent of the lost capacity in terms of numbers and professional capability could have a severe effect on the industry's ability to deliver on the government's infrastructure expansion and carbon reduction agendas as the economy seeks to recover.

However, there are already signs that solutions are being found and progress has been made in starting to reshape the profession for the future. It is evident that the range of skills individual transport planners will require will expand considerably, enabling fewer people to do more, and potentially to provide a higher quality service better tuned to clients' requirements and communities' aspirations.

Any tendency towards silo working and modelling that fails to fully consider project context must disappear, and is doing so already. The transport planner of the future will combine development and implementation of a multi-faceted vision, focused technical advice on how to achieve required results, and expertise in overcoming challenges in design and delivery. Acting as critical analysts capable of influencing agendas, brokering the diverse interests of those affected by transport projects and finding innovative solutions will be key roles for the profession and individual transport planners to develop.

In this report, TPS looks forward to that future and the skills that will be required. In doing so, it was assisted by 50 of the most senior transport planning professionals in the UK from both the public and private sectors, and from academia and the training sector. Following an initial Seminar, three Workshops were held in 2011 to gauge the current situation of the profession and key concerns. A final Seminar in spring 2012 focused on the future, identifying possible actions to strengthen the profession. All the meetings were held under the Chatham House Rule. As the representative body for the transport planning profession and industry, TPS is committed to share its findings and work in parallel with initiatives undertaken by individual organisations and all relevant representative bodies.

Thus a key theme running through the proposals is to build the collaborative relationships required between the public and private sector transport planning service providers, our clients, our partners in central government and educational institutions, and the industry's many stakeholders. TPS would welcome contributions on the list of possible actions in the later sections of this report and how we can work together. Our aim is to finalise an action plan during the summer, and follow it through from Autumn onwards.

The first seven Sections of the report set out the impact of the recession and austerity measures on the transport planning profession, highlights key findings and has enabled TPS to identify challenges that it can assist in addressing. At the end of the report we set out potential initiatives that could be developed to meet those challenges, and a process by which we intend to take them forward.

1 Market Conditions Have Led to Radical Restructuring of the Transport Planning Industry

Key findings

- 30-40% fewer transport planning professionals employed than in 2008
- Profit margins squeezed to unsustainable levels
- All grades of staff affected in redundancy and early-retirement programmes
- Loss of highly experienced transport planning professionals with > 20 years' experience
- Loss of 'brightest and best' younger professionals
- Reshaping of professional requirements alongside contraction in numbers

- 1.1 Over the past four years, in common with many other sectors, the transport planning industry and the context in which it operates has undergone a profound change. The consensus among employers is that staff numbers have fallen by 30-40% since the start of the banking crisis in 2008 and as a result of the introduction of subsequent austerity measures. After a stimulus to counter the initial impacts of the recession, public sector spending was virtually paralysed in many cases, before restarting in a somewhat variable manner and at greatly reduced levels. The availability of projects in the private sector was also hit hard as property development stagnated, with recovery appearing some way off.
- 1.2 Extreme competition for the work that remains means that, in many cases, companies are bidding for, and being awarded, contracts on the basis of profit margins which would be unsustainable if perpetuated. The reduced level of public sector funding, the pressures faced by consultancies' private sector clients and the squeeze on margins has represented a potent mix. Some consultancies have found survival challenging.
- 1.3 Employers have taken a number of actions in an attempt to minimise job losses and retain the most capable professionals, including leaving vacancies unfilled, reducing the number of graduates recruited, freezing salaries and putting staff on four-day weeks. Some have used their reserves to retain as many employees as possible, and multi-national and multi-disciplinary consultancies have redeployed some staff overseas and to other sectors where skills are transferable. However, the scale of the redundancy programmes has inevitably had a very real impact on the profession's human capital.
- 1.4 All types and grades of staff have been affected by the cuts, and their scale has meant that many highly capable individuals have left the profession. As a general rule, employers have sought to retain those staff with the widest range of abilities alongside highly skilled technical experts. For both employers and individuals, a nimble, flexible and multi-skilled approach has been a recipe for survival. Those who have been unwilling or unable to supplement existing skills and embrace a more generalist agenda have been most at risk.
- 1.5 Some staff who in normal, even relatively difficult, times would have been regarded as of the highest strategic value have been laid off. There have been examples in the private sector of whole teams of expert modellers being made redundant as employers have been unable to maintain the project profiles and revenues required to support them over a sustained period. In some large public sector organisations, entire specialist transport planning sub-departments no longer exist. In others,

rationalisation has taken place through merging transport planning with sister functions.

- 1.6 The changes in local authority structures, as well as in the requirements and expectations of many of the industries' clients are likely to be enduring, well beyond the anticipated economic upturn. They will make it necessary to ensure all concerned have a clear understanding of the benefits of good transport planning, and for involving transport planners right from the initial development of a policy, plan or project. Transport planners will increasingly need to be strong but fair advocates, helping politicians and investors achieve their goals efficiently, demonstrating why transport planning matters.
- 1.7 One very real concern among employers is that the market conditions have led to transport planning becoming seen as a profession that is cyclical and risky. Some of their 'brightest and best' staff who they wished to retain, particularly younger employees, have taken pre-emptive action and switched career. Transport planning had already been vulnerable to its most talented staff moving to professions seen as more stable and better paid; the recent downturn has increased the exit rate.
- 1.8 At the other end of the scale, many experienced staff have opted for early retirement, frustrated by the pressures of the current situation and the lack of opportunity for creativity. Some of these high-salary professionals have also been selected for redundancy in order to minimise the wage bill. In a number of local authorities, the most striking cuts have been at senior levels and many of those who have retained their jobs have been required to combine roles previously held by others. This has created the danger of personnel being selected for these roles without the necessary level of expertise across their extended portfolio.
- 1.9 Overall, the pressures the industry and its clients have faced have been such that employers have needed to think beyond simply matching resource levels to the marketplace. They have needed to reconsider the role of the transport planners they continue to employ, the skills that those transport planners require and their capability to adapt to new territory.

2 Volatile and Fragile Medium Term Market Prospects, Despite Early Signs of Possible Recovery

Key findings

- Consultancies and local authorities are somewhat more confident in the outlook than in late 2011 although this change must be seen in purely relative terms
- Considerable volatility is expected during the initial phase of any recovery
- Some short term increase is expected in public sector commissions due to new funding streams
- No expectation of sustained recovery until after CSR 2014 at the earliest

- 2.1 The final TPS Seminar in spring 2012 saw a notable change of mood among participants, compared to the Workshops in summer 2011. It suggests that the impact of economic conditions on the transport planning market and staff cuts may have bottomed out. It is also possible that a recovery, albeit a potentially brittle and volatile one, is starting to emerge.
- 2.2 The catalyst for the change in sentiment was the Chancellor's autumn 2011 statement. Although the Chancellor made clear that austerity policies will continue for an extended period beyond the 2014 CSR, his statement did contain measures which have led to a less pessimistic mood than could have been anticipated last summer. Participants in the spring 2012 Seminar reported that the Chancellor's plan for infrastructure to play a prominent part in the Coalition's recovery strategy had already led to planning work becoming available for some new transport projects. Since the spring Seminar, the market dynamics have become even more volatile with the Eurozone crisis threatening economic growth coupled with the increasing pressure for additional investment in infrastructure to help stimulate growth, including the Prime Minister's search for private sector investment.
- 2.3 In addition, new funds, such as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and Growing Places Fund, have provided considerable resources for some local authorities. This is expected to lead to work being outsourced as few of them have sufficient staff to progress or complete the projects in-house. It is unclear at present whether this will lead to a spike in activity or whether any increase in work volumes will be sustained.
- 2.4 Private sector commissions in some areas of the country are also showing a relative upturn as some developers prepare new investment programmes. However, this may well be an unpredictable market prior to a robust economic recovery. In the short term, it is possible that the National Planning Policy Framework's assumption in favour of sustainable development where there is no local plan could deliver a burst of increased activity as developers seek to get consents before local plans are finalised.
- 2.5 Participants in all the events stressed that an upturn in the market is unlikely to lead to a corresponding increase in the number of professional transport planners in either the private or public sectors. It is expected that market conditions will continue to make it necessary for fewer to do more for several years to come. This change may well be permanent if new ways of working come to be regarded as more effective than previous methods.

3 Public Sector Procurement is Having Unintended Consequences

Key findings

- Unsustainable profit margins are eroding investment in service quality, innovation and staff development
- Price remains the overriding factor in procurement, even when quality is intended to be dominant
- The cost and complexity of public procurement processes are effectively precluding SMEs from bidding for many contracts
- Many authorities allow minimal involvement from professional technical staff during procurement, adversely impacting the process
- Bid costs are rising and the proportion of time spent bidding as opposed to working on projects is increasing
- The process is restricting innovation and freedom to focus on problem solving
- There are examples of good practice and these need to be reflected in a new and more consistent approach

- 3.1 The approach to procurement taken by a large number of public sector bodies has been an increasing cause for concern to private sector transport planning contractors and also to some public sector technical officers.
- 3.2 If price were the sole criteria of interest to clients and policymakers, then the approach adopted could be said to have been successful. Driven by intense competition for the greatly reduced workload, margins have been squeezed to historic lows.
- 3.3 Some genuine efficiency savings have been delivered. However, at the Workshops it was widely considered that profit margins have fallen to a level that has undermined innovation and investment in both service quality and staff development; concerns about risk management are also deterring many employers from taking on new graduates or other young, inexperienced staff. There is also genuine and widespread concern over whether current contract margins are sustainable for some consultancies, particularly when very low return contracts cover longer term periods.
- 3.4 Of equal concern is the substantial variation in approaches to procurement used by public sector bodies and the apparent lack of processes to share best practice across the public sector, causing consultants to complete different Prequalification Procurement Questionnaires (PPQs) for nearly every authority from which they are seeking work. In addition, it is clear that the public procurement process itself, as well as the extent to which margins have been reduced, is acting as a barrier to achieving the best results.
- 3.5 The view of representatives at the Workshops from both the public and private sector is that, in a considerable number of cases, contracts have been awarded without public authorities having full understanding of either what is required or of what is being offered in response to their PPQ or Invitation to Tender (ITT). This is often because the processes used by some specialist procurement departments allow minimal involvement of technical staff or prevent their involvement altogether, creating a tendency towards 'tick box' rather than professionally informed definition of needs or assessment of bids.

- 3.6 In addition, the structure of the tendering process is often seen as stifling innovation. It also frequently precludes effective competition from SMEs, especially in the case of a significant number of framework contracts, and focuses excessively on price even where the process apparently favours quality. One major public sector organisation was viewed by participants at the Workshops as being so target driven that the entire emphasis is on working to budget and time, with little, if any, regard for the quality or relevance of the product delivered.
- 3.7 Bid requirements relating to public liability (up to £50m in one case reported by a small consultant, and without limit in others) have become increasingly onerous and were widely regarded as excessive by Workshop participants, adding cost to both the public and private sector and limiting the number of firms able to compete for contracts. Increasingly onerous financial standing and restrictive track record requirements have also reduced the field of bidders.
- 3.8 Further concerns relate to the growing complexity and cost of bidding. As a result, the proportion of senior consultancy staff time being spent bidding, as opposed to working on projects, is rising. On framework contracts, it is also apparent that there is no guarantee as to the amount of work that will be tendered to firms winning places. In some cases no contracts at all have been awarded.
- 3.9 Elements of good practice procurement, as well as difficulties that have been encountered, were also discussed at the Workshops. Examples included some local authorities acting as intelligent clients through the use of a two-tier process for framework contracts, split into strategic lots for major multi-disciplinary work and specialist lots. This process was designed to provide the local authorities with sufficient access to the specialist, often smaller, transport consultants.
- 3.10 However, there appears to be little evidence of a strategic overview which would assess the effectiveness of different procurement approaches and how they could be optimised to ensure value for money, maximise service quality and use client and contractor resources efficiently throughout the whole procurement process.
- 3.11 For example, some public sector bodies use a very onerous PQQ followed by a very onerous ITT. Others have an onerous PQQ and a very lightweight ITT, taking the view that many requirements have already been established through the PQQ process. The most beneficial approach may be somewhere between these extremes of ITT requirements.
- 3.12 A further issue is that the way public procurement processes are structured is pushing the fees charged for transport planning down towards low-fee engineering processes. By contrast, the expectation is that management consultants involved in frameworks charge higher fees, even though transport planning covers much of what management consultancy involves in addition to transport specialisms. One possible avenue could be for consultancies to consider repositioning themselves as transport management consultants, carrying out high level work, while retaining existing capabilities. However, any such change could be highly problematic, given that many transport planning organisations form part of an engineering consultancy. Concerns were also expressed at the Workshops that association with the management consultancy sector may have disadvantages.

Quality weightings are proving ineffective

Some public sector clients use weightings that appear heavily biased in favour of quality over price (eg 70:30) when making contract awards. However, the effect of the system is that it often remains biased heavily towards price.

This is because the PQQ stage effectively selects companies to receive ITTs based on quality criteria. Therefore, quality scores when competing for tenders in the next stage of the process can be very close, sometimes to the extent of rendering quality, as measured in the assessment process, an irrelevance. This makes price the dominant factor in contract awards.

This situation can be exacerbated by some tendering authorities' assessment practices, including award of a negative price score to bidders whose price is a set percentage above the lowest bidder.

Doubts have also been expressed over the capability of procurement staff to adequately assess the quality element of bids where advice from technical officers in their organisation is precluded.

How the procurement system limits the ability of SMEs to compete for framework contracts

Framework contracts can make up a substantial proportion of many SMEs' existing revenue, but this is being progressively eroded as contracts come up for renewal. Increasingly, contracts are being specified in a manner that makes it problematic, often impossible, for SMEs to bid successfully or even form part of the supply chain.

As a result of the desire to minimise costs, the systems used when assessing bids award higher scores to organisations tendering as a single identity. While this has coincided with falling prices, it has eroded the ability of the public authorities to call on specialist resources. It was also questioned whether the perception that including SMEs in the supply chain will increase costs reflects reality.

A further barrier for SMEs is the common practice of dividing frameworks into a small number of Lots each incorporating a broad territory, which SMEs do not have the scope to cover adequately. Along with the requirement to demonstrate substantial assets and public liability insurance, this has led to framework contracts increasingly becoming the preserve of major multi-disciplinary firms.

Although, most frameworks do include some theoretical provision for the use of SMEs, the provisions are not seen as being particularly effective. On those occasions when work is offered to an SME, it is usually on terms based on fee rates across the whole contract, which fail to recognise the differences in costs between sectors.

3.13 Comments from Workshop and Seminar participants (both public and private sector) on their experience of the procurement process included:

- *The person procuring a transport planning contract for me is the same one who procures our pencils*
- *Procurement has become a cottage industry, verging on being out of control*
- *Transport planning has become commoditised, you buy it by the box*
- *It can be a nightmare to get the right consultants*
- *In procurement, common sense often goes out of the window*
- *Too many procurement managers understand cost but have little idea of value*
- *A simple tick box mentality has developed in some public sector bodies focused on KPIs which rarely relate to the content of what needs to be delivered*
- *There appears to be one size fits all approach taken by many procurement managers, regardless of the nature of the work they are procuring*
- *Even though I run a very small SME, I had to demonstrate I had £50m of public liability cover*
Unlimited liability is becoming a common requirement

4 Record Investment in Skills Development is Being Lost; Productive Engagement with DfT and Stakeholders is Required to Give Impetus to Rebuilding Capacity

Key findings

- Loss of the capability developed in the five years post Transport Planning Skills Initiative
- Lack of new entrants, with few organisations recruiting over the last 2-3 years
- Loss of capacity to meet demand for transport planning when the economy recovers
- DfT has insufficient understanding of the transport planning industry and vice-versa
- Wider understanding of the nature and value of transport planning is required

- 4.1 The loss of large numbers of highly capable staff, following initial culls of less able employees, has had a very detrimental impact on the transport planning industry's progress in building its skills base over the five years prior to the recession. During this time, record levels of investment had been made in training and staff development, with the business case based to a significant extent on meeting current and future public policy requirements.
- 4.2 One of the key contributors to this process was the TPS 2002 Transport Planning Skills Initiative (see panel) and its report *Researching the Profession* which concluded that there was a shortage of transport planning resources required to deliver the programmes in the DETR's 10-year Transport Plan (2000).
- 4.3 One of the Transport Planning Skills Initiative's (TPSI) key findings was that there was a need to increase the number of transport planners from a 2003 base of just under 10,000 by 1,000/year for 10 years – a target which was well on the way to being achieved prior to the recession of 2008. The industry's unprecedented commitment to training was reflected in a 50% increase in the number of employer-sponsored UK transport Masters students between 2002 and 2009, as well as in support for the development of the Transport Planning Professional (TPP) qualification and the TPS Professional Development Scheme (PDS) for Transport Planners. The TPP was developed jointly with the Chartered Institute for Highways and Transportation and launched in 2008. In the same year TPS launched its PDS.
- 4.4 It is no exaggeration to say that, over the past three years, much of the investment between 2003 and 2009 in skills development and building the profession's resource has been "lost". Evidence from TPSI showed that those who left the profession as a result of cutbacks in the early 1990s did not return after the economy recovered and demand for transport planning professionals increased. Participants at the Workshops believe that this trend will be repeated, not least because the breadth of skills transport planners hold, particularly numeracy, analysis and communications. They reported that while some of their former employees have moved into other areas relating to transport, including highways and traffic, many others have moved to unrelated industries such as management consultancy, finance, accountancy, operations research, and actuary.
- 4.5 The loss of resources along with a recruitment freeze across large sections of the industry over the past three years has led to a severe reduction in capacity. As the economy recovers and demand for transport planning increases, it is highly probable that a deficit of skills is again likely to emerge. Despite the restructuring of the industry to deliver more efficient services, the likelihood is that another programme of

concerted action will be required to build the capacity of the profession so as to meet economic and public services requirements.

The Transport Planning Skills Initiative

After a period in which transport was low on the political agenda, it was given a much greater priority by the incoming Blair Government in 1997, and the Secretary of State for Transport wasted little time in preparations for a new Ten Year Plan, published in July 2000

Recognising the potential implications of the increased priority to be accorded to transport for transport planning, in 2002 the Transport Planning Society launched the Transport Planning Skills Initiative, TPSI, with three primary objectives:

- to increase the size of the skills pool
- to increase the range and level of skills
- to raise awareness of the profession among the public at large, and among opinion formers.

The Initiative was supported by a broad grouping of organisations concerned with transport planning, including the DfT, the Department for Education and Skills, employers in both the private and public sectors, professional institutions, and universities and training providers.

Its outcome included a number of actions, with employers making major commitments to the education, training and professional development of a growing body of skilled transport planners, and universities developing the content and delivery of their courses to meet the needs of employers.

- By 2008, employers were funding over 300 individuals studying part time for a transport Masters.
- Working with GoSkills, the Sector Skills Council, TPS developed National Occupational Standards (NOS) for both Transport Planners and Transport Planning Technical Support Staff, approved by the regulatory authorities in 2007.
- In March 2008, TPS and the Institution of Highways and Transportation (as CIHT) then was jointly launched the Transport Planning Professional (TPP) qualification based on the NOS for Transport Planners, providing the profession with a demanding, competence based, qualification.
- In May 2008, TPS launched the TPS Professional Development Scheme, also based on the NOS, that provides an industry standard structured training scheme for professional transport planners. It has been adopted by most of the major transport planning consultants as well as a growing number of local authorities.

4.6 DfT and the industry will need to engage effectively and in good time in order to prepare for this requirement, but at present there is no effective working relationship. Indeed, there are real concerns that the DfT does not see the capabilities of the transport planning profession and the capacity of the industry as being within its remit.

4.7 The impression is that DfT is increasingly viewing its role as being to fulfil executive agency functions and responsibility for national networks (national rail, truck roads, air, ports). There is evidence that local transport may well be regarded by DfT as a marginal part of its responsibility going forward. For example, at present the Department appears to believe that it should not attempt to exert significant influence over activities which will be undertaken by Local Enterprise Partnerships. This is already becoming apparent in its withdrawal of support for localised initiatives, for example funding for urban traffic control and the LTPN. There are real concerns that DfT will cut back on research related to local activity and that will not be replaced at a local level, raising the issue of how it will be taken forward and funded in the future.

DfT has insufficient understanding of the transport planning industry and vice-versa

Following its involvement in the Transport Planning Skills Initiative, TPS has attempted to engage with DfT on a variety of matters to bolster central government backing for both the industry and the profession, including gaining support for the development of transport planning skills and training. The erosion of the transport planning skills base has been such that TPS has concerns over whether the industry will have the capacity to deliver the infrastructure design and planning required for the government's future transport investment programmes.

The impression reported at the Workshops is that many DfT senior officials equate transport planning to the work of its division responsible for modelling and economic assessment, rather than the broad scope of the industry in contributing to improved economic output and making a positive contribution to the lifestyles in towns, cities and rural areas. DfT's approach was seen as being in stark contrast to that of Transport Scotland, which has been very active in the development of the transport profession, including planning and engineering, in Scotland since its formation.

On the other hand, the lack of awareness within the DfT of transport planning's remit and place in delivery of policy is mirrored in the industry's relatively poor understanding of DfT structures, forward thinking and changing responsibilities. This is particularly apparent in respect of the devolution of powers which is expected to take place under localism policies.

The apparent lack of understanding in the industry and DfT of each other's pressures and remit is a backward step compared to the co-operation that took place during the establishment of TPSI.

- 4.8 An alternative view is that DfT would wish to maintain an active interest, but cuts to resources mean that it is too stretched to do so. DfT may feel it is pragmatic to take a backseat in response to new local governance structures.
- 4.9 There is also a need to raise awareness more widely of the impact of the transport planning profession on improving living standards and generating wealth. At present, the public has very limited knowledge of the profession and the benefits it delivers. Broader engagement and the understanding it generates among the public would assist in building support for transport projects and play a part in establishing stronger relationships with civil servants and politicians at central government level. Productive engagement with stakeholders will take on increased importance regionally as localism takes hold and Local Enterprise Partnerships gain in influence.
- 4.10 The substantial investment over the last decade in developing talent, through education and training, followed a surge in demand for transport planning skills resulting from a combination of government transport policies and economic growth. But that surge had been preceded by downturn in the 1990s, when as over the last few years, staffing levels were reduced and skilled human capital lost. The investment was necessary to replace that lost capital. It is clear that transport planning is subject to cycles not only in the economy but also in government policy, a fact recognised by some of the brighter and better recent recruits, who have responded to the latest downturn by moving to what are believed to be more stable professions.
- 4.11 The cyclical nature of the industry raises three key questions of critical importance to building transport planning capacity to meet future requirements.
- Are major private sector organisations going to be willing to maintain a substantial presence in such a sector?
 - Are employers going to be willing to invest as heavily in developing staff competence as they were prior to the impact of the austerity measures?
 - Is the industry going to be able to continue to attract the highly talented new entrants it needs?

5 Market Conditions Have Led to a Sharp Reduction in Training and Professional Development Activity

Key findings

- Support for external training has fallen considerably, and proportionally the fall is in excess of the reduction in staff numbers
- Employers are putting increased emphasis on lower cost in-house training
- Issues have been encountered in satisfying TPP and TPS Professional Development Scheme requirements
- Most graduate recruitment schemes have been frozen
- The lack of new entrants has had an adverse impact on the development of existing staff
- Transport Masters courses need to be highly tuned to evolving market requirements
- There is a risk that Masters courses may focus increasingly on the non-EEA market
- Particular attention needs to be given to new ways of developing generic skills, especially those related to communication and facilitation
- There is a need for the public sector to provide structured professional training schemes for its transport planners

- 5.1 Throughout the past four years, employers have continued to regard training as a core requirement to maintain competitive advantage and have sought to protect budgets as far as possible. However, the economic conditions are such that there has been a very significant fall in support for external training. Proportionally, the cuts have been in excess of the reduction in staff numbers.
- 5.2 The number of transport Masters students sponsored by employers had fallen from its high of 139 FTEs in 2008/9 to 49 in 2011/2, and support for attendance on short external courses and conferences has also reduced sharply. Over the last year, there has also been a fall in the numbers following the TPS Professional Development Scheme, PDS.
- 5.3 Employer support for Masters education is expected to continue to be at a low level, due to a combination of low levels of graduate recruitment, financial pressures within the industry and Government reforms to higher education, which have led to substantial increases in the cost of Masters courses from October 2012, with the possibility of further increases to come.
- 5.4 Unsurprisingly, graduate recruitment has also fallen dramatically, with many organisations freezing their programmes. Such moves have been made reluctantly. Employers view new graduates as a means of breathing life into their organisations through their fresh perspective, and as essential to developing a high quality resource for the future. However, their lack of experience coupled with relatively low initial productivity is seen as presenting a cost risk at a time when margins are slim and many clients' primary interest is in reducing contract prices.
- 5.5 Although some organisations have recently reopened graduate programmes, recruiting now to help create new human capital for future years is largely viewed as a luxury that cannot be afforded in current circumstances. This applies to full time, non-employer funded transport Masters postgraduates as well as first degree graduates.
- 5.6 Whereas a Masters qualification was previously seen as all but guaranteeing a job, that is no longer the case. In the Workshops, universities reported that very few of

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those graduating in 2010 or 2011 had obtained a job in transport on completing their course. This could lead to lower quality intake of full time UK Masters students.

- 5.7 However, the lack of new blood entering the profession has, itself, created supplementary risks, hampering the development of existing staff. In many cases, those who joined the profession shortly before the economic downturn are continuing to perform junior roles that would previously have passed to new recruits. The frustration this causes has led to the loss of capable young staff, compounding possible future skill shortages.
- 5.8 The introduction of the TPP qualification and the TPS PDS are seen by some employers as providing an alternative to Masters courses. Based on experience as well as learning, they can be more relevant to the needs of employers and are lower in cost. Initial experience since introducing the TPS PDS and TPP is that they are both widely regarded as meeting the needs of both individual transport planners and the industry. However, uptake of the TPP has been relatively limited, particularly in the last couple of years. There is a need to promote it more effectively, and for wider adoption of the TPS PDS, particularly in the public sector, where needs for professional competence are just as great as they are in consultancy.
- 5.9 However, providing staff with the breadth and depth of experience required to complete the TPS PDS and successfully apply for the TPP qualification is proving increasingly difficult. This is partly because reduced staff numbers and increased emphasis on project risk management has led to many consultants concentrating key skills in specific offices, where they can achieve a critical mass of capability. As a result, the range of work they carry out in many of their offices has become more limited and with it the ability to meet all TPP and TPS PDS skill requirements. In local authorities, the use of consultants for certain work programmes is seen as having a similar effect. In addition, resources for TPS PDS mentoring have also become stretched as the number of senior staff has been reduced, and pressures to increase chargeable hours have grown.
- 5.10 Despite the difficulties some TPS PDS participants have encountered in fulfilling the Scheme's requirements, there have been instances of staff starting to use their participation in the TPS PDS to challenge management and ensure they gain the necessary breadth of experience. And employers are using their employees' commitment to the TPS PDS as a metric in their periodic review process. As such, a key value of the TPS PDS is that it works to the benefit of both employer and employee.
- 5.11 Nonetheless, the TPP is not yet seen as having either the "gold standard" value of a Masters or the recognition of CEng. The established requirement for firms to demonstrate staff resource with Masters qualifications when bidding for contracts in many markets means there will be an ongoing requirement for this level of academic education, in addition to professional qualifications.
- 5.12 Instead of regarding short courses and conferences as a means of building general professional capability, many employers now require attendance to be justified rigorously on the grounds of relevance to an individual's development objectives or clear contribution to defined business objectives.
- 5.13 To a degree, employers have sought to fill the gap in external training by making increased use of in-house courses provided by third parties or senior staff. In many cases, one person attends external events to learn about new legislation or policies,

and then provides in-house training to colleagues, particularly when linked to continuous professional development such as TPS's PDS.

- 5.14 It was noted that local authorities, and government, value PRINCE project management training, not least because it is assessed, and not all candidates are successful.
- 5.15 A particular challenge will be equipping the profession with key principles of good practice in facilitation, communication and negotiation. While it is thought possible to teach these skills to a degree, particularly through debate and discussion, there is general agreement that they can only be refined and embedded to a high level through observing others, and through experience; ideally opportunities to build these skills should be provided early in a transport planner's career. The same challenge applies to other generic skills such as managing time and inter-personal relations.
- 5.16 It is evident that the transport planning profession continues to evolve, requiring its members to adapt to new needs and to learn new skills. As a result, it is crucial that all involved in education, training and setting professional standards keep pace with, and recognise, emerging skill requirements, as well as those which might become of lesser importance.

Establishing a transport planning apprenticeship scheme may prove problematic and does not enjoy universal support

The possibility of developing a transport planning apprenticeship scheme as a cost effective dedicated programme for the profession, potentially based on National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Transport Planning Support Staff is being assessed by People 1st/Go Skills. The programme is in line with government policy to offer support for apprenticeships.

However, only a small minority of employers participating in the Workshops expressed an interest in such a scheme, while others had reservations. A key issue raised is whether school leavers who have not achieved the qualifications required to attend university would have the required capability or discipline for the academic demands of a transport planning apprenticeship. In the present environment, many employers also see little requirement for an apprenticeship given that few organisations are recruiting at any level, except to fill very specific needs and there is a large pool of unemployed transport Masters and other graduates.

A further barrier is that the number and geographic spread of possible apprentices could make it difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish a critical mass of education providers and apprentices in different areas of the country.

On balance, the potential for developing a viable transport planning apprenticeship scheme that would secure government funding support was considered extremely limited, and the business case could be difficult to make. However, TPS has noted that some employers continue to have an interest in developing a scheme. There was more interest in a structured training scheme based on based on NOS for Transport Planning Support Staff and compatible with the TPS PDS, providing potential for progressive development from a technical assistant to a full professional transport planner.

Some public sector organisations are requiring contractors to demonstrate provision of apprenticeships as a condition of contract, and a group of engineering consultants has responded by jointly establishing a consultants' civil engineering apprenticeship scheme. However, no client has yet stipulated this requirement in transport planning contracts.

6 Skills Requirements for the Transport Planner of the Future

Key findings

- There is an increasing emphasis on the need for skilled generalist transport planners
- Transport planners of the future will need to have a broader skills set, knowledge of a wider range of policy agendas, and the ability to apply skills in a more effective manner
- The ability to demonstrate the value of transport planning will take on greater importance
- Facilitation and negotiation will become a core role in transport planning
- Technical modelling outputs will need to be applied in a more considered manner
- Transport planners will need to understand a broad range of policy scenarios
- Advising on implementation, and how to achieve objectives, rather than just presenting data, will be a key change

- 6.1 The shift in the requirements of the industry's clients and the changes to transport planning's role within local authority structures are expected to be lasting. As a result, there will be an ongoing and essential need to make the case for transport planning. This advocacy will cover transport planning's ability to deliver economic value and social benefits, based on services which are highly efficient and provide exceptional outcomes – both in their own right and compared to alternative interventions. Transport planners are being, and will be, required to develop new skills and expand their perception of what their role involves.
- 6.2 The overall skills sets transport planners require can be summarised as numeracy, analytical capability, ability to communicate effectively and persuasively, technical ability and having a thorough understanding of the framework in which they operate. At a general level, this is broadly similar to the requirements identified in TPSI. However, there has been a considerable change in the breadth of these requirements and the way they need to be applied.
- 6.3 In both the public and private sector, this trend towards developing broader skills sets has seen the creation of teams of multi-skilled generalists, able to contribute to the development and implementation of a holistic vision, while providing expert, detailed advice on addressing the challenges in design and delivery of individual elements, be they projects, plans or policies. At the same time, distinctions between client and consultant and between operations and planning are becoming blurred, with joint teams and virtual teams being formed in some cases. Some large public sector organisations have made similar internal changes to promote closer cross-departmental working.
- 6.4 As a result, new and closer professional relationships have been formed within organisations and on projects. For example, generalists are encouraged to understand the motivations of their clients and the processes they use, while highly skilled technical and modelling staff are being encouraged to understand the wider policy contexts which can influence the practicality of their recommendations. The objectives are to maximise value and service quality, focus rigorously on end objectives, and complete projects rapidly and efficiently. The changing context and requirements mean transport planners will increasingly need the capability to develop in-depth understanding and take full account of:
- Clients' policy objectives
 - National policy context
 - The objectives of other departments within their organisation and within clients' organisations

- Community aspirations
- Clients' internal processes
- Clients' budgets
- Available sources of funding for implementation
- A full range of regulations (eg planning consent)
- A broad range of stakeholder agendas including the requirements of local businesses
- Demand forecasting in England compliant with WebTAG
- Project assessment, in England compliant with WebTAG
- Behaviour change and the key relationships between transport and land use, and the revolution in communications
- Project management and the practicalities of implementation

6.5 These capabilities can be divided into three broad categories:

- Policy, legal and regulatory knowledge
- Technical competence
- Understanding the users of our services and their objectives, creating solutions and taking responsibility for implementing them

Policy, legal and regulatory knowledge

6.6 Policy, legal and regulatory knowledge is crucial to ensuring the advice transport planning professionals deliver is of maximum use to clients. Increasingly, transport planners will need the capability to relate work to an ever growing agenda – including energy, climate change and health – as well as taking into account the expected national and global trends.

6.7 Recommendations will need to be made in line with detailed knowledge of these policies of national importance, including their local application, as well as associated regulations, such as planning consent. This will be a pre-requisite for rapid and efficient preparation and implementation of projects and so that core issues are addressed at the right time.

6.8 The legal and regulatory background is evolving rapidly and it is clear that, in England, there will a particular need to respond to changes resulting from the 2011 Localism Act and other aspects of the Coalition Government's policies, not least the National Planning Policy Framework and the rise of LEPs.

6.9 The localism agenda will be one of the key drivers for transport planners to gain a more effective grasp of project implementation and its practicalities – especially those relating to funding. One of the fundamental issues every transport planner should understand is the increasingly complex process of assembling finance to deliver policies and projects. Transport planners will need to keep abreast with changes in how public money is assigned and allocated and where the opportunities might lie for securing funding, both public and private. Avenues include new mechanisms such as the Community Infrastructure Levy, Tax Incremental Finance, and other emerging initiatives that will have a significant bearing on how funding is streamed to infrastructure and service provision.

6.10 In the midst of this transport planners will have to support the need for a clear, evidence based, strategy, and be able to explain why a mass of unrelated schemes may end up failing to achieve local or national objectives, or even undermine each other.

- 6.11 Ever more demanding public procurement processes and contract structures are also requiring consultants to develop new skills. This is particularly important for smaller and medium sized consultants competing with large, multi-disciplinary (and international) firms who have specialist teams dedicated to managing Pre-Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs) and Invitations to Tender (ITTs).

Technical competence

- 6.12 The transport planning profession has a reputation for high technical capability, but theoretical knowledge on its own is not sufficient. Application is crucial.
- 6.13 One consequence of software advances which have made it simpler to run many transport and traffic models, and to do so very quickly, is that this can lead to over reliance on the modelling process and a lack of transparency. This means insufficient thought may be given to ensuring both the models and the inputs are fit for purpose, and to ensuring their relevance to the objectives clients are seeking to achieve. In general, greater care in the use and interpretation of model based outputs could deliver substantial benefits
- 6.14 The use of models is just one illustration of how the profession needs to re-focus on a 'right first time' approach, so as to ensure it provides superior service and value. At the Workshops, participants also noted that errors and project time and cost overruns had become too common in transport planning. Even without the pressures of current circumstances, there would be a need for much stronger, more effective, project management, both as client and as contractor.
- 6.15 Appropriate use of assessment processes will be another key challenge. At present, it is unclear whether moves to localism will lead to increased or less use of full WebTAG requirements. Full compliance with the detailed technical sections of WebTAG is seen in the profession as unnecessarily demanding, and costly. In many cases, certainly for a significant number of local schemes. However, it may be that localism policies mean there is a need to justify projects more rigorously because of the provision of local funding and potentially more private sector funding. In the future, transport planners could have a key role to play in advising commissioning bodies on how to improve their project and policy assessments to suit individual circumstances. Full use of WebTag as a default option can lead to standardised processes which add cost and provide little opportunity for creativity and innovation.
- 6.16 Other technical competencies also need to be reviewed. A case in point is that there is a growing need to understand marketing in its broadest sense. For example, a major part of the impact of the suite of measures often called "Smarter Choices" depends on changing people's perceptions and fine tuning transport products to what the public wants. At a strategic level transport planners will increasingly need to be aware of how low carbon vehicles can best be promoted as a core element of transport policy – forecasting usage using 'standard' inputs will be of limited value. In addition, transport planners also need to understand how social media can be used most effectively – this can range from receiving feedback or directing maintenance to providing information and acting as a substitute for travel.

- 6.17 Meanwhile, clients and society will continue, to make rapid technical advances which will need to be understood. Modern logistics is becoming increasingly sophisticated, while electronic communication is having an ever-increasing impact on both transport demand and operation. Internet shopping is having a major impact on travel demand, with a reduction in the need to travel to retail centres, but an increasing demand for local deliveries.
- 6.18 Project management is also becoming an increasingly technical field, and transport planners need to understand the procedures. A key element, particularly for consultants, is record keeping and documentation, enabling systematic and rapid detection of problems or errors and allowing advance warning of any emerging issues. Another core capability in designing and managing projects is matching proposals to clients' expectations and what they are willing and able to afford. It is essential to avoid creating an expectation that more can be delivered than is reasonable within the project time and budget constraints.

Understanding the users of our services and exerting influence

- 6.19 The need for the transport planning profession to understand the users of its services is growing greater almost by the day. Key forces include:
- clients' expectations of a transport planning service which is not only more efficient but more holistic and more focused on delivering tangible outputs and results
 - the emergence of new alliance and partnership contractual models
 - the evolution of the localism agenda
 - changes to funding streams in the context of lower public sector expenditure
 - advances in IT and social media which enable rapid dissemination of knowledge within communities
- 6.20 As a result, the ability to inform and influence key stakeholders, lead projects and assist in developing policy agendas will become an essential requirement. Already it is no longer sufficient for transport planners to be good communicators in a general sense. Increasingly, they are required to present the findings of their work in a manner which persuasively makes the case for the programmes clients and employers want to deliver, and demonstrates how they will provide the outcomes the public wishes to see. They need to be able to match their writing and speaking to the needs of different target audiences.
- 6.21 The evolution taking place is for transport planners to become forward-thinking and critical analysts, able to make compelling arguments for transport schemes. In short, the industry has to become better at demonstrating why transport planning matters – how it can deliver improved economic performance, better quality of life and add financial value to development schemes.
- 6.22 The impact of failing to do so, even with localism at an early stage, is already being felt. Projects which have ticked all the right boxes in terms of economic benefits and complying with policy guidance run the risk of attracting local opposition if they are poorly understood by communities. Communication is a two way process and transport planners will have to listen and respond as well as making their work better understood.

Key changes in the way transport planners will need to communicate

In effect the changes in communication described in this section represent **a move from delivering findings to facilitating outcomes**. It demands political nous as well as technical knowledge and presentation skills, the ability to understand changing requirements as they evolve and the energy to find satisfactory alternatives. Being seen to listen and heed what others say is central to this process of facilitation and negotiation. As such, advanced written and oral communication skills and the ability to adapt presentation style to match the needs and competencies of the target audience will become of paramount importance.

- 6.23 This represents a considerable change from the way the industry has operated and to some extent continues to behave. All too often, the outputs of modelling have been described in a way which fails to convey the costs and benefits of transport schemes in a manner that clients, politicians, and the public in particular, fully understand. It will be important for transport planners, whether working individually or in teams of generalists and specialist modellers, to become more effective interpreters rather than just presenters of data in order to inform decisions effectively. As part of this role they will also need to become more self critical and ensure that technical judgement is made explicit and the reasons behind it fully explained.
- 6.24 On the ground, transport planners will need the capability to work productively with the complete range of politicians and stakeholders, from Ministers through to Parish Councils, neighbourhood groups and investors. This requires the ability to empathise with and take full account of policy drivers, both local and national, balance them with the sensitivities of the communities affected by schemes, and present solutions which are of demonstrable value.

7 Next Steps: a plan for action and engagement

There are two important areas of work we have identified to take this initiative forward. The first is the consideration of what specific actions, from reforming public procurement to reviewing the TPP, are required to adapt for the future. This involves using the skills base to achieve value for money, but beyond that to generate and implement new solution to the problems we face in a very challenging economic and environmental context. The second is to ensure that we do not simply talk among ourselves, but explain the value of what we do, and how deploying the skills and experience that we have can make a real difference to people's lives.

In undertaking this we will need to work co-operatively with the individuals, transport planning businesses, their client organisations, and all the representative bodies involved. The role of TPS has always been to stimulate debate, to be open and transparent, and not to shy away from difficult issues.

Below we set out a draft list of topics to be developed and revised in the Action Plan. These draw on the extensive material gathered in the research phase, but we want to give an opportunity for these to be developed over the next few months, both in terms of actions for the profession itself, but beyond that through engaging with external agencies and Government to support the changes required.

If you have any comments, or would like to be involved in this process, please contact info@tps.org.uk.

- 1) **Ensuring the diversity and talent of the next generation of transport planners**
- 2) **Connecting the existing skills base with the new intake**
- 3) **Reviewing the TPP and encouraging its take up**
- 4) **Broadening the user base of the TPS Professional Development Scheme (PDS)**
- 5) **Finding new ways of encouraging and recognising progress through the TPS PDS**
- 6) **Working with Masters' courses to maintain their contribution to the transport planning skills base**
- 7) **Simplifying public procurement, making it more open to SMEs, and encouraging innovation**
- 8) **Engaging more effectively with central and local Government**
- 9) **Engaging more effectively with all the other organisations involved in transport planning and provision**
- 10) **Promoting a greater understanding among the public, as well as decision makers, of what we do and why it is important.**

