**Transport in the future**

**Presentation by Keith Buchan, TPS Director of Skills, 30th June 2016**

**Transport Practitioners Meeting (TPM) Plenary Session**

In my presentation today I would like to cover two topics for transport in the future: developing skills, as you might expect from TPS Director of Skills, but also how future decision making needs to change, especially in the light of the Referendum result.

It is clear that we will need to respond to new challenges such as "mobility as a service" or “intelligent mobility” and also to new data both big *and* small: big – already strongly influencing travel choice in real time, and small - telling me when to leave my house to catch the bus from my local stop. Transport planners have always had breadth of skills and experience as part of their professional development and we are in a good position to respond to the new challenges in three key areas: in analysis; in forecasting and appraisal; and in evaluation. I have deliberately separated the three - each will require a different and measured response. Those responses will need to be sophisticated and persuasive – the impacts of new hardware and software will be very different in different contexts.

For example, autonomous or semi-autonomous vehicles on the strategic network are likely to create new capacity, reduce congestion and improve reliability. In urban areas they may stimulate traffic demand and cause congestion and damage to the local street environment. In rural areas they may or may not cause or solve problems depending on how they evolve, how they impact existing provision and the policy framework within which they do so. We need depth of understanding of how individual people will react and adapt, and constant engagement with how that develops – look at the completely unexpected explosion in the use of text messaging. It is important that this is not just a question of simply being up to date with the latest technology.

I was at this point going to talk in more detail about the potential impacts of some of the new developments in transport technology. However, like many others I am sure, I have been reflecting on the impact of the EU Referendum result on 24th June. Just for the record I found the campaigning style and content on both sides seemed determined to occupy a narrow spectrum from the distasteful to the disgraceful. In particular it contributed to the corrosive attitude that expert opinion can be bought and sold – an opportunity was lost by both sides to restore faith in the evidence based approach which is at the heart of transport planning, in common with many other disciplines. I’m going to have to stop otherwise I will get too angry with those on both sides who should have known, and done, better.

To return to my reflections for the future. These do not focus on the economy or migration, although on the former I would say that the skills and problem solving talents of this and the coming generation of transport planners will continue to be sought well beyond the UK’s borders – wherever those borders may end up being……..

No, my concern is that national decision makers, including those we advise as part of our daily work, have collectively parked (I’m afraid it’s a transport talk I have to mention parking) have collectively parked a shared vision of social justice and cohesion, pride in community and in work. The way in which the media has talked about significant economic progress has left many people bewildered when those economic benefits don’t get past their front doors and into the reality of their lives. For me this is the key lesson that we must all learn.

So how should we react? I think the result should galvanise us all to promote quality in our public spaces (not just private spaces) – transport is a key influence here; to recommit to a proper analysis of the distributional aspects of our work – not what we do currently; and to be honest about the real economic impacts of transport schemes and their ability or inability to create jobs.

The failure to do this has led to a failure to create or deliver a genuinely shared vision. For example we have housing developments with no social content, distant from employment and other facilities and with poor public transport; we have cuts to local buses while massive investment is planned to reduce train travel times between London and Birmingham; and we have no policy framework in place which could make Uber part of the solution rather than part of the problem. There are many more examples.

So what are the implications for the future? Are we going to have more of the same or can we be more proactive, produce more penetrating analyses centred on people – not just people as a conceptual whole or average numbers but also as individuals, many of whom do not see the benefits of what we do. We need to ensure that not only do they understand how they can benefit from our work, but that those benefits are there in the first place. And to return to skills we now have a transport planning apprenticeship in place which is based on the same breadth of knowledge and experience that the TPS Professional Development scheme contains and which in turn feed directly into the Transport Planning Professional – TPP – qualification. We need to reach out and ensure that those apprentices are recruited as widely as possible, and TPS shares this aim with the other bodies representing transport and land use planners.

I also see many of the issues I have raised reflected in the papers for this year’s TPM so I know I am not alone in my concerns. I hope my thoughts have stimulated your own thinking and look forward to discussing them further, not just in this session but throughout the conference and beyond.

Keith Buchan, TPS Director of Skills, 30th June 2016 at TPM Plenary Session