CONSIDERATIONS IN ESTABLISHING SUITABLE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES OF TRANSPORT PLANNERS

A Professional Framework for Transport Planning

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Background

Practitioners in any field need standards by which performance can be judged and by which quality can be recognised. In most fields a professional qualification identifies this standard. As we approach the end of the century, the quality of transport planning has become critical as never before. A crucially difficult balance is to be struck between economic, social, environmental and other objectives. As yet, however, there is no clear professional framework for such decision-making.

Historically, a common path for recruitment of transport planners has been the ranks of civil engineers and, more recently, the specialist postgraduate MSc courses provided by universities.

Many employers, with consultants and local and national authorities, have, however, begun to look for other first degree graduates who are possibly more able but who have little or no training in transport planning. As a result, many transport planners today have a background in mathematics, geography, economics, operational research and the arts. Graduates of these subjects do not perceive themselves as engineers, yet until recently membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers was still seen by many in the UK as the most appropriate route for professional qualifications in transport planning. This can no longer be the case, partly because of this dilution of identity with ICE but also because transport planning is not just about infrastructure design and construction. It is also about cost-benefit trade-off, understanding and managing demand and user behaviour, economic appraisal, finance and the environment.

A number of those concerned with the practice of transport planning have consequently been discussing the possibility of a clearer framework for the training of new entrants to the field, and indeed the continuing professional development of practitioners. Interest has also been expressed in the scope that may exist for a new professional body to be created to meet a need that appears to be currently unsatisfied by any other institution. Some form of association may be appropriate, complementing the existing institutions but offering a route for practitioners to become recognised in their field, to achieve professional status, irrespective of their academic background, and to act as a focus for discussion of current issues and good practice.

This paper describes the purpose of deliberation that led to the publication of a constitution document on the above themes in early 1995.

The June 1994 seminar

In order to explore the background issues of concern further, a seminar for leading practitioners in the field was held in London in June 1994, with some seventy people attending. The main findings were:

Transportation planning is a broad "profession" encompassing many diverse disciplines; it should not be associated only with engineering issues and infrastructure provision;

- the existing institutions have encouraged only those transport planners with "appropriate" academic backgrounds - many of the "new" generations are effectively "homeless";
- a transport planning forum of some kind is required to provide a single voice for the profession and address immediate issues;
- something must be done and (although debate has continued for some years) now is the right time to act;
- the practical difficulties of setting up and running a new body, possibly further fragmenting the profession, needs to be recognised;
- the role of the new National Vocational Qualifications in giving a professional qualification and a common measure of quality needs to be considered;
- some form of task force is needed to develop, independent of the existing institutions, proposals for change - there then should be wide consultation on these proposals;
- the needs of younger members of the profession needs to be taken into account - they should be instrumental in the continuing debate.

Preparation and content of the consultation document

An eleven-strong Working Party was subsequently established and first met in September 1994, with representatives from local government, academia, consultancies and other organisations. Its objectives were to develop the ideas put forward at the seminar, identify the needs of the profession and investigate the extent to which these needs are being met by the existing institutions and organisations.

The pare presents the results of the Working Party's further research and discussion. Its sets out a brief history of transport planning in the UK and assesses the changes now affecting the profession. The professional needs of transport planners are set out against this background, leading to proposals as to the role of professional bodies in the future. Comments are made on the activities of the existing bodies in the field and how they are reacting to change.

The culmination of the document is the identification of the key issues and the options which exist for their resolution. The intention has been to seek the widest possible consultation on these proposals among UK transport planning professionals in order to achieve a consensus on the way forward.

Towards a definition of transport planning

First, it is important that there is clarity and agreement as to what is meant by transport planning. A concise definition is, however, difficult to achieve. One definition is:

"Transport planning is concerned with the analysis and evaluation of past, present and prospective problems associated with the demand for movement of people, goods and information in the context of economic, social, land use and technological developments and of relevant community aspirations. It is the mechanism for balancing the needs for accessibility and environmental, social and private costs of transport, leading to the development of policies and projects which can be implemented to society's advantage."

This definition, prepared by the Working Party, attempts to encapsulate the wide range of issues that are relevant to transport planning today. It is interesting to compare this with the definition from a standard text of the 1970s:

"Transport planning seeks the optimum quality, timing and allocation of transport investment in support of specific economic development goals."
(Techniques of Transport Planning, Meyer, 1971)

And also with a UK government-inspired manpower planning study of the same era:

"Transport planing is the overall (transport) planning process including strategic and tactical planning of transport in the context of land use and economic planning."
(Transport Planning: The Men for the Job, Lady Sharp, 1970)

The first of these earlier definitions serves to illustrate how the view of transport planning has changed over the last 25 years. The second is equally concise, yet conveys the wider framework, suggesting that many of the views now being expressed about transport planning are not new, and confirming that the debate has indeed continued for some years.

The Sharp Report was commissioned by the then Ministry of Transport Barbara Castle in 1970 to research the manpower needs in transport planning and, in particular, the problems of local authorities in grappling with the emerging issues of urban transport planning. The report covered manpower availability, calibre, qualifications, training and organisation, and made recommendations as to what needed to be done.

It is probably debatable how much the subsequent change and development in universities and local authorities flowed from Sharp's proposals. But it is clear that many issues raised in the report concerning the inter-disciplinary nature of transport planning remains of concern today - and largely unresolved.

The Sharp Report called for a Transport Planning Centre as a focus for training, but this did not extend to the creation of a body along the lines of existing institutions. Relatively little has been achieved since to give transport planning greater professional recognition. This can only be due to the fact either that the issue is not sufficiently important to merit action and change, or that the existing institutional structure has failed to accommodate the needs of transport planners. It is the latter that is the focus of this paper.

The post war performance of transport planning in the UK

The national transport infrastructure in Britain has been extensively changed and developed over the last fifty years in response to technological, industrial and social change. On the streets, trolley buses have gone and trams almost disappeared in the 1960s, to return in the 1990s. The Beeching Report in the 1960s saw the national railway system truncated by almost 50% and London's pre-eminence as Europe's greatest port has been ceded to Rotterdam. The road system has developed and a national motorway network has been constructed. However, the additional capacity has been outstripped by the ninefold increase in road traffic, and the need for extensive widening and repairs has cast doubts on the planning process.

Travel behaviour has changed even faster that the network of infrastructure and services offered. Public transport's share of passenger travel has fallen from over 60% to around 10% and the use of buses is now less than half as much as it was in the late forties. On the other hand, air travel has grown and airport capacity expanded, although rarely in good time. Many would argue that the choice of location of new airport capacity has been flawed.

In the 1950s and 1960s transport planning was invariably engineering-led and dominated by meeting demand, especially for road traffic. The task of planners was mainly to forecast future demand and then design the capacity improvements needed to meet this most cost-effectively.

Expanding capacity was not the only objective, however, and transport planners in the UK must be fairly credited with a strong commitment to improving standards of design and system safety. The UK's road safety record over this period is worthy of recognition and is exemplified by the reduction in fatalities from 6,400 in 1944 to 3,800 in 1993, despite the increase in both traffic and population. This concern with road safety was linked to developments in traffic engineering in which the UK exhibited international excellence. However, this achievement has often been at the expense of accessibility, particularly on foot and in densely trafficked areas; pedestrian safety has improved much less that that of motorists.

The conventional approach to transport planning was brought into question in the early 1960s with the publication of the Buchanan and Smeed reports. The first exposed the conflict between accessibility,

investment and the capacity of the built environment. The second argued the practicability of electronic road pricing. Since then there has been a growing recognition amongst many, but not all, transport planners that expanding capacity cannot form all, or even part, of the solution to the country's transport problems and environmental and social considerations must be weighted in the balance. More recently, there has been a growing rediscovery of the fact that dealing with transport problems must involve some influence over the pattern of activities which give rise to the need for transport, especially the spatial disposition of activities and the nature of human social behaviour.

The "transport planning profession" has been developing during this momentous transport era and its gestation cannot be divorced from the causes and consequences of our recent difficulties. It can be argued that transport planners clung too long to outmoded ideas of capacity-oriented solutions, failed to persuade policy-makers to take a longer term view and looked too narrowly at the issues.

The professionals involved too often saw transport challenge in terms of what they had traditionally to offer, rather than what was needed in today's and tomorrow's societies. They have been slow to embrace issues, such as the environment or demand management, which did not fit easily with their professional traditions or involved compromises in the way in which they related to the wider political and policy-making process.

The picture, however, has not been all bleak. The Buchanan and Smeed reports signalled the need for new approaches to dealing with transport problems. The Urban Motorways Committee (1972, 1973) recognised the need to respect the urban fabric in building new roads whilst the recent recognition by the main related professional bodies of the need for effective demand management is a further indication of a more catholic and progressive approach. Professionals at the "sharp end" of policy, particular those in local government, have meanwhile developed new practical approaches to issues such as public transport planning, traffic calming and accident reduction.

Many of the failings of post war transport planning cannot be fairly placed on the shoulders of the professionals. The enduring political reluctance to face up to the need to restrict the growth of road traffic, the sluggishness in introducing relatively "pain free" policies such as emission controls and the ideological pursuit of some philosophies in the transport sector cannot be attributed to the professionals but to the politicians they advised and to the emphasis always on the short term. Nevertheless, transport professionals are somewhat trained by these policies and this increases the need for them to get their professional house in full order and to offer an effective input to the ongoing debate.

The shortcomings in the performance of transport planners over the last few decades can be argued to be due, at least in part, to the absence of a coherent and effective transport planning profession. This has meant that too often those who have found themselves cast in transport planning mould have approached this task with sets of skills and values which have not collectively added up to good quality transport planning or been in tune with relevant community aspirations. The apparent absence of coherent transport policies in many instances may have been the result.

The nature of activity has necessarily been forward-looking and solution-orientated and therefore satisfied one of those requirements of planning. However, it has also suffered from being too narrow (for example, matching future demand with additional capacity, which is to be found in most areas of engineering).

Where these deficiencies have occurred, policy decisions have still had to be made to resolve conflicts and offer solutions and the professional void filled by a lay approach. This has also resulted from impact of public opinion. Whilst planners have increasingly grasped the importance of public consultation, often schemes and policies have been revised to reflect what is acceptable to the minority, to the detriment of rational transport planning and the disbenefit of society overall.

The future of transport planning

The "predict and provide" approach, which has characterised transport planning until recently, is rapidly being overtaken by a "demand management" approach. This is more than a simple technical advancement, and prompts the need for a re-appraisal of the role of transport in society, and the means by which it is planned. This re-appraisal needs to be robust, especially in the context of the current move towards "sustainable" transport policies, and must secure a sustainable balance between environmental, social and economic objectives.

The way of meeting the pattern of demand to be provided for will in future thus be a matter of choice, and not merely one of meeting forecasts resulting from observation of past trends. The full consequences of this shift will take time to emerge, but some changes in transport planning can already be seen:

Decisions about how much to provide of what will need justification in terms of explicit policy objectives. This will mean a more "value-driven" approach in which engineering and conventional methods of project appraisal will continue to be important, but will perhaps not dominate the extent that they have in the past. Transport planning will continue to be closely determined by political choice, and long term considerations will be dependent on the achievement of greater political consensus;

Seeking out policies and projects which are practical, affordable and acceptable will require much greater understanding of the factors influencing demand and its various impacts on society, the economy and the environment. This will involve a wider range of disciplines that has traditionally been involved in transport planning. Examples might be psychological (behavioural factors), marketing specialists (awareness and promotion campaigns), environmental scientists (strategic environmental appraisal), sociologists and demographers (the impact of changing work and family patterns);

There will need to be an integrated approach to transport, and a fuller understanding of what "integrated" means. It will certainly involve new procedures for trying land use and transport planning together in pursuit of common objectives. Recent UK Government Planning Policy Guidance notes, especially PPG6 (town centres) and PPG13 (transport), are examples of "value-driven" rather that "forecast-driven" policy documents. There will also be greater integration between modes of travel and between the planning, funding and operational process. The "package" approach to public sector project funding within local areas is a sign of this change;

There will need to be new types of training. For example, how many traffic engineers have had training in traffic calming techniques, or in provision for pedestrians or cyclists? How many have any skill in urban design or environmental appraisal? How many town planners understand the travel consequences of location decision?

There are important organisational developments affecting transport including, for example, European integration and harmonisation, policy oriented taxation (eco taxes and road pricing), private sector involvement and the consequential development of contracting, franchising, partnership, market regulation and deregulation;

Wider awareness of transport "impact" will mean more multi-sectoral involvement. An example is the requirement of local health agencies to consider transport impact on health in order to help meet nationally determined health targets. Education bodies will also be more involved in accessibility issues. And centralisation of facilities in the health, education and other sectors has a consequence of increasing travel demand;

The burgeoning developments in information technology are likely to transform not only the technical operation of all modes of travel, but may also effect the urban and social patterns which transport serves. Planning for the movement of people and goods can no longer ignore the impact of changes in the efficiency of movement of information and images;

These are some of the changes in transport which seem likely to require a realignment of professional interests and organisations. One thing is clear - the notion that transport planners should be either chartered engineers or town planners is fast becoming obsolete.

The activities of existing bodies in the field

Because of widespread impact of transport planning at both the general and modal-specific levels there are a number of professional bodies, trade associations and learned societies with an interest in the field. This is a healthy reflection of the diverse nature of the subject and illustrates the difficulty of attempting to establish an exclusive professional body in the field. Some of the organisations with an interest (for example, the Transport Studies Society) have a limited learned society role; others (for example, the British Parking Association) combine a learned society and trade organisation role but only in a limited and well-defined part of the subject area; and others (for example, the County Surveyors' Society) represent professionals with some responsibility for the general function of transport planning.

A number of senior professional associations (for example, the Royal institute of Chartered Surveyors and Institution of Mechanical Engineers) include matters of significance to transport planners within their bailiwick and there are a number of pressure groups (for example, Transport 2000) which take a keen and active interest in the subject. All of these bodies have a legitimate interest in transport planning but none can be described as having a central role in the professional aspects of the subject.

The Working party considers there are four professional bodies with a direct and substantial interest in the transport planning profession in the UK. These are (in no particular order):

- The Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT);
- The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE);
- The Chartered Institute of Transport (CIT); and
- The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

Within these bodies there is naturally a range of views as to how actively they should seek to embrace transport planning as this inevitably has consequences for the balance of their activities and priorities. Whilst there are strong factors within each arguing for a greater recognition of transport planners outside the traditional range of skills of their members, there also those that argue this could lead to a dilution of standards and the primary definition of the professional activity they represent. This is an important debate, especially for those bodies responsible for professional accreditation and standards. In the case of the ICE there is a move towards unification of the engineering profession as a whole and this could have a bearing on its ability to accept transport planners as corporate members.

Institution of Highways and Transportation

The IHT was founded in the early 1930s as the Institution of Highways Engineers. It does not confer chartered status on its members and was originally mainly concerned with highways construction and, more recently, with traffic engineering. It is now concerned more widely with the safe operation of transport infrastructure, including its design, provision and maintenance.

The IHT has a strong branch structure and, although the majority of members are engineers, is open to people with a wide range of backgrounds as long as they are working in the highways and transportation field. The organisation has an active Transportation Board, and has been the prime mover in the development of the Transport Planning NVQ.

Institution of Civil Engineers

The ICE was founded in 1817 and is the oldest and most senior of the engineering professions. It can confer chartered status on its corporate members and has a long-established and well-developed professional examination system. Since the 1960s, the ICE has recognised transport engineering as a legitimate aspect of its remit, although usually from a rather traditional engineering viewpoint. Of late the ICE has made a further move to widen its doors to non-membership participation by professionals who do not have a conventional engineering grounding by joining one of its specialist groups. The ICE's corporate members are exclusively engineers, though transportation is a recognised specialism.

Chartered Institute of Transport

The CIT was founded in 1919 (the same year as the Ministry of Transport) and is exclusively concerned with transport matters. Most of its members are drawn from the transport industry. Whereas traditionally it has been mainly concerned with transport operations and management, it now comments extensively on transport infrastructure issues that are subject of current debate. It has a strong branch network in the UK and nearly half of its 20,000 membership is outside the UK.

The CIT is an examining body which confers chartered status upon its Members (MCITs) and Fellows (FCITs). The examination system provides means for entry by transport planners and engineers.

Royal Town Planning Institute

The RTPI was founded in 1914 and is the professional body responsible for the town and country planning profession. It is chartered and confers chartered status on suitable qualified individuals. Originally very much concerned with land use planning it has become increasingly involved with economic, environmental and social issues and with transportation because of its importance to how settlements operate. Not surprisingly it also has a strong interest in environmental issues raised by transport.

Comment

All four of these bodies have been ready to recognise the importance of transport planning as a profession and have strong claims to be involved in the professional scene. Each has its own particular strengths, but it is fair to conclude that the range of interest of any one does not fully cover the scope and range of professional contributions to the full panoply of contemporary transport planning process.

Cooperation between these bodies on transport planning matters has been limited, focusing on the Road Transport Forum and the development of new NVQ, though this has not involved RTPI to any extent. Links have been stronger at the local rather than national level, and joint meetings to address transport topics take place from time to time.

The professional needs of the new generation of transport planners

With change in transport planning on such a large scale, transport planners will need to develop and adapt in a similar fashion. In order to consider the professional needs of today's and tomorrow's transport planners, the Working Party circulated a brief questionnaire to "young" members of staff in some local authorities, public sector transport authorities, consultancies and academic institutions. This was not intended to be a fully comprehensive survey, but to provide guidance in understanding perceived professional needs.

The majority of the 150 respondents were under 30 years of age, reflecting the emphasis on the future . The responses also indicated that transport planners as a group are highly skilled, with qualifications in engineering, economics, mathematics, geography, environmental sciences, transport-related studies and town planning. Over 50% of respondents were qualified to MSc level or above - with most of these qualifications in transport-related areas. Most of the other respondents were qualified to degree level.

Of those citing a specific subject at degree / diploma level as their academic background, over 30% were educated in engineering, over 20% in geography or environmental studies, 26% in economics or mathematics, 15% in transport-related studies and 6% in town planning. Over 190 separate qualifications were shared among the respondents.

Transport planners also seem to work in a wide variety of transport-related fields, including public transport planning, transport modelling, traffic management, highway planning and engineering, policy and land-use planning. Many are members of existing institutions, with CIT (23%) and IHT (22%) being the most popular, followed by ICE (14%) and RTPI (6%). However, 31% of the respondents were not members of any institution. Many respondents were multiple members of the main organisations - 94 respondents with 128 memberships.

Regarding aspects not well-served, the main response, making up around 50% of all comments, indicated that current organisations do not relate well to the profession of transport planning. Other comments included the need for improved promotion of the profession, and the need for improved training and career development.

The areas of greatest perceived need were identified as follows (in descending order of importance):

- Education and training
- Access to technical information
- Qualifications and chartered status
- Liaison with other professionals
- Career structure and professional development

Although some of these aspects are dealt with well by existing institutional bodies, for some areas of transport profession there is concern about the relevance of training to the profession and access to relevant technical information.

Education and training

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of academic courses becoming available to transport planners. A number of new undergraduate and postgraduate courses have been added to the established MSc and MA courses. The range of disciplines within transport planning is such that these courses, though offering a solid base in the principles of transport planning, do not represent direct entry routes to professional accreditation as is the case in some other professions. Furthermore, although the courses each have a separate external examiners, there is no one body providing a vetting or validating role. A system of recognition of certain academic qualifications as part of a route to professional accreditation is desirable.

The degree qualifications held by those working in transport planning are widespread. The range of qualifications will increase as new technologies and disciplines become integrated in the transport field. The changing nature of transport planning has led away from what might be seen as its original home, that of an engineering-led discipline, to a more multi-disciplined profession incorporating ideas and solutions from numerous sources. Such changes have caused many of those entering the profession to feel homeless with a limited sense of belonging or desire for qualification or accreditation to the existing professional bodies. What is required is a body that is applicable to all working in the field, offering a high standard of professionalism which recent or future entrants to the profession can identify with and wish to belong to. Such a body should be free of restrictions placed on transport planners who do not fit the mould of engineers or town planners, whilst also being attractive to those who do.

Access to technical information

There is considerable support for improving the dissemination of recent advances in transport planning in a way that deals with transport issues from the perspective of new and fresh transport agenda and provides the basis for well informed debate and training. Suggested methods include:

- Technical papers and journals (such as TPS) - which reflect the views of the wide church of transport profession
- Seminars - which are not seen as reflecting one or other of the "vested interests" of transport profession
- Guidance and standards - the existing institutions produce guidelines and standards on a limited range of topics and this practice needs to be extended and made consistent

Qualifications and chartered status

There is widespread concern about the ability to achieve chartered status via recognised qualifications and institutional membership. This relates to the concern that the existing institutions do not relate well to the transport planning profession. It is also reflected in the wide range of skills and entry qualifications apparent amongst the profession. Any future arrangements would need to reflect this broad range of backgrounds, whilst recognising the core knowledge required for transport planning.

As further dimension to the area of education and training, the current regime for transport planning provides for no peer group review of the competence or skill acquisition of practitioners who seek chartered equivalent status outside the procedures of existing institutions which are primarily directed to different ends.

Liaison with other professionals

One of the main reasons for the current debate is the expanding variety of disciplines contained within the transport planning profession, and the inability of the existing organisational framework to cater for the needs of the emerging transport professional. Consequently, a continuing theme through all future considerations has to be the need to enable a true dialogue across some of the more traditional professional divides, and to provide a professional framework which can cater for the needs of all contributors to the profession. An improvement in the overall quality and competence within transport planning should result.

Career structure and professional development

A significant proportion of professional development for transport planners occurs on the job, with varying degrees of assistance from employers. Some companies offer clearly structured career development for engineering-related subjects, but for transport planners such a structured approach appears to be the exception rather than the norm. One of the main reasons for this is that the nature of the work undertaken by transport planners varies widely, making it more difficult to develop a single programme to meet the needs of those seeking a long term future in this field. A variety of schemes do exist and have been examined in order to assess what is required and demanded by the future transport professionals (Walpole, 1993).

Good experience can be gained from on the job training. However, it is often restricted to the range of work being undertaken by an individual organisation. A national system establishing a level of competence in a range of transportation fields is required for what is now a multi-disciplined profession. A system to establish levels of competence for those practising in the field would promote and protect all concerned. The initiative currently being promoted for a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Transport

Planning may fulfil this requirement. However, the need to protect individual organisations against costly and bureaucratic training requirements should be stressed and the need to provide "top-up" training emphasised. The profession is dynamic and continual development and dissemination of information on new techniques and technologies will become increasingly more relevant in the future.

The role of professional bodies as we enter the 21st Century

On the evidence of the albeit limited survey of transport planners and of views expressed at the June 1994 seminar, there appears to be a considerable groundswell of opinion that it should be the professional bodies in the field that should evolve and develop in order to satisfy the needs of transport planners in the future. But a considerable change has already been taking place in the role and organisational framework of professional bodies through the latter part of the twentieth century. After a period in which organisation theory encouraged the development of large consolidated bodies spanning wide umbrella areas, with the disappearance of many smaller specialist institutions, the underlying tendency has changed somewhat.

prompted particularly by the emergence of new technologies, areas of technological change and different social and economic priorities, a range of new style institutions has begun to emerge. These bodies range from highly specialist "networks", without the traditional role of validating qualifications and policing entry to professions, to multi-discipline groups which often provide a complementary focus to the more traditional professional affiliations that many of those belonging will continue to hold. For some, the new-look organisations provide the main, or only, professional "home". For others, they offer a "second home".

Not surprisingly, the existing dominant institutions have been inclined to see these new look bodies as a "threat" and even seek to subsume them into their own traditional establishment, often coupling their views with their other pressing need to maximise the use of their administrative organisations and infrastructure. There is a danger, however, that this reaction represents a defence of the traditional organisation *per se* (and the interests of current leaderships), rather than a recognition of the needs of the membership in their changing day-to-day roles, and of society in general.

The sort of professional framework that appears to best meet the needs of transport planners can be characterised by the following:

- an ability to recognise a variety of "first degree holders" and other entry qualifications, for example from those making mid-career changes;
- an "openness" of structure to facilitate debate on emerging professional issues and to recognise the contribution of younger members (often with the greatest relevant experience of new ideas and applications):
- a full democratic "ownership" (with fluidity of "control" between leading individuals);
- an emphasis on information exchange (by both traditional and electronic media);
- an ability (and enthusiasm) to embrace inter-disciplinary links with other bodies;
- an approachable, less formal, and flexible image (in comparison with existing institutions);
- an involvement in policy debates without the adoption of formal "positions", but influencing decision-making through individual members' actions;
- the availability of a process which offers professional accreditation to those who seek it, but which does not lead to restrictions on affiliation.

Whilst "traditional" institutions can, and indeed do, play some of the above roles, their structure, history (and nature of "incumbent" membership) militate against this to a greater or lesser extent. Some conflicts appear to be unavoidable as they also try to relate to the substantial "corporatisation" of the main macro professional fields like engineering, architecture and planning. At the same time, large top-level professional umbrellas often appear unable to reflect the rapid emergence of new fields of professional activity and find great difficulty in bringing the "gaps" between each other.

As far as society as a whole is concerned, the sustainability and effectiveness of the institutions will increasingly be judged by their perceived ability to address the issues of the moment in a relevant way - and to co-operate in seeking solutions to them. Without this their status and authority will inevitably decline.

Experience from Overseas

A review of the professional framework for transport planners in a selection of other countries has been carried out to examine how they differ from those currently in existence in the UK.

Netherlands

There is no special organisation or institution especially for traffic and transportation engineers and planners in the Netherlands. Professionals seem happy to join larger, more general institutions to develop their activities, as well as represent their professions in public. All qualified engineers (BSc. BEng. of all engineering disciplines) can join:

(i) KIVI	Royal Institution of Engineers, open to all engineers with a university degree.
(ii) NIRIA	National Institution of Engineers, open to all engineers with a degree equivalent to that of UK polytechnic.

Germany

Qualified engineers can join large institutions such as the VDI (association of German Engineers). The VSVT Association of Highways and Transportation Engineers is very similar to the IHT in the UK with its emphasis on local meetings. The FGSV, the Research Association for Highways and Transportation can be seen as a combination of the UK's ICE and Transport Research Laboratory, but it is not an organisation exclusively concerned with transport issues.

France

Transport planning is not represented by a single institution but by a combination of engineering and planning institutions. There is an institution for civil engineers, the Societe National des Ingenieurs et des Scientifiques de France, which is comparable, although less significant than, the ICE. The equivalent institution to the RTPI in France is the Societe Francais Des Urbanistes. This encompasses urban transport planning.

USA

There appears to be similar growth and trends in the American transport planning profession to that presently occurring in the UK. The following organisations have been established at national levels:

- Institute of Transportation Engineers - has an engineering focus, but it has now established councils to take account of the needs of transport planners;
- American Planning Association - a general planning organisation, but there is a recognition of the specific needs of transport professionals;
- American Society of Civil Engineers - many transport planners with an engineering background are members of the organisation;
- Women's Transportation Seminar - established to facilitate the exchange of views of women in transport.

Australia

The Institute of Engineers (IE Aust) and the Chartered Institute of Transport in Australia (CIT) have similar roles to their UK counterparts. The Australian Institute of Traffic Planning and Management (AITPM) has adopted the philosophy of members sharing working experiences and interests (rather than academic qualifications). Its objectives include: the promotion of the positive aspects of traffic and transport planning and management; the fostering of research; the provision of a central point of reference for members; and ensuring that membership becomes a prerequisite for working in the profession.

Experience from overseas: conclusions

In general terms, the experience from overseas is not helpful to this debate. It suggests that transport planners join either planning or engineering professional institutions. In some countries, however, such as the USA and Australia, there have been some moves to cater specifically for transport planners' needs. In the USA, this has been through the adaptation of the existing planning and engineering institutions, while in Australia a separate institute (the AITPM) has been formed.

There also seems to be a basic difference between European institutes and those in English speaking countries, in that elsewhere in Europe the approach of reaching professional standards (chartership) through postgraduate study is less widespread. University degrees are generally considered to be an adequate professional qualification in themselves. European professional institutes serve more ass a forum for the exchange of ideas.

Issues and options

The previous sections have sought to explore in more depth the issues raised at the June 1994 seminar. The research carried out by the Working Party has helped identify the thinking of those currently building careers in transport planning. A number of proposals and considerations have emerged in response to the key question - is there a gap in the way that the existing institutions cater for transport planners and, if so, what needs to be done to fill the gap?

There is undoubted confusion over which of the existing institution best meets the needs of transport planners. The very fact that the institutions have all responded to the debate raised by this initiative, stating that transport planners are welcome in their institution and furthermore that they are willing to examine their entry requirements in order to accommodate such membership, confirms the level of confusion and the overlap that exists. To some extent this is not surprising. Transport planning is a broad profession with roots in many disciplines and, in terms of the traditional institutions, is relatively new.

Some would question whether any single organisation can ever satisfy the needs of all transport planners when these will be disparate and diverse. But that is not the key proposition to accept or reject. There is evidence already of an informal transport planning network. Transport planners form diverse disciplines come together from time to time in response to ad hoc events such as lectures, seminars, training courses, anniversaries and workshops. The June 1994 seminar was one such occasion.

So the existence of a "gap" and the need for some new mechanism to fill it is apparent, in the view of the Working Party. But another institution modelled along existing lines, is not required. Such an organisation would almost certainly not be viable in commercial terms. Nor would it be sufficiently flexible to meet transport planners' needs as they change over time and in response to the changing environment.

Instead, transport planners want an organisation with a different character that they can belong to, which is relevant and which has as its focus training, education and dissemination of good transport planning practice. Such a body could develop a reputation which could enable it to become a respected national voice - this is not simply the preserve of big budget organisations which often find it hard to react to change by the nature of their own structure.

As well as a "home" and a "voice" for transport planners, a new body is required to liase with the universities and to advise on the content and suitability of transport planning education, be this at first or second degree level. It would similarly promote on the job postgraduate training in the work place, preparing transport planners to become experienced professionals abreast of new thinking and practices. Not least, a new body would devote time and energy to informing a much wider population, especially in schools, about transport planning issues in relation to a sustainable environment.

A new body would be complimentary to the existing institutions. It would not be a choice simply of joining a new organisation with specific interests in transport planning, whilst remaining a member of one of the "traditional" institutions. There would also perhaps be a difference in membership and entry requirements. The Working Party's view of the kind of transport planning organisation required is that it could be one that is open to anyone with an interest in the field, whether or not they have a "relevant" qualification. A shared interest and a concern for good practice will be the issues that bind the membership.

Yet many of those who wish to join such an organisation will have a requirement for professional recognition. If the organisation is to be effective in this respect it will need to satisfy the demands of this section of its membership by providing a route to a recognised level of experience, competence and professional status. This would build naturally on the organisation's function in promoting relevant educational qualifications and quality postgraduate training in the work place.

It is the Working Party's view that it is possible that transport planning NVQ, currently undergoing a practical pilot test, may meet this requirement in part, but as yet this is unproven. The development of a transport planning NVQ level 5 - one currently under preparation - is meanwhile further confirmation that there is a gap in the professional accreditation structure.

It is too early to tell whether the NVQ proposal will be successful and be popular with aspiring transport planners. But whether or not it is a success is unlikely to be relevant to the debate over the need for a new organisation for transport planners. If the NVQ is successful then a new organisation will give it added weight by giving a stamp of approval and embracing the NVQ training programme. If the NVQ initiative fails, then a new organisation may need to develop its own training programme, probably along the lines of that already developed in practice in some of the leading transport planning consultancies in the UK and perhaps through liaison with the wider tertiary education community.

A new organisation is therefore likely to require an accreditation role. For this it could create a panel of "professionals" to judge a candidate's experience against specific criteria. A training programme, possibly based on the "Chilver points" type system, would be appropriate in measuring performance and comparing candidates' experience against expected levels of attainment and good practice.

In the same way that the organisation would liase with universities over training content, it would also establish a directory of courses in order to provide guidance those seeking training and career in the profession. By taking this role, the organisation would also promote change and encourage those responsible for training and education to respond to new initiatives and to change their approach and course content accordingly. The existing institutions fulfil this role to varying degrees, but none of them do so for transport planners.

A situation is therefore envisaged whereby a new transport planning body will assist in directing training and subsequently in validating achievement and experience. Members of staff who currently pass through the training courses operated by WS Atkins and Oscar Faber TPA, for example, are recognised within those organisations as having achieved a certain level of competence. A formal transport planning organisation would serve to give that achievement a wider recognition, making the qualification effectively transferable within the profession and raising the status of practitioners among "clients" of transport planning services.

The proposed new organisation would require an administration and a secretariat. The emphasis, however, must be on a slim-line approach with the minimum of bureaucracy. This objective is probably shared by the

existing institutions. But the Working Party is firm in its view that the gap that exists does not create room for another institution on the conventional style. Membership fees must be correspondingly modest. For that fee, members would have access to a network, the opportunity to join debates and to receive news and guidance on relevant interests, probably through the existing medium of magazines and newsletters, but also by taking advantage of new technology and communication media as they develop. Services could be charged for as consumed.

Conclusion: the way forward

These proposals suggest a possible way forward. They are not definitive and the full consequences are yet to be thought through in some respects. The proposals are for discussion and for debate. If there was an easy answer then it would have been thought of already.

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