

ADEPT Engineering Board update – January 2020

At its meeting at the Department for Transport's headquarters on Friday 17th January, the ADEPT Engineering Board welcomed back Paul Chandler who is leading the implementation of 'Street Manager'. Street Manager is a new digital service that the DfT hopes will transform the planning, management and communication of street and road works through open data and intelligent services to minimise disruption and improve journeys for the public. Some local highway authorities are working with the DfT to test the system which will formally go live at the beginning of April. However, question marks still remain about its ability to cope when it goes live and requested that the system distinguish between local highway authorities' work and that of developers.

Members of the Board then discussed the organisational resilience of their respective authorities. Many were investing additional funds into highway infrastructure maintenance but the difficulty in recruiting staff in technical areas was a common theme – many were either 'growing their own', using career progression schemes or reliant on apprentices to plug the gaps.

Kent and Suffolk County Councils gave a brief update on the latest on their Live Labs whilst Hannah Bartram gave an overview of progress for the others, citing the importance of having a project manager in place. ADEPT is looking at the successful start to Live Labs to strengthen the case for seeking further DfT funding for different programmes.

Will Britain and Suzanne Ingham attended as guests from the Local Councils Roads Innovation Group (LCRIG). Will described how Blackpool's 'Project 30' work to enhance its local road network through planned investment had morphed into 'Project Amber' – working in a different way with the highways sector in general to retain Blackpool's network in amber condition or better. Many more authorities were joining LCRIG, some of whom were looking to replicate the principles of Project Amber at a local level.

The DfT then provided an update, primarily focused on future funding. This covered the soon-to-be-announced outcome of the latest Challenge Fund bidding round, a further £50m Pothole Action Fund for 2020/21 and testing with Ministers the retention of the self-assessment questionnaire for Incentive Fund allocations. The Board also discussed the implications of the Conservative Election Manifesto pledge to invest an extra £500m per year for four years into 'potholes' (in its interpreted wider sense) and how this aligned with the current £1bn combined Needs-Based and Incentive Fund annual allocation. The Board pledged its support to assist DfT officials in the preparation for the March 2020 budget (as well as the Comprehensive Spending Review) and the MHCLG in discussions over 'tree-lined streets'. Funding allocation letters for 2020/21 would follow the March budget.