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RLG update

● Codes of Practice for the UKRLG are under review. The objective is to update advice in the codes to reflect current developments in the sector and give ways in which practitioners can deliver efficiencies and link their work to new approaches to funding.

The Codes of Practice will place an emphasis on a risk based approach to decision making in highway maintenance, further develop sections on network hierarchy and focus on resilience. For those with questions or case studies to share there is more information available on the UKRLG website.

A series of workshops is being held in England, Scotland and Wales at the present time. The workshops offer participants the opportunity to express their views on the review and influence the contents of the codes.

● Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) – has launched a new street lighting toolkit to give UK councils the means to save millions. Councils using the toolkit and investing in LED lighting look set to pay less for electricity in 25 years' time than they do now.

Asset management gets a boost from e-learning

A more robust approach to highway infrastructure asset management is expected through a new Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme e-learning toolkit. This is designed to help authorities fully embed asset management, reports Justin Ward.



Everyone involved in highways asset management is encouraged to consider the new toolkit

The importance of good asset management is currently well recognised with guidance, toolkits, incentives and examples of good practice available to support robust implementation. Now a new e-learning toolkit is being rolled out to further promote effective and efficient progress.

What follows is a discussion with some of the key people involved with the development of the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP) e-learning toolkit:



Matthew Lugg (ML), director of public services at Mouchel. Seconded to the Department for Transport as a special advisor to support HMEP, where he pushed for the development of the e-toolkit.



Lila Tachtsi (LT), director of asset management at Atkins, of the e-learning project and also of a commission reviewing the UKRLG Codes of Practice.



Henry Nkwanga (HN), a highway asset management engineer at Atkins, responsible for developing the content of the e-learning tool.

Justin Ward (JW): Why was a decision made to develop an e-learning toolkit?

ML: HMEP recognised early on that asset management was a key area to deliver a more efficient and effective maintenance service and therefore we looked to provide further support to the local highway sector.

Original guidance on highway asset management was first produced in 2005 but as time moved on this became out of date. A lot of work has been undertaken on valuation, lifecycle planning and deterioration modelling tools. There was a recognised need to produce new guidance and this led to the development of the HMEP/UKRLG Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Guidance (published in 2013). This provided a step change as it was a more comprehensive document for local highway authorities.

But producing guidance in itself is not enough and I strongly believed that to embed asset management within an organisation further support would be needed. I recognised

the benefit in e-learning as a new approach to training as you can make it available to a large number of people.

JW: The toolkit will support practitioners using HMEP/UKRLG Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Guidance – has the implementation of this been lacking?

LT: Yes, the context is important and it is good to recognise that this asset management training is not self standing and that it really helps people understand and use the guidance.

ML: It is difficult to know uptake. What I would say is the new guidance will most likely have been taken forward by specialists in asset management but not disseminated or embedded more widely. Asset management needs to be aligned to corporate objectives and link to operational delivery.

JW: Does this build on work by the Highways Agency?

ML: Yes, the Highways Agency has produced an e-learning toolkit and the development of the HMEP product took account of this.

HN: This toolkit is more focused on local authority networks. A Reference Group made up of stakeholders from the wider sector has been helpful with reviewing the material. The Reference Group constitutes HTMA, HA, CIHT and UK Roads Board./ADEPT Asset Management Group.

LT: I would like to thank all members of the reference group for their support and the Highways Agency for sharing material with us.

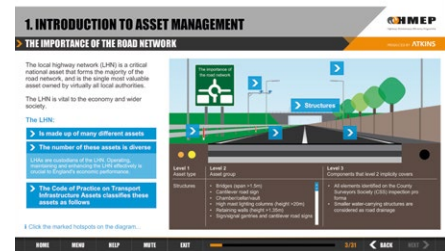
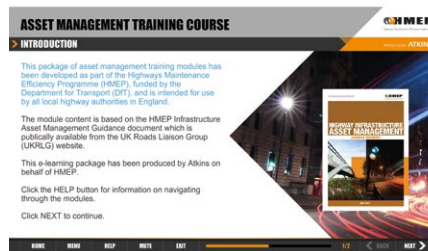
JW: How does the toolkit work?

HN: There are five modules which are as follows:
 1. Introduction to Asset Management
 2. Policy, Strategy and Performance
 3. Asset Data
 4. Lifecycle Planning and Works programming
 5. Leadership and Going Further.

For example, local authority service managers might decide just to look at the introduction module to provide an overview. Whereas people tasked specifically with taking forward lifecycle planning will look at module four as it is highly relevant to them. Every module has a set of questions which the user will work through.

ML: We tried to make it as user friendly as possible, so that people can dip in and out of it. We also wanted to provide useful management information and have a way of assessing how people were doing through their results in tests at the end of each module.

I had a strong view that there should be no barriers and that the toolkit should be freely available and managed to persuade the HMEP Board to support this. This can be used anywhere and anytime, and avoids authorities having to send staff on expensive courses.



Content of the e-learning toolkit has been developed by the Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme

JW: Will there be recognition, through a certificate for instance, given to people who have been through the training?

ML: Some form of recognition through CPD would be really good, particularly if CIHT could support this.

JW: What do you think the benefits of the toolkit will be?

ML: Primarily to embed asset management within the culture of an organisation. Anyone and everyone involved with the highways maintenance service could complete the training. There is still a concern within HMEP that asset management is still not comprehensively applied.

For example, the last Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance survey showed that only 60% of authorities had asset management plans. Even with authorities producing good plans this, in itself, is not enough to fully embed asset management.

LT: In addition to the benefits of practitioners developing their skills to implement asset management – and in realising the potential benefits – there will likely be an increased awareness of HMEP products more broadly.

HN: The e-learning toolkit will provide a good foundation for understanding of asset management principles; perhaps this is lacking sometimes and even if highway services are contracted out, there is still a need for responsible stewardship of the assets. Client capability will undoubtedly be improved.

JW: How should authorities use this?

ML: Use the e-learning tool but not in isolation. Get people together who have completed the training and discuss with them how this fits with their organisation's approach.

LT: Although HMEP is focused on England, authorities across the UK can benefit from this as

it is freely available. As with the underlying guidance document applying across the UK, the e-learning toolkit can too: others can benefit from it.

There is also a good link to the UKRLG Codes of Practice as there is a recognised hierarchy in guidance, in this regard the e-learning toolkit will help embed the high level advice that underpins all the advice and guidance in the codes.

JW: Given funding is due to change and authorities will be rewarded, in part, for asset management will this make the toolkit more significant?

LT: This will help authorities with the funding approach expected in the future.

ML: I have actually been commissioned to do work on the self-assessment questionnaire (for the capital maintenance allocations from DfT for 2015/16 onwards) and evidence of good asset management is likely to be a pivotal area for helping authorities getting into higher bands and receiving the incentivised funding.

As part of this assessment an authority's skills and capabilities may be considered an important criteria for asset management. The questionnaire is still under development.

LT: The guidance helps authorities move to a higher band and the toolkit helps authorities make progress with the guidance. The questionnaires are all linked.

JW: When will this be available?

HN: We have just received the final comments and are making some further amendments to it. There will be the inclusion of a voice over which will help users navigate the content. All these final changes are being worked through and should be completed by the end of March.

ML: We hope to be able to launch the e-learning toolkit by late spring.