



# Collaboration is key to delivering innovation and value



**“Now there is nowhere to hide – we have the money and we must deliver!”**

Mike D'Alton

**Mike D'Alton, UK/Europe director of highways, transportation and asset management for Parsons Brinckerhoff says the industry's supply chain must be ready to deliver ahead of the government's biggest investment in the road network since the 1970s**

**With the infrastructure sector – roads, rail and air – facing what may be an unprecedented period of investment, the spotlight is very much on the supply chain to raise its bar. We need to generate confidence that it has the capability to deliver the innovative and cost effective solutions required to meet the exciting and challenging opportunities ahead.**

For the first time in my 30 years in consultancy, I see a situation where there is almost cross party convergence on transport policy (perhaps with the exception of airports). We are about to witness a programme of work from the Highways Agency that is nearly as impressive as what is being spent on the UK's railways – perhaps followed by another frenzy of activity after the Airports Commission reports in 2015. Then we have LEPs being awarded extensive funding through the government's Local Growth Fund, with probably more to come through their strategic 'asks'.

But – and it has to be asked – what would happen if we fail to deliver the type of innovative, cost effective solutions we have been demanding and lobbying for over the last 10 years?

It could happen. We complained throughout the recession that our infrastructure was disintegrating and

urgently needed to be maintained, renewed and improved. And many in the sector were vocal with their innovative proposals about how we could and should improve the UK's transport networks – now there is nowhere to hide – we have the money and we must deliver!

## Delivering value

If we don't (collectively) find a way to deliver value across the infrastructure supply chain there is a realistic possibility that much of the money now being freed up for new schemes may, in time, be diverted back to the Treasury. We probably won't ever see the magnitude of that money again. As a **“collective”**, the industry needs to provide confidence to all stakeholders. We have just about managed to address the **“overspend culture”**, with the Highways Agency and Network Rail leading by example. Now we must address the resource and capacity issue urgently, or risk our profession and industry once again coming under criticism.

It's a real worry. The skills shortage, over which we now clamour, manifested itself not two or three years after the economy switched itself back on but almost straight away. This is probably the most telling metric of where we stand on skills – we had a shortage almost immediately – demonstrating to me that we had collectively let

our industry become dangerously overstretched. Sure, we are all taking on apprentices and voraciously recruiting graduates, but the engine room and professionally experienced tiers are very lean.

So if we want to provide the ongoing confidence to government that we can really deliver, then we have no choice but to work in a collaborative manner. There will be issues of intellectual property and commercial sensitivities, but if we don't put these issues to one side in a managed way, then we will have bigger things to fret about. We must work as one – we need industry-wide cross sector collaboration groups focused together on delivering innovation, more for less, shortened **“time to market”** and sharing how we did it for our peer group to learn.

At present we are taken to these 'places' by some of our more enlightened clients – the innovative delivery hub of the Highways Agency being a great example. But how about an industry working party coming together to discuss resources, pipelines, challenges, and how we might address many of these issues collectively?

Perhaps our clients should be involved in such a working party? We need a shared agenda; we need to be flexible; but most of all we need to recognise that we are far stronger together than we ever will be apart! ☺