

Thinking differently

Dave Hooper, executive director for Osborne Infrastructure (highways and rail), discusses proposals to turn the Highways Agency into a government-owned company and what challenges it might bring

The Highways Agency reform will create a government-owned company and will provide greater financial certainty and commercial flexibility. As suppliers we will all benefit from improved workload and funding security which will provide the confidence to invest in long-term capability and efficiency to deliver the infrastructure to create UK economic growth.

In return for this visibility of opportunity as suppliers we have to step up performance, improve industry safety, deliver more efficiently, create space and time for our people to innovate and deliver year-on-year cost improvement whilst reducing disruption to the highway users. Changing culture means thinking differently, making better decisions and changing lives in terms of safer highways, earning a reputation with the public for delivering what we say we will, creating more rewarding careers and attracting the very best talent.

At Osborne, we have recently introduced a programme called STOPThink! to act as a catalyst for change within our business. Although the programme has a strong safety theme at its core, STOPThink! is designed to develop behaviours which will impact directly on the performance, quality, efficiency, reliability and productivity of our business to support our customers.

During October and November of this year, over 450 of our people, suppliers and customers have embarked on the programme with us. Developed with a behavioural change consultancy, STOP Think! coaches people to understand why we “do what we do” so we can think and act differently to make better decisions. It focuses on the whole of our organisation, from the top-down to the bottom-up, working with our key customers and suppliers.

Investment in leadership

This is a significant and vital investment for us, therefore visible and active leadership supporting the programme is critical. Leaders from our supply chain and principal customers are joining us



“I am confident the outcomes of the STOPThink! programme we have embarked on will create the desired change in creating more collaborative working environments that will foster people to thinking differently, making better decisions and change lives supporting the ideals behind the Highways Agency reform”

for a series of “Leaders Days” to set the context of the programme, explore what is expected of leaders, achieve clarity on what success looks like and explore how we can think and act differently.

As we rollout the programme through launch days, we are creating a network of coaches who volunteer from the sessions. So far over 50 per cent of attendees have asked to be put forward to become STOPThink! coaches to support others understand the principle involved and take ownership. This is the key to embedding it so it becomes intuitive to how we do business, by transferring the newly understood principles into actual “on-the-ground” practices that result in changing lives.

“Outstanding performance and outstanding safety go hand in hand” is a well-known mantra in our industry, and rightly so. I am confident the outcomes of the STOPThink! programme we have embarked on will create the desired change in creating more collaborative working environments that will foster people to thinking differently, making better decisions and change lives supporting the ideals behind the Highways Agency reform.

As a company, we rebranded this year and we want to move forward as a business moulded out of a strong sense of respect and dedication to our customers. We have a positive impact on the environments we help to create.

What makes us different? We are a family business and continue to be driven, not by share prices or investor return, but by a clear desire to work in partnership, solve problems and add value over the long term to make you successful.

We have a culture that is personal, as well as providing the professional standards of excellence expected by our customers. We aim to establish a supportive environment where creative ideas and solutions are encouraged from everyone involved, and our project managers have the support and confidence to make decisions to meet the individual customer needs. ➔