

The company one keeps



INTERVIEW BY **PAUL HUTTON**

ITS (UK) is the world's oldest national ITS Society and this November sees the relaunch of its Annual Conference after a break of more than a decade. Badged the ITS (UK) Summit, it has received considerable support from its Chairman, Ian Patey of WSP, who is one of the speakers. Paul Hutton met up with him, and discovered he'd had just one job...

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These days we're told that people may have a dozen jobs before they're 50, so you must be an endangered species

because until now I didn't realise you're still on job number one, aren't you?

Yes Paul, I'm still in my first job – and I am not sure when the probation period is supposed to end. I joined LG Mouchel & Partners in West Byfleet, Surrey, as a Graduate Engineer in 1984 with the aim of designing water purification plants for developing countries.

When I arrived at the office on my first day I was taken to the Bridges department where I began my professional life designing bridges for the Kuwait Town Highways project. That was a high pressure environment and I learned an awful lot about balancing competing demands, working in a team and what it takes to create a good design. After a year

or so I moved to the Manchester office – my fiancée (now my wife, Kathryn) lived in the North West and we had decided to settle down there. I moved into the highways team where my first job was also for Kuwait – designing bilingual road signs, which in the First Gulf War were all taken down to confuse the invading army! After several roles and projects in the Highways team, we were given (this was before competitive tendering for consultants) the Manchester Motorways Communications System to design and manage.

During this time I achieved Membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers (MICE) as a Chartered Engineer. A requirement of the training for MICE was to spend some time on site to gain an understanding of construction to complement my design experience. That was an interesting 18 months, half of which was spent working by the side

of the M62 (during winter) and the other half was spent supervising the construction of a new Mental Health Unit at North Manchester General Hospital.

While my role has changed over the years – including 2005 -2012 when I ran the ITS business – the company has also seen various changes. LG Mouchel & Partners became LG Mouchel Ltd, then it merged with Parkman (Mouchel Parkman), then it was re-branded as Mouchel and in 2015 bought by Kier. The consultancy business was sold by Kier to WSP in 2016 and we were very quickly and painlessly fully embraced and integrated into WSP.

Q So I guess you predate the term ITS?

I guess that industry grandee and previous Big Interviewee Eric Sampson could tell us when the term ITS was first used so I won't be so bold. My initial foray into the world of what we now call ITS was in 1988 when I started working on the Manchester Motorways Communications System project. The project was initially for an upgrade of the existing emergency telephone and signalling system on what has now become the M60 orbital motorway around Manchester. In those days the signals were either matrix signs in the central reservation or "Motorwarn" signals that comprised two amber lanterns that flashed to warn of fog – they were turned on by Police Officers with a form of TV remote control. The scope escalated as the use of technology on motorways began to take shape – the whole network was eventually equipped with gantry signals, CCTV and an upgraded Police Control Room. So my induction into the world of ITS was via the motorway route, I think that at that time most ITS activity was more focussed on urban traffic control.

Q The Manchester Motorways Communications System was ground breaking at the time - what prompted it? Congestion management or safety?

Neither initially, it was driven by a system upgrade – the predecessor of Highways England had developed a new control system to cope with the growing need for technology on motorways. It was called NMCS2 – National Motorway Control System 2 – and replaced NMCS1. But it soon became a tool for managing congestion.

MMCS eventually equipped 100 miles (160km) of motorway with emergency telephones, signals, gantry signals, CCTV and over 600km of cabling. There was a lot of civil engineering required to install all the technology, and all that cable, on to existing motorways. I was responsible for the design of the temporary traffic management

Photo: Ian Pengelly



arrangements which introduced me to what we now call "stakeholder engagement". I had to meet the traffic Police teams who patrolled the motorways and explain to them how we intended to manage traffic during the various construction projects.

My first period of site experience was on an MMCS contract, on the M62 north of Manchester, in the winter. We carried out a number of feasibility studies into things like Automatic Incident Detection Systems, Variable Message Signs and other innovations – which led to the project growing in scope and geography.

I guess we were in there at just the right time – as using technology on motorways was starting to take off and the motorways were getting more congested as soon as they opened. Creating the orbital around Manchester gave that network an identity and its position on the national network made it a magnet for freight traffic which came with its own challenges, and opportunities for using ITS.

Q And of course then it was your job to work out how to add technology to make Smart Motorways...

That all started with a small feasibility study – there was an artist's impression of a "future motorway" in a Highways Agency vision document published in either 1999 or 2000 that showed a futuristic looking gantry and an incident being managed by using the hard shoulder as an extra lane. Mouchel was tasked with establishing the feasibility of using technology to open the hard shoulder for incident management. A lot of change

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was taking place in the road sector at that time – Highways Agency had started to move towards becoming a road network operator, the motorway widening programme was about to be cancelled and the role of the Police in managing traffic on motorways was changing. The combination of these changes led to the development of the Active Traffic Management (ATM) Pilot scheme on the M42 in the Midlands.

I was responsible for the Operations workstream for the ATM Pilot which was hugely challenging and exciting in equal measure – there was so much that we needed to do that hadn't been done before and we learned from similar schemes in The Netherlands and other countries. We had the experience of Controlled Motorways on the M25 to build upon – where driver behaviour played such a key role in making that a success. The Regional Control Centres and Traffic Officer Service were also being created at the same time and our teams were heavily involved in both.

ATM led to Managed Motorways which in turn became Smart Motorways – the combination of network operations, operational safety and technology has continued throughout those developments, and will continue as we look to embrace connected and eventually, autonomous, vehicles.

Photo: Kathryn Patey



Q It's been a long time since you worked on that introduction of variable speed limits and then all-lane running... are you surprised it's still a controversial issue and why do you think it is?

In some respects I am surprised as they have both been around for some time, but then when it comes down to anything to do with driving and drivers, nothing surprises me. My view, based on purely anecdotal evidence, is that driving standards have been reducing for some time, with a more "me" based approach which means that a speed limit becomes a restriction on personal freedom rather than a sensible control measure.

I also think that as an industry we have been too slow and too shy to explain the benefits of what we are about and why we do things. That means that we are all too often trying to defend what we have done rather than expounding its virtues.

Q You've worked through some boom years for transport and then the economic downturn in 2008 onwards took its toll, do you think that's when technology became more important because it delivers quicker, more efficiently and importantly more cost-effectively than traditional building projects?

Well that was the rationale behind the original pilot of Active Traffic Management on the M42 – that it would provide the journey time benefits at a fraction of the cost of widening. I think that the days of adding lanes to our road network to cater for demand are behind us and that we have many more tools available to us when we think about a transport eco-system that also includes technology, more efficient operational regimes and advances in vehicle systems.

Taking a more holistic view of people, place and purpose helps us to understand why travel is needed and for what purpose, so the traditional view of a morning and evening peak for commuting traffic becomes less valid and we then think more about how we create, maintain and operate transport as an overall system.

Q You're going to be speaking at the ITS (UK) Summit in November in your capacity as Chairman of the Society. One part of the day examines our focus on driverless vehicles - do you think we're right to be focussing quite so much on the technology?

I never do focus on the technology –my roots are in civil engineering and I think that one of the qualities that I bring to the ITS sector is my constant searching for the outcomes that we are trying to achieve, asking "who

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is going to benefit and how"? That and my, some say annoying, habit of asking "why?" – I guess that I just need to know why. But I know that within the membership and community of ITS (UK) we have the people and skills who do know how to make sure that the technology works, that it is reliable and that it is safe to use.

So yes, we do need to know about the technology, what is available, what is coming up, what the future might hold and so on. But we need also to ask "why?" and keep on asking until either we can see why it will make a difference and to whom, or we move onto the next development, or stick with what we've got for now.

Q Of course when you're not working, your focus is on your feet because you seem to have the runner's bug...

It was in 2004 that I decided I wanted to have a go at running – several people from work were taking part in "Corporate 5k" events and I wanted to be able to do that and run 5k non-stop. So after several months training on treadmills, I decided to set foot on the roads and I did manage to complete my first 5k without stopping or walking.

I have a slight (?) obsessive streak in my personality so after a few 5ks, thought I'd like to try a 10k and within a year my first half-marathon, and yes, the next year my first marathon. I only set myself two goals – complete a marathon in under four hours and to take part in the London Marathon (I did achieve both). I enjoy running, I can do it anywhere in the world – when I am overseas with work I check what events are going on locally – and when I run I have time to think and clear my head. Last month I completed my 12th Great North Run and if Sir Mo hadn't been given a 15 mins head start, who knows.....

Q And family and faith are important too...

Family has always been central in my life – from my earliest years when we lived in a village outside Canterbury and grew up in an extended family of grandparents, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles. That close-knit community has been a theme and ever-present reality throughout my life. I never missed a birthday for Rebecca, Ben and Kathryn even if it meant some late night and long journeys to be there.

I found my Christian faith whilst at University, or maybe it found me. That, alongside family, is central to my life and in 1996 I was licensed as a Lay Reader in the Church of England. I think that my passion for equality, inclusion and diversity finds its roots both

in my upbringing and my faith. I have always been driven by a desire for people to be treated equally and fairly and for everyone to be given a chance to thrive.

My other hobby is photography which started when I was at school. My passion is landscapes and photo-journalism, so no common thread there. When Rebecca and Ben were growing up I turned my attention to family photos, although as I always had the camera there are very few pictures of me!

I went to evening classes and achieved some City & Guilds qualifications. That was before the real growth in digital photography and so involved a lot of chemicals and hours in dark rooms, which is a great way to learn patience and perseverance, as well as changing just one thing at a time until you get the result you are looking for. I have also been the photographer at a few family weddings which is great for developing organisational skills, working within a tight programme, achieving a high quality of output whilst being a diplomat and collaborative negotiator!

Well so long as we never have the autonomous vicar, you'll be OK!
Amen to that!