

**Building a Wider Europe –
A Venture in the East**

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**The Fellowship Chairman,
Professor R M Kimber, in the chair**

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John Ekins started his professional career over 30 years ago with major projects in Hampshire including the Winchester by-pass, the Kingsclere, Whitchurch and Litchfield by-passes and the provision of major development areas in South Hampshire. He was appointed Deputy County Surveyor in 1985 and County Surveyor in 1989. His many key achievements include the development of Transport Strategies which through the year 2000 Local Transport Plan earned 'Centre of Excellence' status from the government, together with engagement in European projects including telematics and East–West partnership projects. He is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Institution of Highways and Transportation and of the Royal Academy of Engineering. He is a past president of the County Surveyors' Society and Chair of the National Road Maintenance Condition Survey Executive committee from 1998 to 2001. In 1998 he was awarded the OBE.

Abstract

This lecture described the work undertaken by Hampshire County Council's Surveyor's Department in European programmes. It emphasises on projects with two of the newly emerging states of Eastern Europe as part of technical support programmes supported by the EU and the UK government.

Hampshire County Council's policy of taking an active part in European affairs led to its participation in the EU TACIS programme and in the UK Government's 'Know How' fund. Technical support and exchanges in the public transport field were set up with Chisinau—the capital city of the Republic of Moldova and with Nizhny Novgorod in the Russian Republic. Helpful outcomes were established in both cities offering assistance in a non-commercial context but none the less establishing confidence in British technical abilities and opening up opportunities for the private sector.

These initiatives have brought investment into Hampshire and have built a network of contacts in Europe for sharing experience and have developed the in-house knowledge base.

Building a Wider Europe – A Venture in the East

John Ekins
County Surveyor

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Introduction

This lecture is an account of my activities in Eastern Europe leading from my involvement with Hampshire County Council and some personal views and reflections. It is a story that I wanted to tell. I suppose I could have chosen something more prosaic and technical but it is difficult for me because I do have quite a wide brief professionally and I probably couldn't aspire to the intellectual depth and scientific analysis that could be found in some of the earlier lectures in this series, so I am doing this.

I was moved to choose this topic when I was last in Moldova on behalf of Hampshire CC, when I was reflecting on what I had seen there and the changes since the first time I went there. Changes which I felt we had in some small way contributed to through our outreach. Now, I know that there a lot of consultants from the UK and elsewhere, working hard in Eastern and Central Europe and doing good work there and this institution tonight is well connected into Eastern Europe so its local associations which are building informal links with like-minded engineers in the East and the Institution itself has very strong connections with the Russian Federation and the May 2001 edition of Civil Engineering contained a very comprehensive and sympathetic review of what is going on in Eastern and Central Europe. So I claim no singularity to our effort and endeavour but I do think that the engagement between local authorities in the East and the West brings with it a political dimension and an aspect of altruism that sets us apart from other initiatives.

Now in my lifetime, Europe seems to have dominated the UK political scene. Probably two generations have

been dominated by it. My recollections go back to Harold MacMillan's efforts to join, what was then called the Common Market, and that description is probably why it got off on the wrong foot in Britain in my opinion. We had the veto from De Gaulle for probably all sorts of peculiar gallic reasons, Harold Wilson's manoeuvrings to try and get in and then nearly 30 years ago, Ted Heath took us in. And his was a very positive determination to see Britain taking its place in the European community and he was supported by people of a similar vision; particularly Roy Jenkins.

Ever since then, for the last 30 years, we have been agonising about Europe, we are at times reluctant players, we are sometimes perversely insular and chauvinistic about it and yet strangely we are equally perversely implementing every directive with a zealous and pedantic fervour.

However, I do not want this evening to get involved in the politics of the EU, the ERM or the Euro. I am just content to be a middle of the road enthusiast for United Kingdom to take its place in a community of European states, believing that we Europeans made a bit of a hash of the first part of the last century and we actually need to work together rather better in the 21st century. We need in the UK to play a very positive part in helping to make it work well.

This evening I am going to talk about our contribution to that end. So this is our story. Hampshire's outreach to Europe. I am going to talk a bit about how Hampshire as a local authority has engaged itself with Europe, outline how we ended up in a relationship with Moldova, to talk about the POLIS East West conference which kicked the whole thing off, to talk a bit about TACIS, the EU programme for Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States, to talk about the transport projects in Chisinau and Moldova and to say a bit about similar projects in Nizhny Novgorod in the Russian Federation.

Hampshire CC and EU development programmes

Hampshire was formerly the largest shire county until 1997, when Portsmouth and Southampton were devolved as Unitary Authorities. It is one of those ironies of life that just as the government were talking about an integrated transport policy they started to disintegrate local government which might have delivered it. The County is still quite big, in the administrative County there are 1.2 million people and 1.6 million if you include the two cities. I think we have a vibrant approach to life. The political make-up in Hampshire has generally been Conservative, although the Council were once 'hung' and for four

years was Labour/Liberal Democrat but it has been Conservative again since 1997.

We are not an authority that plays party politics really, our transport policies have really not changed at all through that time, they might have changed a bit at the edges but there is really been no change. The one thing that has gone through in the last ten years or so, has been to develop an outreach into Europe and we developed the accord with Basse Normandie, opposite numbers across the Channel, huge historical links with Hampshire because the Normans came and built the Great Hall at Winchester, Winchester was their capital, they created the New Forest, so there was a synergy between us and Basse Normandie, but our politicians were very concerned that this should not be what you might call a 'twinning', a 'jumelage', it had to be a purposeful accord and so it has been and from the Basse Normandie Accord has grown our involvement in the Arc Mange, relationship with other places in Europe, particularly in Spain which then grew into a much wider network into Europe, we got involved into Eastern Europe and building on these links to actually build a whole network of contacts, relationships and information.

Networking into Europe has been very important to us and I will explain what we have done on that in a minute. We have been active in the Association of European regions and we developed our links with the POLIS community. I am sure you all know, Europe is bedevilled by acronyms and I am not going to try and tell you what the acronyms are, you can ask me at the end and I might be able to remember, POLIS is the original network we joined and we are still part of that, it brought a wide community of people really involved in Telematics Applied to Sustainable Transport. Out of that grew our links into Eastern Europe which I am going to talk a bit more about and out of POLIS grew the first conference in Eastern Europe in Chisinau in 1996 and that was strongly supported by our Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians at the time. So Hampshire has had this clear commitment to working to get the very best out of Europe really and to play its part. It is not always been an easy thing to sell in political terms.

So a bit more detail about our networking in Europe before we actually get into the East. Our first endeavour, as I said, was the Telematics which produced ROMANSE and came under the umbrella of SCOPE. One of the things that always puts me off catching a bus is that you do not know when they are coming, or even if you know the timetable, you are not sure what has happened to them.

We were one of the pioneers to get this sort of information onto the streets of Southampton the 'Stopwatch' real-time information in bus-stops. It gives the user great confidence—another thing that has put me off previously

is that you never knew where they are going to stop or what the fares are. You start to get some measure of improvement in people's perception if at least you give them some information.



'Stopwatch' system, Southampton

We got involved in THERMIE, an entrance which actually came out of the energy Directorate and out of that we got a lot of benefits in to Portsmouth and Southampton, including bus lanes in Portsmouth, and gas powered buses in Southampton. They run on compressed natural gas rather than LPG, there is a fleet of them in Southampton, our heritage to the unitary authority of Hampshire, less pollution and I suppose lower costs and a very worthwhile thing coming out of our involvement with Europe.



Gas powered buses, Southampton

We have been involved in INFORM and TAPESTRY and indeed so has Moldova been involved in those in looking at travel awareness issues and that sort of thing. As for PEPTRAN and PRICILLA, they have a sort of alliterative sort of ring to them. PEPTRAN was about bringing mobile phone type technology into transport matters; PRICILLA was about bus priorities, and just

at the moment we are into CIVITAS and MIRACLES, particularly in Winchester, which is really looking at sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions to transport.

And you might think well: what was all that about then? Well, it brought a lot of inward investment to Hampshire, supported very commendably by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, as it was by the Department of Transport, who have supported us for 10 years in our European endeavours and supported, as I say, strongly and, I think, bravely by our own politicians. This is not an easy thing to sell to the punters—that we are actually spending money getting involved in Europe—but the pay-off has been something like £20 million investment levered into Hampshire over a period of about 10 years. And the other benefit of course, as I have mentioned before, is the working link with other regions and cities in Europe which gives us a network of places to get information from, to share problems with and to generally be better informed.

So the history of the last ten years of our involvement in all those sort of things has been of a huge benefit to us and it has a spin-off. As well as giving Hampshire a bit of a buzz, it gives the people who work in Hampshire a feeling that they are not just turning a wheel. Through this present skills crisis it probably just gives us a bit of an edge with people thinking they might actually want to come and work in Hampshire.

So that is the sort of foundation on which we built our endeavours into Eastern Europe; it started with the Romanian connection that was the link between Hampshire and Moldova. The previous Liberal Democrat / Labour administration was very keen on being involved in Eastern Europe and built up a relationship with a local authority in Romania: Hunedoara County. I think there was a coming together of kindred spirits at a personal level between their politicians and our politicians, so much so that they were quite happy to dash around without at any restraining influence from any officers with them. Out of that from our Romanian friends came a realisation that there was a problem further east in Moldova, a struggling country which is still struggling, particularly in the capital city, Chisinau.

The TACIS programme

The TACIS (Technical Assistance for the Cities of the Independent States) City Twinning Programme was initiated by the EU in 1995 as a pilot programme, becoming fully established in 1998. The programme has gone through a number of rounds and has recently metamorphosed into the Institution Building Partnership Programme.

The purpose of the programme was to provide grant finance for know-how to foster the development of market economies and democratic societies in the 'New Independent States' (NIS) which were emerging from the break up of the Soviet Union. TACIS was a pilot programme created with a view to supporting local and regional authorities in the NIS wishing to improve their management and reform their structures in order to increase efficiency and promote a well functioning democracy.

At the heart of TACIS was decentralised co-operation between local and regional partners in the NIS and the EU to bring about understanding and improvements to management and operational practices. In the long term it was hoped that the programme would lead to stronger ties and lasting co-operation between regional and local government in the EU and the NIS.

Shorter term and more pragmatic objectives were to transfer know-how through practical training for managers and staff of local and regional authorities with a view to improving performance. The programme was project based and an essential ingredient was the dissemination of experience and knowledge acquired to the benefit of a wider constituency in the East and the West. This was to maximise the benefit from the programme across the NIS. TACIS was not confined to Transport but embraced a wide range of Local Authority fields including administration, social policy, spatial planning, the environment and economic development.

At a working level TACIS participants were expected to avoid overlaps by forming partnerships with a lead authority. Projects ran for a year with an identified team of senior managers from the NIS authority receiving practical training in the EU and then returning to the NIS authority to make practical use of the knowledge gained. To support them in this an officer of the EU authority would accompany them to the NIS authority to provide continuing advice and guidance.

An important feature of the TACIS programme was collaboration at a political level as well as at a technical managerial level. This political engagement is crucial to the strengthening of democratic institutions and forging real partnerships.

At the conclusion of the programme the project would be reported formally to the TACIS programme secretariat and disseminated the TACIS wash up conference. These conferences brought together the various projects and provided an opportunity to disseminate experience and knowledge and also promote new links and understandings between the EU and the NIS.

The participants received financial support from the TACIS programme but were expected to make financial contributions of their own. Clearly this latter aspect needed to be handled carefully as the prospect of spending money to assist remote places in the East may not be a high priority for many Council Taxpayers. However there is a real case to be made in terms of the value of such outreach programmes and the real opportunities for training and development.

Throughout Europe, a large number of countries have become involved with TACIS. Financially, France, Germany and to some extent Italy, are predominant. Finland comes out as quite a big bidder, but I think that as that is not entirely an altruistic distribution, there are people there seeing that on the back of helping and offering training and advice comes a real commercial opportunity later (see Figure 1).

The 1996 POLIS conference in Chisinau provided a good starting point for looking at the opportunities and needs for TACIS topics. The conference itself gave a fascinating insight into the needs and concerns of the NIS and also the breadth of knowledge and expertise available in EU local government.

Building on the early contacts with Chisinau brokered through our partners in Hunedoara County, Romania, Hampshire signed up to partner Chisinau in a project aimed at boosting the ailing passenger transport system. This initial project was successfully delivered 4 years ago and reported to a TACIS wash up conference in St Petersburg.

A follow up project was then undertaken through the Department for International Development's (DFID) 'Know How Technical Links Programme'. This fund has very similar aims to TACIS seeking to 'support the transition process towards a market economy and

pluralist democracy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia'. The scheme funds the exchange of technical expertise between local authorities, local authority associations and local authority professional bodies in the UK and their partner communities in the East. The DFID 'Know-how fund' project was undertaken during 2000 and reported last year. This project enabled Hampshire and Chisinau to build on their proven partnership strengthen their links and deliver some more significant work for the city of Chisinau.

Subsequently Hampshire has embarked on a TACIS supported partnership with the City of Nizhny Novgorod. This project came about as a result of the dissemination of the Chisinau work. Nizhny Novgorod felt that their own problems were similar and that they too could gain from working in partnership with Hampshire. This project went ahead under the TACIS programme and is due to be complete later this year.

Both Chisinau and Nizhny Novgorod are keen to pursue further partnership projects with Hampshire with the field possibly widening from Transport related projects to other aspects of sustainability including Waste Management where Hampshire has a leading position in the UK. The UK Government has been keen to promote Hampshire's involvement as an exemplar of what can be achieved through participation in these kind of European programmes.

More recently there have been requests to participate in a project with Irkutsk Oblast in Eastern Siberia.

The Hampshire/Chisinau partnership

Background

Moldova emerged as an independent state in 1991 following the break up of the Soviet Union. It lies to

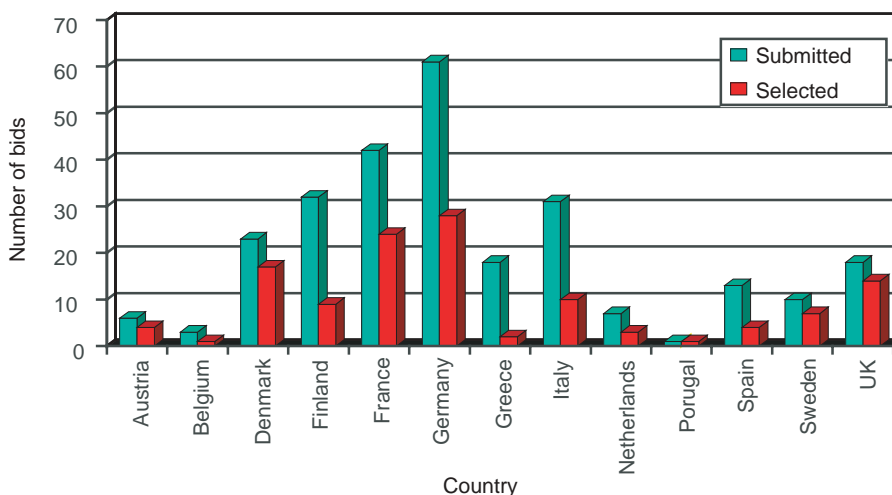


Figure 1: Number of bids for TACIS funding

the East of Romania and to the West of the Ukraine. It was a part of Romania until annexed by the Soviet Union during World War 2. Moldova is landlocked apart from a short riparian border on the river Danube. It has a population of about 4.5m living in an area of 33,000 sq kms—so using the usual yardstick this is about 1.5 times the size of Wales (see Figure 2).

The people tend to look to Romania rather than Russia and Romanian is commonly spoken especially in Chisinau. There are some 60 different ethnic groups although Romanians form the largest. In 2001 the Communist party returned to power after securing a majority over the Christian Democrats.

The autonomy of Moldova is not totally secure as intermittent separatist conflict has been taking place in some disputed areas. Russian forces have remained in control of the territory east of the Dnister River and have proclaimed a 'Transnistria Republic'. It is said that this enclave supports illicit trading especially in armaments.

Moldova is a poor country and the economy is struggling having shrunk by nearly 70% since independence, with a GDP per head of \$2500—about one tenth of the UK. Real unemployment is high especially if account is taken of extensive underemployment. The economy depends heavily on agriculture especially fruit, vegetables, wine and tobacco. There is some manufacturing industry especially in the white goods area and agricultural machinery as well as clothing and textiles. There is heavy dependence on fossil fuels for energy nearly all of which is imported from Russia. In consequence energy is in short supply—revealed by a lack of heating in public buildings and very limited street lighting.

Moldova does however support two airlines and a football team, which first brought it to the attention of people in the UK. Latterly the Chisinau opera has been touring the UK.

Our first visit to the POLIS conference in 1996 showed up some of Moldova and Chisinau's shortcomings. The



Moldova

lingering influence of the totalitarian state was still around—particularly at the airport on entry. It was difficult to reconcile the stony and suspicious reception with our reason for being there which was essentially to offer assistance. The airport is now redeveloped, works being completed in 1998. It is said that observations by POLIS delegates hastened its progress!

Chisinau is the capital city and has a population of some 800,000.

It has a central core which clearly has some historical relevance and but much of the development outside the centre is Stalinist. It can be imagined that the broad boulevards giving access to grey high rise blocks were laid out to accommodate battalions of T34 tanks.

Plates x, y and z show scenes that are fairly typical of the outskirts of the town, large blocks of public sector housing, not very pretty and all set out some distance from the centre which obviously produces a problem with transport.

The centre has a certain neo-classical charm shining through the grubbiness, this is Stefan Selmari Road, the main street of Chisinau, wide, flowing, gracious and really rather pleasant.

Transport in Chisinau

Given the poor economy, low car ownership and dispersed populations the public transport system is vital to every day life but is struggling. It has a significant fleet of Russian built trolley buses, many of which are at the end of their useful life and a growing number of buses. All these are run by the municipal public transport company. The system was overloaded and decrepit and there was a strong whiff of former Stalinist glories.

The municipal public transport undertaking was established on a scale and comprehensiveness not seen in the UK for a generation or so. The undertaking had several depots with repair facilities and a headquarters where every need of the staff could be fulfilled. From the obvious such as recreational and canteen facilities, it included such items as physiotherapy and hydrotherapy suites with all the staff in place to run them. Much of it was now looking run down and obsolete and the effect on the overheads had anyone calculated them must have been immense.

The undertaking was visibly over-manned—with lots of non-jobs in evidence—gatekeepers—or doorkeepers sitting huddled in booths. As a further example they had got this rather strange practice—the first trolley buses they got out every morning were canteen buses and one went to each extremity of the network to serve tea to the drivers. Why didn't they just give them a token to use in the local café instead



Public sector housing, Chisinau

of having to tie a bus, a driver and someone to make the tea? The staffing levels are extremely inefficient but unemployment was still very high.

The private sector was filling the gap left by the failing public sector transport system with fleets of minibuses. This together with a growing car ownership and poor traffic management was giving rise to the familiar problems of congestion and pollution. The mini buses were generally conversions of Russian made vans with a rather basic approach to pollution control.



Stefan Selmeri Road, Chisinau



Shared use roads, Chisinau



A typical minibus in Chisinau

buses off the road—many lying as hulks in the depots, having been cannibalised for spares: decaying, clapped out buses forlornly lying there like an elephants' graveyard.



There was very little traffic management in the city centre—little evidence of parking restriction but a few traffic signals at major intersections supplemented by police on point duty. There was therefore no thought of how one might actually facilitate the buses moving better. One can see two trolley buses and a parked car. One trolley bus has got stuck, so has the other. This is a typical street scene in Chisinau.

The private car fleet—130,000 in 1994—is surprisingly large given the poor economy, and it is showing buoyant growth—possibly as high as 10% per year albeit from a low base. On the first visit the car fleet was overwhelmingly eastern European in origin—mainly Russian but with a few surviving Trabants puffing about. Interestingly, by the last visit in 2000 the fleet was becoming rapidly westernised with a high proportion of older German models and a significant sprinkling of quite new BMW and Mercedes. In the intervening years the traffic problem had worsened.



Examples of trolley buses, Chisinau

When we visited in 1996 the public transport system was near to collapse with about one third of the trolley

There was just a feeling of dreadful despair about it. And in the workshops the despair you could almost feel. The approach to health and safety in these places is interesting because nobody seemed to have any protective clothing. There was no concern about open pits that one could walk down; and people were really struggling to keep a few vehicles on the road with no system or organisation to it.

The remaining fleet lumbered around the city often grossly overloaded. An abiding image was the evening scene with queues at the stops—packed trolley buses proceeding at a snails pace with headlights like glow worms.

Many of the diesel buses were in a poor condition and utilisation was at about 30%. Patronage levels were high to the point of consistent overcrowding and revenue was falling below the level needed to sustain the operation.



Diesel buses, Chisinau

At the 1996 POLIS conference in Chisinau, ideas and problems were aired from East and West. It became clear that Chisinau perceived that it had a growing problem with its failing passenger transport system attracting popular dissatisfaction but with a growing and unregulated private sector seizing an opportunity with resulting anarchy and congestion.

It was also apparent that the city administration was looking for big injections of capital to deliver a range of high profile projects. These included an urban motorway and an LRT system. Suggestions of aid through low-key advice and self-help plans were not initially well received probably because they carried less obvious political prestige. None the less the opportunity to participate in TACIS was seized by the city and the partnership was born which has endured.

Chisinau and TACIS

The first Hampshire/Chisinau programme was approved in late 1996 and began in 1997 to address public transport operations in Chisinau. The project budget was 121,500 ecu financed 80% by EU and 20% by Hampshire. The budget covered the cost of staff time, travel, and accommodation, the preparation of reports and the payments to the technical partner.

The project partners were the Chisinau municipality and the Chisinau public transport company, Hampshire County Council and its technical partner the Southern Vectis Bus Company.

Project management was exercised by the Deputy County Surveyor, David Tarrant, and in Chisinau by the Deputy Mayor, Anatole Turcan. Contact with the EU was through the TACIS Secretariat in Brussels and its technical assistance team in Paris. A crucial influence was the Mayor of Chisinau Serafim Urecheanu a former general in the Soviet artillery.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were an evaluation of:

- Existing public transport arrangements.
- Potential route network and operational improvements.
- Requirements for additional public transport resources.
- Traffic management measures to give priority to public transport.
- The feasibility of introducing new modes of public transport, including trams.

Approach

At the start of the project a project plan was established detailing the issues to be evaluated. Managers and specialists from the Chisinau Municipality and the Public Transport undertaking were to receive 'hands on' training and experience of public transport systems and techniques in Hampshire and the UK. This involved detailed tuition, study visits presentations and meetings with public transport operators and specialists. The project was reviewed periodically to ensure that the objectives were being addressed and that practical proposals could be established. The training was designed to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to the Chisinau partners enabling them to implement the project outcomes and thus progress the reform and restructuring of public transport in Chisinau.

Findings of the study

During the course of the project the partners have primarily reviewed the costs of operation and the income generated concentrating on the following elements.

Review staffing levels and management structure

The number of staff needed to maintain the service reflects the poor quality of vehicles and the harsh environment in which they work. Improving the fleet quality will over time ensure that there are more vehicles on the road more of the time and less need for emergency maintenance. Reviews of staff scheduling and driver rotas, perhaps moving to the more intensive driver regime found in the UK, will reduce staff overheads. Finally the management structure will be strengthened in some commercial areas but there is still a need to critically review some of the traditional administrative roles within the public transport company.

Establish non-core activities of the Public Transport Company as independent cost centres

Although traditionally the public sector organisations in Moldova undertook almost a 'cradle to grave' responsibility for its employees this can no longer be sustained if it adds to the overall costs of operation. A number of activities associated with catering, health and housing have been separated from the core business, where ultimately they will need to meet their costs through generated income or be moved into private sector provision.

Introduce new fares

The revenue from the ticket sales meets only a small proportion of the total costs of operation and fares had been frozen for many years. While recognising the hardship caused by steep increases in fares on passengers on low incomes it was felt that additional revenue could be generated by ensuring that fare levels kept pace with inflation. A 50% fare increase resulted in only a marginal reduction in ticket sales and greatly increased revenue. Fare stages are being introduced and further plans to move to zonal and discount tickets are being considered.

Review of the concessionary fares scheme

The concessionary fare scheme is a legal requirement and free travel has to be provided for various categories of passengers. In consequence some 65% of passengers pay no fares. Although the concessionary travel scheme is a requirement, the compensation for loss of income is insufficient and therefore the continued existence of a generous scheme prevents local authorities from achieving enough revenue to cover operational costs. A delegation to the Moldova Parliament presented the case for a review of concessionary travel in October 1997 and there was

agreement that a change was necessary to ensure the viability of Moldova's public transport systems. 50% fare levels are being introduced in time of free travel for some groups and larger employers are assisting with financial support for services.

Review contractual relationship between the Municipality and Public Transport Company

When compared to the western model as seen in Hampshire it was recognised that the strategic objectives of the Municipality are different from the commercial requirements of the Public Transport Company and that the relationship between the two parties should be clearly identified in contractual terms. This requires the removal of political interference in day to day operational matters but in return an expectation that the Public Transport Company will work within its budgets as effectively a commercial sub-contractor.

Access options for fleet renewal

It is clear that with the average age of vehicles used by the Public Transport Company reaching 10 years or more it will be necessary to reinvest substantially to achieve the vehicle reliability expected of a modern public transport system. Early trials of new trolleybuses suggest that an accelerated programme of fleet renewal will reduce operational costs significantly.

Commence surveys of public transport usage

Through the EU INPHORMM project funding has been secured to develop patronage surveys, to enable better service planning to meet current travel needs. Traditional travel patterns are changing rapidly through employment changes and the growth of low-density suburbs. New services can be planned and implemented efficiently if based on high quality data indicating potential demand.

Assess and implement network improvements

The network of services has remained broadly the same since independence but significant changes in employment and travel demand required a critical appraisal of the current network. The concept of 'Super Routes' is being developed, where investment in vehicles and infrastructure is matched with improved service frequencies on principal routes crossing the city.

Identify and assess options for infrastructure improvements and traffic management measures to give priority for public transport

With increasing car ownership and use there are developing congestion problems in the city centre and some suburban centres. The project recognised that the whole journey needed to be reviewed, including the environment at stops and shelters, ticketing,

publicity and bus priority. Proposals for greater pedestrianisation, controls of 'on street' car parking and bus only lanes can be progressed through follow up studies.

Feasibility assessment for light rail opportunities

There is a need to resolve the current short-term pressures on Chisinau's public transport system but to also develop solutions for the medium and long term. To meet those aspirations a basic first assessment of light rail systems for Chisinau was undertaken, which supported the argument that there are sufficient passenger numbers but substantial funding would be needed to meet the costs of building the system and maintaining it. As an option for 5 to 10 years the idea should not be discounted but much depends on the health of the national and local economy before such commitments could be entered into. There may be possibilities for attracting private external investment, which could also be explored.

Conclusions from the study

The project benefited from political support in both Chisinau and Hampshire. This coupled with the excellent working relationships which were developed provided the foundation for the project to progress. Also by ensuring the involvement of senior personnel from the Municipality and Public Transport Company it is expected that the project will have a sustained impact and greater opportunity for its longer term and strategic recommendations to be implemented. However some of the project objectives and recommendations will inevitably be constrained by available finances and resources which will determine the speed of their implementation. Public transport will have to compete with other sections of society for funds. It is also the case that some of the project recommendations will prove unpopular with sections of society, as was found with the recent fares increases. Car drivers are likely to criticise measures which restrict their movements and many passengers who currently receive free travel will object to paying fares if existing concessionary fares arrangements are reformed. Such moves will be politically sensitive and their longer-term benefits, including environmental gains, will need to be promoted to help offset criticism. Whether the TACIS environmental objectives can be achieved without the restructuring of public transport, for example, is less clear but there is optimism that a new pragmatic 'non western' approach to environmental concerns can be developed in the NIS.

In broad terms the project has enabled a full evaluation of public transport in Chisinau and a successful programme of training on a series of strategic and operational issues. The Chisinau partners are now equipped with a range of knowledge and experience of

western models of public transport which can be utilised to help develop solutions to the problems and issues facing public transport in Chisinau. The project has also been significant in raising the profile of public transport on the political agenda. It has stressed the major role it must play in developing Chisinau as a 'green' and sustainable city and it has raised awareness of the need for reforms and resources to enable the necessary improvements to the public transport system.

Partnership next steps—the DFID know-how fund project

Hampshire County Council explored further funding possibilities through the British Government's 'Know How Fund'. This allowed for an extension of the public transport project in Chisinau and helped consolidate the partnership. There was also a possibility that Chisinau Municipality might agree to a form of term consultancy to receive advice and information, and the County Council's support as a link with UK businesses and ongoing assistance to progress their public transport reforms.

This project followed on from the TACIS project. It was realised that there was scope for taking forward some of the some of the key findings of the TACIS project using support from DFID 'know how fund'. The area that was considered to be most pressing was the need to assess improvements to public transport operations in Chisinau city centre as part of a broader transport plan for the capital. The objective was to establish options for infrastructure and traffic management measures in the city centre to provide priority for public transport. Alongside this was the aim of providing continuing advice and training and to sustain practical co-operation between Hampshire and Chisinau.

The busy city centre is focussed on Stefan Cel Mare Street and around this 3.5km long boulevard can be found the main government and municipality offices banks and commercial organisations as well as shops. This is an area of high demand for access and mobility. Efficient penetration by buses and trolley buses is being hampered by the increasing numbers of cars and a lack of traffic management or means to assist public transport.

The study work undertaken by the project team identified opportunities for bus lanes, the provision of bus boarders on the busiest stops. The bus lanes had the potential to improve the efficiency of the public transport services and also offer a safeguarding for any future implementation of a tram system.

The growth in numbers of mini buses remains a problem and whilst improvements to the municipal service will undoubtedly abate their rate of growth they do provide an important service which needs to be accommodated. To avoid the minibuses hampering

the big bus services, proposals were developed for providing lay-bys to keep the mini buses off the thoroughfare but without hampering the other public transport operations.

It is surprising by Western European standards to find such a paucity of parking control as exists in Chisinau. Parking by private cars is virtually unregulated and is indiscriminate and wanton. Proposals are being explored to introduce a city centre parking strategy which has been given a more urgent focus by the joint project team.

The urgent need for some low cost fairly basic measures was identified—such as marked waiting restriction in critical locations.

In the longer term the city-wide parking strategy which could include park and ride would provide income streams to support some of the necessary measures.

It was rewarding to find that there was clear evidence that the Chisinau administration was, as a result of the TACIS programme, better equipped in terms of knowledge and skills to tackle these issues. Funding of even low cost measures remains a difficulty but there seems to an eagerness to make progress and to begin to look at opportunities for raising funds from development opportunities and from future parking charges. This may seem quite mundane but against an environment where there are really no parking restrictions at all, let alone charges, it represents significant progress. The findings were to be incorporated into the Chisinau Municipality's 10 year Transport Plan.

Longer term aspirations remain of securing major capital investment to promote new transport infrastructure but at least progress is being made with the possible rather than just waiting for something which may never happen.

Implementation

Returning in 2000 after the TACIS work and at the end of the DFID programme a new air was apparent. Real effort was now going into revenue collection including a proper recognition of the cost of concessionary fares. Advertising was apparent on the vehicles. There was less visible overmanning—but still a lot of 'non jobs'.

Most impressive was the new approach to vehicle maintenance. Gone were the yards full of 'dead' trolley buses. A few remained but there was now a positive programme of refurbishment and some renewal.

Rather than let the whole fleet gradually fall to bits it appeared that a 'triage' approach was being operated. The worst hulks had gone, the better in service vehicles



Refurbished trolley bus



Overhead supplies

were being properly maintained and there was now clear evidence of a rebuild programme for some of remaining vehicles. A new spirit of optimism pervaded the workshops—although Health and Safety was just as bad as before.

Funding had been found from the government for an extension to the trolley bus lines to serve another dense residential area—and this was proving popular and well patronised. There was a new air of confidence and pride about the management of the undertaking—no longer a matter of faded glories but real determination for the future—and all this despite a poor economic picture overall.

Progress was also being made with the refurbishment and renewal of the bus fleet. New Hungarian built vehicles were arriving and adding to a spirit of optimism and confidence. These had been funded by offsetting electricity charges although it appeared that an attempt had been made to barter wine for vehicles. There was an impression that amongst some of the older management there was a regret for the loss of the certainties of the old centrally planned regime.



Low standard of health and safety in the workshops

One can sympathise with this view as the transfer to a market economy does not come easily and brings with it its own pain and difficulties. The private minibuses, which at the start were seen as a nuisance, are now recognised as an asset providing complementary transport in support of the municipal undertaking.

In the streets the changes were also marked and sadly it was obvious that as the consumer society was taking off so there was a rise in car ownership. An opportunity was slipping away to get a grip on things before the car became too well entrenched and introduce some restraint. As mentioned above parking restrictions and traffic management were virtually non-existent and one could see the onset of many of the problems so typical in the west.

Transferability

The situation in Chisinau—of car ownership growing rapidly and public transport in decline as economic and political factors constrain the necessary investment in the renewal and maintenance of vehicles and infrastructure—is likely to be familiar to many other cities in new, independent states and it was expected that the Chisinau project could be readily applied elsewhere. In particular the project evaluated several strategic and operational issues which will be common to other NIS public transport operators, including the need for operational efficiency, company restructuring, income generation and the reform of fares systems. With moves away from a command economy possibilities also exist for establishing client/contractor relationships between Municipalities and Public Transport Companies. In these aspects the project could act as a model in helping to progress the restructuring of public transport in other NIS cities.



The renewed bus fleet

Nizhny Novgorod

Hampshire's second enterprise in the East was to Nizhny Novgorod—once known as Gorky. Nizhny Novgorod is the third largest city in the Russian Republic and has a population of about 1.4m. It lies at the centre of a regional conurbation of over 2m people, on the Volga River some 270m east of Moscow. It is a centre for manufacturing and some 70% of the industrial output comes from the car manufacturer GAZ. In terms of economic activity, material prosperity and western influence it is in a different league to Chisinau.

However in the late 1990s Nizhny was suffering from similar problems to Chisinau and through the TACIS dissemination programme was aware of the beneficial outcomes of the work in Chisinau.

In consequence an approach was received from Nizhny to a joint bid under the TACIS programme for public transport related project.



Nizhny, Russia

The general project objectives were:

- 1 To identify the demand for public transport and the options available for meeting this demand more efficiently and cost effectively.
- 2 To offer training and advice on a wide range of public transport strategy and operational matters including fares structure, income generation and organisation.
- 3 The establishment of a longer-term strategy and policy framework for developing sustainable transport through a number of specific objectives.

The specific objectives related to the structure and organisation of public transport operations, resources including funding and income generation, fares policy including concessionary fares, service improvements, fleet maintenance and renewal. In addition the relationship between the municipal and private sector transport providers would be explored and the role of public transport in the broader development plans for the city.

The approach again involved appraisal and fact finding sessions in Nizhny with opportunities in the UK for personnel from Nizhny to visit UK operators and learn about UK approach to the commercial operation of public transport.

Work is still proceeding on The Nizhny project but the results so far show a similar pattern of outcomes to those of Chisinau:

- 1 There is a need to address the issue of fares and fare-box income. The lack of revenue needs to be resolved and the level of fares brought up to a sustainable level. The concessionary fare regime needs to be simplified and funded properly.
- 2 There is scope for improving the relationships between private and public transport operators including monitoring of vehicles and allocation of routes,
- 3 The undertaking needs to be put on a more contractual basis with a move to a franchised approach to permit cross subsidy between profitable and non-profitable routes.
- 4 Again there is a need to pursue greater commercialisation of the municipal operators so that there is a clarity about costing and cost centres particularly with regard to the peripheral activities such as depots.

It is encouraging that there is a keenness to make improvements and to learn lessons from the west although alongside an understandable desire to retain their own style of working.

Conclusions

Membership of the EU has opened up opportunities for UK local authorities to be engaged in European collaboration particularly through the successive framework programmes. Working in these opens up horizons and brings an invaluable network of contacts. It also delivers real and tangible benefits in terms of inward investment and knowledge gain.

The opening up of Eastern Europe in the course of the last 10 years or so provided many marketing opportunities for UK firms. Many UK consultancies have seized these opportunities and are well established in the East. The EU TACIS city-twinning programme provided a slightly different dimension. By encouraging partnerships between Local Authorities in the East and the West it made possible the sharing of knowledge and experience without the attachment of commercial strings. Help, advice and training could be offered in an affordable and friendly way. The process was very much a two way traffic in information and importantly there was a political dimension to the process. Local politicians from both sides have been able to understand the others processes at a political level and thus help the democratic process to flourish in the East where it is still a relatively frail development.

The UK has been reasonably well represented in the TACIS programmes but the participation rate for Germany and France is much higher. It is also evident that for example German firms are more strongly represented in the East. It suggests that there is a more integrated approach in Germany—encouraging the TACIS partnership as a stalking horse for future commercial participation. Such an integrated approach is less well developed in the UK but the DIFID has made a good effort to support and encourage UK local authorities taking part in TACIS.

Hampshire has been able to offer very positive help to Chisinau and to Nizhny Novgorod and certainly in Chisinau the results are visible on the ground. The process of helping is tenuous and the benefits at times indistinct—but they are there. Confidence is built in UK approaches and in UK institutions but there needs to be follow-through. This sort of exercise is so important if we are going to build a wider Europe beyond the present borders of the EU. That wider EU offers both political and economic benefits—not through some super state but rather through the coming together of the peoples and regions within the nation states. It is in the diversity and strength of the regions that the strength of the new Europe should be found and that needs the development of trust friendship and understanding. The TACIS programme has provided good opportunities for these.

DISCUSSION

Rod Kimber

John, thank you very much for a splendid account of an extraordinary set of circumstances. When I first heard of this work I was struck very strongly by the sheer range of operations and what we can learn from them. A very colourful lecture. Let us now move on to questions.

Question

I was in China a couple of years ago and I was amazed at the pressure there was on people to buy and use cars. To what extent are public transport operations in the cities you described having to run hard to keep still?

John Ekins

Yes, against this background of failing public transport in quite poor countries there is an amazing growth in private cars. The failings of public transport are exacerbating the desire to have a motor car; which is already present anyway, for all the reasons it is in the West. It is both astonishing and sad to see that they are heading for the same problems that we have got. Despite starting off with a strong presumption that public transport is the way to get about and an extensive existing system, albeit with the failing I have outlined, people are buying cars. In 1996 95% of the car fleet was Russian, East German and Polish, and there were very few Western cars. In 2000 when we were out there this car fleet had almost disappeared and there were largely Western cars, some amazingly expensive ones. I don't know where people got the money from. The desire to have private transport including strong growth of private minibuses, is a reaction both to human aspiration to do your own thing and also to the failing of the public transport system.

Comment (follow-up)

What seems to be happening in China is that Western car manufacturers set up local manufacturing plants with the encouragement of the Government who actually allow people to take out loans to buy cars. There is obviously a sense there in which they feel that maybe it is a driver for the economy to get a car industry going. Is there an element of that in Eastern Europe as well, or are they just imports?

John Ekins

I think that they are not able to do that. Nizhny has actually got a car plant left over from Soviet times.

We all tend to use car manufacturing as an emblem of economic success. We get upset if Ford stop making cars at Dagenham and we were very pleased when Nissan and Honda came to Britain, and like the desire to own and run a motor car personally, this is a sort of emblem of strong nationhood to have manufacturing plants. We ought to try to curb it.

Question/Comment

First, congratulations on managing to get TACIS to pay for a transport-related project. I suspect that the Local Authority element was what sold it to them, rather than the transport issue. My question is how was the TACIS project managed and what was its the scope? How many man weeks/months were spent on it? What exactly did the TACIS people in Brussels actually contribute and pay for; what was their interest and what was yours; who paid for what?

John Ekins

There was an amount of money which covered some of the externalities in terms of getting there, being there, and of our Eastern colleagues coming to us. We put in the value of our time and commitment in helping them. The figures were not very big: contrasted with some of the TACIS schemes which involve significant investment, this was really a very modest investment—in travel, accommodation and time. There wasn't anything significant in goods and services. This is the altruistic part, I think. It was very modest expenditure.

Question (follow-on)

How many man months of your people's time were involved? Can you give a general idea of how much it would take to duplicate this kind of thing? Clearly it is not sapping all your energies, but it does seem to be an enormous task. The scale of the problems you have been looking at have been daunting.

John Ekins

Hampshire's desire was to be involved in doing more than just turning the handle. We became involved with EU projects in Western Europe where we were getting investment out of the EU working with other local authorities in Europe. At the margin of our activities it has been a significant commitment on behalf of the individuals primarily involved—Tony Brown, David Tarrant and Bob Pinkett when he was with us. In the Chininau TACIS scheme Tony had, I think, three spells of about 2 weeks over there. Chininau colleagues came over to us 2 or 3 times and needed husbanding—showing around. We forced ourselves to find the time and effort to put into this in the interstices of our activities but it wasn't a huge commitment. We, and the elected members of Hampshire, have said in effect that if you just stick to the things you have got to do, life gets very boring and tedious and that brings very low horizons. Whilst these things are optional they add a huge amount of added value.

Question/Comment

You clearly opened some doors very effectively. Now, if you were French or German you would have half the consulting, construction and transport sector supply industry following in behind you. It seems that if we, in Britain, are going to develop effective relationships with the Eastern Bloc, it will be very helpful to go in with a Local Authority, because that gives political engagement and ways of opening doors. But how are you extending your involvement to help the industry follow you into Moldova and Russia to secure advantage for the UK?

John Ekins

It is one of the great disappointments that when we have tried to give commercial undertakings a bit of an entree, particularly in the bus industry and other allied activities to do with transport, there has been reluctance. Perhaps we chose a bad place in Moldova which is poor and decrepit. Maybe if we had gone to somewhere more sexy, people would have come with us. We certainly saw that as an aspiration but it hasn't happened to the extent we hoped and we are disappointed about that. We have some good partnering arrangements with firms of consultants. We are not an insular authority, but it is quite difficult to get them to engage. Perhaps they have got their own agenda to follow. We are not as joined-up as the Germans and the French in exploiting commercial opportunities. This is probably a British problem more generally.

Rod Kimber

A supplementary to that is how far we are behind the French and Germans at the moment and what we could do to try and encourage our commercial sector to follow.

John Ekins

My reading of French and German activities is that they are more joined-up and are also more, in a way, chauvinistic than we are. And they are more enthusiastic about Europe. We, the British, can never make up our minds whether we want to be part of Europe or not. This is probably a big handicap for us. We still think that we might belong in the middle of the Atlantic rather than alongside western Europe.

Question/Comment

I went on a number of missions to central and eastern European countries in the early post-totalitarian period which I think were largely unsuccessful. In meeting people in the transport industry there seemed to be two types of individuals. Those who are prepared to consider and pursue reform—often younger people, both politicians and officials—and those who when you started to talk about reform their eyes narrowed or glazed over: these were often senior people. There was not going to be any reform until the latter left or were escorted off of the stage. From what you say, that problem seemed to have disappeared by the time you went into Moldova. Is that fair?

John Ekins

I vividly remember the 1996 conference when a number of people were making presentations from various places in Europe about things you could do. The response from the Moldovan authorities at that time was 'yes, we hear what you say but we are not really interested in things that would help us to improve what we've got. We are not really interested in your helping us to get our buses running better, or to deal with the problems we've got. What we want is a big urban motorway through the middle and a tramway system put back in, and oodles of capital investment. Don't talk to us about the small change, what we want is big money.' That changed very obviously.

It changed partly because we had got political engagement. In other words, it was not just practitioners going out there and talking to them; instead we had this political engagement. That brought a degree of political commitment which perhaps drove the officials a bit, along with the realisation that they were not going to get big capital investment and they were either going to collapse or start to pull themselves up by their boot straps by the smaller things we were telling them about. So, I guess Moldova was probably a bit different because it is a small place, is very poor and might well not survive in its present form as it has just re-elected a communist government which is now looking back into the Russian Federation. Interestingly Chisinau is almost a beacon of free economics and democracy against almost a return to old ways. Perhaps we helped them a bit with that.

Question/Comment

It is very interesting to consider what solutions there might be to the problems you describe in Chisinau. On the face of it there is very low car ownership, no traffic congestion, and everybody lives on housing estates on the edge of town. Therefore the buses ought to be highly profitable as they used to be in this country when it was at the same stage of development.

Did you consider issues of ownership and regulation? These might be quite fundamental to solving the problem—rather than helping patch up buses and getting the workshops organised and so on. Did you look at anything more fundamental?

Secondly, I notice back home (Hampshire) on your photograph of the real-time system, in about quarter of an hour's time, two buses are due to arrive, each going to the same place, and within about 4 seconds of each other. Are there any spin-off benefits in reliability from all of this high tech information and from the experience you are getting overseas?

John Ekins

To your first question I think 'yes'. I think the next stages might well be to look at a move towards privatisation—the disentanglement of the political municipality from the bus undertaking. I think we will possibly see this, although a change of government might inhibit this. But I think that we were not in a position to say 'Hey, this is the way you should do it', because after all, as your second question points out, the reasons for not doing it are because we have made a real total mess of buses in this country. They may not be decrepit now but they are not actually operating too well everywhere. So I think there is a move, perhaps, towards ownership and privatisation. But the real problem with it is that they, the buses and trolley buses, are heavily used but 80% of the punters were not paying anything. That was the problem, they should be successful if you get the revenues in.

Coming to your point about Winchester, I despair. I talked about the disintegration of local government, just as you are trying to integrate transport; but we have totally disintegrated transport in this country, and we struggle to deal with the problem of South Hampshire, a conurbation of nearly a million people. South Hampshire has got two unitary authorities, the County Council with an interest, it has three or four bus operators, train operators, and an attempt is being made to promote a light rapid transit which will be yet another operator eventually. Where is the ability to co-ordinate that? No wonder the buses are running four seconds apart because there is no means of stopping them doing that. It may just be that they got delayed in the dreadful traffic conditions in Winchester but actually it might just be running like that because that is the way they run. We actually need to get a grip on this—not to go back to municipally owned buses or nationalised railways, but to gain some coherence over the way things are operated so that we have a pattern of services we want, driven by a commercial endeavour to optimise the income from them. We could learn from Chisinau—at least they have got one bus undertaking, some regulation to the minibuses. All they want is a bit of wherewithal and they could make it rather better than we could in South Hampshire. So we could learn something from them.

Question/Comment

I considerably admire what you have done, John, but I have a number of management tests and one of them I call the Standard Test which is this: What is it going to look like as a headline in the Evening Standard? What is your answer to the headline which says 'Ekins Swanning Around in Moldova'—either in your local authority, and I genuinely admire what you have done, or in your role as a local authority officer, or wearing your ICE Counsel hat—which recognises that senior members of this institution go and do good work spending other people's money. I believe it is highly desirable but how do you, or rather, how do we justify doing this? That is the principal point. On the detail, I have a number of friends working in Byelorussia, Georgia, Lithuania under the flag of the World Bank, EBRD etc and I am not quite sure why the World Bank and EBRD are in those countries, but unusually they are not apparently in Moldova where you are.

John Ekins

Well that is an interesting and difficult question. I suppose I was expecting an interesting and difficult question from the questioner when I saw him here this evening. How do I answer it, I ask myself? This is how we deal with it because clearly it doesn't play very well with the punters, as I said, who have an awareness and it is easily misunderstood in the headlines of the Portsmouth News or the Southampton Echo, let alone the Evening Standard, but one antidote we have adopted is to engage them: When we first set about building our relationship with Basse Normandie we took them with us, so they were joining in the junket as it were and that seemed to settle things down. We are taking the BBC with us, are we not David, next time we go to Nizhny? So we are making a virtue out of it. Working in local government as long as I have done, you can never avoid the disconcerting headlines whatever you do and that comes with the territory. I leave it to the politicians to worry about and whether it is going to be a big problem for them. I think the one antidote is to take the people with you, engage them, and they are quite amazed and interested then. Then, if they go there and you get a few photographs of them in the sauna at Samarkand then you don't hear too much more about it.

What has happened to the World Bank? Good question. I am not an expert but I think that the World Bank is present but not inclined to invest in transport there at the moment.

Question/Comment

John, you clearly had an effect on the transport system over there, but I also know that you have an interest in highways infrastructure. I was wondering, is the highway infrastructure in a similar state of deterioration to the pictures of decrepit buses we saw, and were you able to offer any help and advice on that front?

John Ekins

We didn't get involved in talking about the highways infrastructure. I think it is something we would have been prepared to have done if we had been asked. The highway network is not as bad as the buses. There are places where it is pretty grim but then you could say that of certain parts of the UK before we had the 10 year plan. I wouldn't criticise them too much for their roads. I think the thing that is most lacking, as I've said, is the traffic management, the control of parking, any regulation of what is going on on the roads, rather than the condition of them.

Question/Comment

John, my own experience of working in Eastern Europe, (not actually in the transport field) was that the politicians were generally delighted to see you and the institutions were generally delighted to be getting investment from outside. However, it was sometimes quite difficult initially with the technical people to forge a good working relationship. There was a little bit of not quite resentment, but almost that, to Westerners coming in and telling them how to do their job. Did you find that at all, in this field?

John Ekins

I didn't personally, but Tony Brown and Bob Pinkett probably took the brunt of engaging these people and I think probably Tony is our secret ingredient because he has an ability to get on with people and calm them and overcome all resistance of that sort of nature.

Rod Kimber

John, you have described some work which has really pushed the boundaries and raised all sorts of questions. There is a mine of possible questions that we could ask about many things to do with the functioning of transport systems and the market economy, as car usage grows within it. We are immensely grateful to you for drawing all of this together and for giving such absorbing reflections on your own involvement and that of your team.