



## Asset Management Case Study

### Intro Box

Local Authority	Blackpool Council
Region	North West
Sector	Highways
Theme	Highways Asset Management
Benefits	Improve service delivery and right-size budgets, make efficiency savings and extend the life of highways assets.
Publication Date	November 2010

### Key lessons

- Keeping on top of the highways asset register and being able to use the asset data to understand the network better will deliver significant savings and efficiencies for Blackpool Council
- It is essential to understand your highways network in a different way (within its social framework)
- Development and implementation of the new approach to viewing highways asset data has involved a huge culture change for Blackpool Council staff and so it was crucial to communicate the purpose and benefits of the changes and obtain their buy-in.

### Summary

**The Council's sale of Blackpool Airport in 2006 resulted in £12 million of funding some of which kick-started implementation of a number of highways improvement schemes. This in turn triggered Blackpool Council to take a fundamental look at its highways maintenance data and asset management procedures.**

### Background

Blackpool undertook a comprehensive review of its existing highways system which revealed issues with the management of highway asset data and unlocking its value in decision making. The systems in use weren't joined-up, preventing the free flow of relevant information to the Council's decision makers. As such, the highways team were wasting time and resource trying to get senior management on board with decisions, which in turn was having an impact on the Council's long-term strategic objectives for Highways. New system and data storage concepts were introduced that are now the foundation for a new approach to highways asset management system – called the Graphical Resource Platform (GRP).

Following a successful pilot to prove of the concepts of the GRP, Blackpool Council bid for funding to further their work in the field of asset management and information control systems.

### **Drivers for Change**

Blackpool Council recognised that there were a number of key issues with their existing highways asset management systems and procedures, as follows:

- The data they had was out of date and disorganised making it difficult to access and extract meaningful information.
- The existing system was slow to act on requests.
- There was a lack of communication across the team.
- Information wasn't getting to the key decision-makers.
- In its current condition, Blackpool would fail to realise the requirement to get its inventory up to date by 2012 for accounting purposes (local councils will have to quantify what they have, it's value and also account for depreciation).

The team approached these issues from both a technological and social point of view. From a technological perspective, it was essential for the team to understand and quantify who is dependant on the data. They established that it was a number of users, including internal staff, senior management and the public. They also looked at the social worth of the road network to the local community to enable them to build a system that would represent the most value to road users. Following this process, they identified that they needed to build a collaborative system that was available to all the stakeholders outlined above. As such, they decided that web-based, online technology offered the best solution as it would be easily accessible (requiring only internet access) and easy to keep up to date. Also, being a web-based solution it would be relatively economical to develop and maintain over the long-term.

### **Improvement action**

Blackpool Council's 'Element 2' submission to DFT details how it is developing the Graphical Resource Platform (GRP) system from the proof of concept phase to a fully working and supported system that can be deployed to councils nationally. See [www.helq.org/asset\\_management](http://www.helq.org/asset_management). Reward funding of £600,000 was awarded.

Blackpool appointed a technology partner - a provider of web-based collaborative management systems - and they have been working in partnership to develop and build the GRP system to help manage and maintain asset data. One of the key benefits of the GRP solution is that it will store all the council's highways asset management data in a central place and be accessible via a standard web browser. The GRP will incorporate an innovative 'GRID' method for automatically working out the exact area and value of roads and footways, plus condition monitoring. It will also provide much wider access to asset information, enabling not only Blackpool Council engineers, but elected members and the general public to see and understand what highways infrastructure the Council owns and the condition it is in. This will help to facilitate improved resource management across a whole range of highways services including traffic management, parking and enforcement, highway maintenance and Streetscene services. The GRP system will enable very fast and accurate valuation of the Council's entire highways asset register and the valuation of carriageways will be transformed as it will be maintained with minimal effort.

Furthermore, any changes to the network will also be captured and reported to the Asset register, thereby automatically adjusting the condition and thus the valuation. This will increase the accuracy of the valuation of highways and the information can also be standardised to make annual reporting more efficient. This innovative approach will also facilitate the management and display of a wide range data including; road safety information (patrolled crossings, accident black spots, slippery road surfaces etc.), live public information (diversions, road closures, ice warnings, flood warnings etc.) and asset information. The safety of the highways network will increase significantly as this information will be made available for all road users to access via a simple to use web based system.

By integrating street works and facilities information for direct access by the Utility companies, the GRP system is now currently being used across the Yorkshire and Lancashire region to allow for collaboration between councils and Utility companies. Blackpool has recently met with a number of Utility companies, in particular United Utilities, who have expressed a keen desire to build this into the works scheduling systems to enhance works coordination and make efficiency savings. This is possible through the ability of the GRP for all parties to be able to view exactly what plans each organisation has for works and traffic management and to enable co-operation in sharing road works. This will not only save organisations money, but assist in compliance with the Traffic Management Act to significantly reduce disruption to the highway network and limit the impact on residents and businesses using Blackpool's highway network.

Blackpool Council formed a Project Board to oversee the project. This included all the key project stakeholders to ensure that everyone's issues and/or concerns were addressed. To date, the first phase of the GRP system has already been delivered successfully, and the next phase is in development and due to be complete in 2011.

In addition to GRP is the development of the G-Location system which is able to provide one unified information source. This will have huge benefits in the case of a civil emergency as it will enable the Council to manage and re-order the transport network very quickly.

The "Road Explorer" programme was also launched in late 2009, giving up to date information about road works and road closures in Blackpool. Born in Blackpool, the Road Explorer has been designed to display street works in a graphical and user friendly way and to allow the public to see exactly where current and future street works are situated and for how long. The site allows the user to zoom into specific roadworks and look at the details, including contact details so they can obtain more information if they wish. The system allows users to filter the data so they can just see works that are likely to have a severe effect on congestion or those that will have a slight or no disruptive effect. At the National Land & Property Gazetteer (NLPG) and National Street Gazetteer (NSG). - 'Underpinning Transformational Government' conference in October 2009, the Improvement and Development Agency and Intelligent Addressing awarded Blackpool Council 'Most Effective NSG and Street Works Integration' winners of the NLPG and NSG Exemplar Awards. The awards recognise the innovation, commitment and achievement of the local authority community, including the police and fire authorities, in their use of NLPG and NSG. This system has now been taken up by more than 50 authorities across Yorkshire and the North of England. It is expected that this system will become UK wide thereby reaping wider benefits.

Blackpool was also awarded NW REIP funding to for an Advanced Directional Signs Regional Survey. This funding has been used to survey approximately 3000km of the strategic road network across the North West of England predominantly focussed on the Fylde Coast area. There is consensus that the regions' signage has areas of obsolescence and that the system has become inconsistent and poor quality in places. This project focused on the Fylde Coast and regionally, giving NW-wide efficiency benefits. This

survey included; Variable speed control, Variable message signing, Telemetric control and information systems, Advanced directional signage and Tourism signage. This project was primarily concerned with signage, however another objective of the project was to prove a mechanism for sharing highways asset and traffic information across boundaries using new online technologies. Developing new technologies for collaboration and information sharing will be vital to the future deployment of shared services and other joint ventures aimed at making efficiency savings.

In March 2010, Blackpool's Highways Asset Management Plan was approved for the first time. This is important as Local Authorities are able to use non ring fenced revenue funding, allocated by the Department for Communities and Local Government through a Formula Grant, for maintenance of local highways. The increased accuracy in the Plan of the inventory of highways assets, their existing condition and target condition based upon desired service levels, are now being used to determine what expenditure is required. In particular, Blackpool Council Elected members now understand the importance of highway maintenance and the implications of maintaining funding over the long term. This work is continuing with Elected Member workshops in autumn 2010 which will assist in prioritisation of non-ring fenced funding towards highway maintenance. Blackpool Council is also using this information to investigate Prudential Borrowing to fund a Borough-wide street renewal programme.

### **Barriers**

One of the main barriers Blackpool Council faced is that the move to the new system involved a huge culture change for staff. A key concern was that the new system and processes could be more labour intensive and involve more work. To address this, Blackpool use a 'Systems thinking' approach to make a detailed examination of the processes involved in maintaining an accurate Asset register. Using this work Blackpool brought about a culture change and arranged several presentations to senior management. These were followed by several road shows to various stakeholders and staff, giving them information about the new programme and the opportunity to understand the benefits they would gain from the new way of working. In addition, there has been engagement with Elected Members in showing them how improved information about the highway network condition as well as its social context, eg access to school routes, proximity to health centres, can support how they can influence more focused use of the highways maintenance budget.

### **Outcomes**

Blackpool Council has recognised that sustaining highways asset management improvement over the long term requires the development of an 'Asset Management Culture'. To address this, they have built up a network of 'knowledge partners' extending into academic organisations and industrial operators. The pioneering technology and processes developed by Blackpool and their technology partner has attracted the support of many organisations within business. This knowledge partnership has the potential to create a spin-off 'National Information Portal', offering the improvements in highways asset management to all Councils across the UK.

Blackpool Council has taken an active role as a regional champion to help disseminate good practice. As an example of this, they presented at NW regional CIPFA seminar in 2009, and at an AIA conference 'Making the Roads Work' in Leeds in July 2010. Blackpool and their technology partner have collaborated with several local authorities within the region to show-case and discuss the work they are undertaking and planning in the future. There are also discussions underway to undertake joint work

with other authorities, for example Cumbria County Council, to promote highways asset management best practice.

Blackpool held a regional Asset Management Seminar in Blackpool in September 2010, jointly hosted with LOGIN. The NW Login group aims to improve highways services across member authorities through support, guidance and sharing of data and information in the application of information systems and technology. LOGIN covers core systems such as GIS, Integrated Highway Management Systems and UKPMS and has widened to take into account current issues such as the Traffic Management Act and the National Street Gazetteer. Group members are not necessarily IT experts but in their role, they have a thorough understanding of how one or more specialist IT systems support the highways service. Blackpool has now join forces with LOGIN and launched the Information for innovation IFI web forum at the above event. The group is currently involved with making best use of mobile working solutions as well as Transport Asset Management Planning.

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