

Stepping up to the customer challenge



Steve Beauchamp, business support director at A-one+, highlights the importance of the sector working with its customers in mind

The relationship between roadworks and customer experience is an area of developing strategy and learning. Our customers rely on a safe and resilient road network for business and for personal travel, but we have a challenge on our hands to deliver the programme of investment on the strategic road network whilst delivering improved levels of customer satisfaction. So how do we go about tackling these two high level objectives which on the face of it might be pulling in different directions?

Firstly, we need to better understand what our customer wants, by having better quality conversations. We need to determine priorities by engaging customers in conversation rather than assuming we know what they want. We are already starting to see how this might develop through the work of Transport Focus, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and associated customer panels. What is certain is that in our digital age, customers look for reliable and real time information, which can be used to plan journeys from origin to destination in a reliable manner. Another area of conversation with our customer has to be around education about what we do and why we do it. Remember the Tufty Club, or public service broadcasts, all of which contributed to making our roads some of the safest roads in Europe? At the front line we see time

after time customer enquiries answered simply by explaining what we're trying to do. What if we were to do this more proactively and let customers know what we're planning to do before we do it, and let them know we are on their side and want to keep them on our side? That comes from understanding each other's needs.

The customer experience

Secondly, there has to be an acknowledgement across our industry that customers are interested in more than just the quality of the roads that we build and maintain. Customers want to feel safe, feel stress free and feel in control of their journeys. The things we have to do whether it be managing incidents, breakdowns or putting out roadworks to maintain the asset disrupt that equilibrium and introduce pain points and stress to customers' journeys. There are things we can do to address this but we need a collaborative approach between clients and the supply chain to address this across the multiple forms of contract that are currently in operation to ensure a consistent experience for customers.

Thirdly, whilst there are many challenges for us to ponder, we must recognise and celebrate some of the great customer service which is already happening across our supply chain. For example the recent use of the innovative Airscan technology using Wi-Fi and Bluetooth signals to provide real time traffic management

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on diversion routes is a fine example. This shows our customers that we're still looking after them even when we've diverted them off their normal route, helping reduce stress levels on often unfamiliar diversion routes, and often overnight in the dark when roadside features are harder to spot. Another example is the multi award winning IPV No Strikes training with the freight transport industry with the backing of the Freight Transport Association (FTA). As well as educating freight drivers about traffic management in general and IPVs in particular, this grass routes engagement has been two-way and we have listened and recorded views from over 2,000 lorry drivers with over 40,000 years of professional driving experience between them. Their feedback should be being used now to help us develop more customer friendly traffic management. Dedicated website and Twitter feeds have also ensured the legacy of the learning and maintain the two-way conversation with this key customer group.

If we consider safety or innovation, we have pooled knowledge over time in these areas and have many industry wide bodies rightly driving these areas forward, never more so than making sure everyone stays well and goes home safe. Should we be looking to do the same for customers and start by pooling our knowledge?

So, three areas that as an industry we need to consider to make certain that we understand what our customer wants and so they can understand the benefits to them of the work we carry out day and night throughout the year to maintain and improve the national asset that is our road network. 🚫

