



Facing challenges

Andy Jamieson is in his 40th year in the highways industry. The A-one+ managing director reflects on his time in the sector and discusses some of the challenges around being one of the Highways Agency's leading service providers



After gaining wide experience of civil engineering within the public sector, including a spell with North Yorkshire County Council, Andy Jamieson joined Halcrow in 1999.

He was instrumental in forming the A-one+ joint venture, Halcrow/Colas/Costain and its rapid growth in winning four MAC contracts.

"I got a role in one of the divisions (at North Yorkshire County Council) that carry out maintenance. That's kind of when I got into highways maintenance," notes Jamieson. *"I was an assistant surveyor, which provided a good grounding because you had the managing of blue collar issues and also had to deal with the client in terms of the service. You also had to manage budgets. For a young engineer it provided a good background in general management. That set me off down the highway maintenance route.*

"As my career progressed I became the trunk road manager. A lot of work went to the private sector and that's when I transferred to Halcrow. That's when my career really shot off because there wasn't a great deal of expertise in the private sector. My background is really public service so my ethos is delivering a good service for the public.

"My mantra is to keep everyone safe, keep the client happy and then make

the margins. My experience is if you do it in that order it follows through."

Joint venture

A-one+ is a leading service provider for the Highways Agency, supporting them to help customers with their journeys on England's strategic road network. The company is the service provider for Area 7; East Midlands, Area 12; Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire and Area 14; North East.

The A-one+ joint venture is now well established, with Jamieson keen to point out that there is real synergy between the three parent companies.

"We first started off as A-One+ in the north east in a small area. It was then Halcrow and Colas, but we bid in Area 10 which included construction management. That's when we realised we needed a contractor so Costain came on board," he points out.

"There's a synergy in terms of skills, but we also wanted the organisation to have similar values and cultures with all three firms focused on the customer and their staff.

"I like to call it a virtual company so that when you actually go into the joint venture and ask who someone works for you can't really tell. We only have one client - the Highways Agency - and all our systems are geared towards

"All the Areas have got different challenges"

Andy Jamieson

delivering their services. We can quickly respond to the HA's needs and focus on their requirements. We're a non-incorporated joint venture which means that we don't employ people directly.

"Staff are seconded in and they work under our systems. Another advantage of having a three-way joint venture is when we're dealing with peaks in the HA workload we can tap into parent company resources in terms of design and construction requirements to deal with them."

Challenges

Working solely for the Highways Agency can present its own unique set of challenges.

"A good example would be when the Highways Agency needed to make significant savings. As a leading service provider we had to lead the way and gave them significant savings by altering the way we delivered routine maintenance and incident management," explains Jamieson. →

“We always have in our mantra that we’re easy to do business with. Equally, during fiscal stimulus the HA expect us to respond in a positive way to dealing with additional spend. It’s very much about ensuring the HA delivers its programme on time and to budget. Because the HA has got a big reputation for delivery they rely on us as a leading provider to make sure we deliver our programme of works.”

Shovel ready

Earlier this year Roads Minister Robert Goodwill called on the industry to be ready for a large increase in work ahead of the government’s biggest investment in the road network since the 1970s.

Jamieson believes that a move away from annualised funding is key.

“The positive thing is that this additional funding has been ringfenced. We’re moving away from annualisation and that’s a big help. I think there will still be a need for robust and accurate programmes, but in the past if you had a bad winter in January and February they’d be a mad rush to spend money in March.”

“Our supply chain tell us that a big part of being ready is having visibility of the programme so they can gear up for it. If we can actually have a two or three year programme that’s going to give certainty to invest in resources and also create efficiencies and utilisation then we can smooth out the peaks and troughs. I think there is a concern on the materials side, particularly with blacktop. There’s going to be big demand put on the quarries. I think the key to it is visibility of the programme so everyone knows what’s coming.”

“These are exciting times in terms of workload and having more scope to do the right thing at the right time, instead of being tied to annualised budgets and on/off funding.”

Winning contracts

Despite A-one’s good work in Areas 7, 12 and 14, Jamieson admits the company has a challenge on its hand in order to win the HA’s asset support contracts (ASCs).

“All the Areas have got different challenges and are quite diverse. Even though Area 14 is small geographically the A1 around Newcastle has probably got over 100,000 vehicles using it every day. It’s probably one of the busiest two carriageways in the country. Because there’s no hard shoulder it can be difficult to maintain in terms of getting maintenance vehicles off the main carriageway, putting signs out, etc.”

“There’s a huge range of challenges, but all three Areas have performed well in terms of delivering the HA’s budget.”

A snow blower being used on the A66 in Area 14



“We haven’t won an asset support contract yet so that’s a concern. We’re determined to get back to our maximum market share,” he adds.

“We’re keen to win them and have put a lot of effort in this year into doing so. Competition is fierce.”

So what can give A-one+ the edge when tendering for a contract?

“I think it is about understanding the HA’s needs going forward. The way the tenders go, you’ve got to outline your approach, but also evidence it.”

“The good work we have done in the past will help us hopefully win contracts in the future,” Jamieson remarked.

“To do so we need to demonstrate that we can deliver to time and budget. We need to explore collaboration by working more closely with clients and the supply chain.”

“We also need to drive lean through the business. We need to continue to push the boundaries in terms of safety, by eliminating road workers crossing carriageways and educating drivers. There needs to be more focus on the customer in terms of finding out what their needs are. We must demonstrate that we understand those needs and give them positive messages about our business.”

“They need to know how important the strategic road network is in supporting growth. There’s an opportunity with the funding to make

smart asset management decisions. That’s about doing the right thing at the right time rather than things failing and then being repaired. It’s about being more proactive to prevent failures. The certainty of the funding and the longer-term thinking is going to help that. It’s a really exciting time for the industry.”

Mad March

Reflecting on his four decades in the industry, Jamieson says some things have changed dramatically while others have remained the same.

“Safety is unrecognisable now to what it was when I started,” he says. *“Regrettably the industry hasn’t changed much in terms of the mad March pack and load approach. That happened when I first started. It’s better now, but it’s still there. That’s why I’m excited about this opportunity.”*

“During mad March everyone wants to spend their budget and if you don’t spend it you lose it. When you go and talk to the workforce they’ll say why are we going round grass cutting and picking up litter in the summer when we have long nights. And then in the winter we’ve got to do winter maintenance and work on other schemes. They say wouldn’t we be better doing these schemes in the summer? It’s been a frustration that hasn’t changed throughout my career. Hopefully things will change going forward,” he concludes. —