

**REPORT BY CROWN MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS ON THE
MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS OF THE TRIAL CLOSURE OF
LENDAL BRIDGE**



Review of The Lendal Bridge Scheme

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Introduction

In April 2014 Crown Management Solutions Ltd (CMS) were commissioned by City of York Council (CYC) to undertake a review of the events and decisions underpinning the Lendal Bridge scheme. The review was commissioned after the Leader of CYC took the decision to re-open the Bridge on 8th April 2014. The decision to re-open Lendal Bridge and cease all enforcement activity was taken in response to the publication of the Adjudicator decision that had upheld a number of appeals from members of the public and which was made public on 1st April 2014.

The closure and enforcement of Lendal Bridge perhaps represents one of the most significant traffic schemes introduced by CYC over the last few decades. The possibility for the scheme as an option for future traffic management activity was mentioned as far back as April 2011 and was included in the York Third Local Transport Plan, published at this time. Closure of the Bridge formed part of a wider approach to economic regeneration and was developed in order to deal with the anticipated growth patterns in traffic movements across the City of York as key sites, both commercial and housing were being developed.

Although acknowledged as a possible future traffic management tool much earlier, this review predominately focuses upon the timescale from autumn 2012 through to the launch of the scheme in late August 2013, the subsequent six month trial period and the final decision to abandon the scheme and re-open the Bridge in April 2014.

By April 2014 the closure of Lendal Bridge had attracted significant and predominately negative media interest at both a local, regional and national level and was appearing to also be highly unpopular with local York residents and businesses alike. The scheme had also generated a significant internal workload for CYC in terms of managing the high levels of appeals, Freedom of Information requests and individual complaints.



Methodology

This review draws its comments and recommendations from a number of one to one interviews held with key officers involved in the development and delivery of the scheme and the Cabinet Member in position at the time. It has also drawn upon a range of written evidence in order to highlight the process and key decisions that underpinned the scheme and a thorough desk search for evidence to substantiate individual recollections. This review only reports, in good faith, on the information and recollections that have been willingly submitted by officers and the Cabinet Member in position at that time. The review does not include any further exploration of potential evidence undertaken by CMS beyond this position or include additional bespoke searches of individual emails or files.

It is possible therefore that further enquiries may uncover new evidence, which has not been brought to bear or highlighted in this review and which may challenge some of the findings, recommendations and recollections highlighted.

Findings

Governance

The Lendal Bridge scheme suffered from a lack of governance and robust project management from the very start of its development phase. Indeed the transition from the original rationale and thinking behind the scheme, which appears to have been articulated in April 2011 in the Third Local Transport Plan, right through to its launch of the trial phase in August 2013 presents a picture of confusion and conflicting recollections. During the course of this review CMS were unable to find a single, clear and cohesive audit trail that plotted the progress of the scheme in a logical and transparent way.

CMS has found significant evidence that progress of the scheme was dependent upon a number of individual officers agreeing to deadlines for the delivery of key milestones. These agreements were made however, within a disparate and uncoordinated framework. Whilst Gantt charts predicting progress against milestones were produced, they were drawn in isolation to a detailed project plan and these charts appeared to have been abandoned as predicted delivery dates were missed. Moreover, there were no agreed stated objectives or deliverables upon which effective project management is dependent. This approach quickly led to a spiral of slippage from a political perspective and has not subsequently produced a clear audit trail of events.

There was no named and agreed Senior Responsible Officer for the scheme. Senior management took on elements of responsibility for sections of the scheme development but this was not set against a clear comprehensive project plan. As the development of the scheme was brought forward within the context of 'individual tasks' the responsibility for whole scheme progress appears to have been passed from one senior officer to another. There was no evidence of a critical path analysis of key tasks being delivered or any intelligent holistic project tracking by one nominated officer of overall progress. There was no accountable and responsible project board created to assist and support officers in the development of the scheme.

Individual officers were left to make seemingly critical decisions with no clear 'safety net' or checking procedures in place. CMS believes this led to working protocols that encouraged a significant number of individual and bespoke meetings which had no formal agendas, minutes or action points recorded.



The scheme was surrounded by a culture of individual and disparate meetings and decision-making processes. When meetings were held that involved senior Directors and the Cabinet Member they were not prepared for with agenda's, formal minute taking or the written recording of action points. During the course of this review CMS have found that officers and the Member attending these meetings have significantly differing recollections of their outcomes and action points. A search for written evidence has found individual notes and emails that were made at the time but which on historical reflection, can be interpreted in different ways.

Political Involvement

It appears that much of the scheme development was driven by political ambition and that as the development phase suffered slippage, critical milestones were imposed in order to achieve this ambition. Despite evidence that clearly demonstrates the scheme was discussed and considered during 2012, officers did not begin working in earnest on implementation until May 2013 when the scheme finally received full political approval.

It is difficult to find any evidence of boundaries being put in place to separate the political ambition and leadership for the scheme, from the day-to-day operational processes. As the development of the scheme progressed the Cabinet Member effectively behaved as the project manager, pushing forward deadlines, chasing progress and setting key targets. This position was not challenged by senior officers and facilitated a culture of pressurised and directive decision-making.

The development phase for the scheme was driven by a pre-set launch date, which officers felt was non-negotiable. Despite evidence to suggest that by the autumn of 2012 there was awareness amongst officers of the political ambition to launch the trial in August 2013, the scheme did not achieve full cabinet approval until May 2013. Officers were not protected in this position and not directed by senior management regarding the actual prioritisation of the scheme in relation to its formal status. This led to a position that during the last 3 months of development critical decisions were made under significant pressure as after receiving formal political approval officers felt the ambition date for launch on 27th August was not negotiable. Officers did report the difficulties in achieving the deadline at the time but it appears that no reassessment was undertaken of the actual position once political approval had been formally achieved. This meant that after this key milestone was achieved no realistic assessment was made of whether real progress to date meant the remaining timeframe was realistically achievable.

Project Management

The scheme was not placed within a clear prioritisation schedule. The critical development phases were being progressed during a major downsizing exercise, which had a direct impact on officers working on the scheme, upheaval from relocation of offices and within the context of other major schemes and projects requiring delivery. There is no evidence to demonstrate that the delivery of this scheme was actually given first priority or that any necessary and additional resources were allocated during this phase.

CMS have been unable to uncover any agreed project definition documents. There does not appear to be a single source of information covering the original scope, objectives, deliverables, critical path analysis and outcomes that were expected from the scheme and although analysis of the final data suggests the scheme did actually meet many of its original objectives, it is difficult to understand the detailed context and impact of the outcomes within the whole scheme rationale.

Inadequate resourcing in terms of the allocated funding and timescales after full cabinet approval meant that a number of potential design options were not brought forward. These options could have included changes to the road design upon approach, use of reactive bollards and bespoke road markings.

Although it became apparent very early in the trial that the predicted numbers of PCN's was significantly below the actual number, no active steps were taken to redress the balance. The lack of a pre-planned risk register meant that the response to the number of PCN's was not pre-planned and fully considered. Technical officer advice on how to redress this position was not accepted at the time and senior management appears to have been driven by a fear that the scheme would suffer a legal challenge if the options put forward were adopted. The Cabinet Member response was to focus the issue onto the scheme having inadequate signage, a position, which officers still maintain was not relevant to the high numbers of PCN's being issued.

The scheme did not appear to adopt the convention of educate, engineer and enforce which is associated with national safer roads strategy. Whilst this is not necessarily a requirement this best practice was highlighted as a possible route forward to the Cabinet member during the December 2013. Following the nationally based rationale adopted by the safer roads camera enforcement policy a proposal for spot fines was repeatedly put forward by officers as offering the best solution to the issue of PCN's but was rejected several times. Senior management appeared to be highly nervous of this approach raising both legal and political concerns.



The large numbers of PCN's being issued appears to have significantly contributed to the negative response by both the public and media. The Communications team reports that at its height the Lendal Bridge scheme required more intensive resource than any other previous project that can be recalled. Although a budget for one additional officer was made available for the short term this did not cover the additional communications requirement as the scheme grew in unpopularity.

As the trial progressed the pressure to respond to individual complaints by members of the public increased. This requirement was highly time consuming and resource intensive and took the focus away from overall management and seeking to learn from best practice elsewhere. The result was that officers became highly reactive to external pressures and opinion, which facilitated unplanned management decisions and a more significant loss of control.



Recommendations

Governance

It could be argued that the issue relating to the Lendal Bridge scheme was created as far back as when the manifesto reference to introduce new enforced traffic management schemes in York was made. Although not clearly articulated as a scheme within the manifesto it could be assumed that the Administration was fully committed to this longer-term vision and subsequent introduction of the Lendal Bridge scheme. It is difficult to highlight this phase in any detail, as many of the senior officers that were involved at this time are not available for comment. However recollections from the Cabinet member would suggest that in future more formal and effective communication processes should be adopted between senior management and members before political manifesto promises are made. Potential manifesto promises need to be communicated effectively with officers before they are published and that in return officers should feel empowered and protected to offer a realistic picture of what they anticipate is possible to deliver effectively within the manifesto timeframes.

If Members could feel confidence in delivery through the introduction of robust project and programme management systems, new working protocols could effectively be introduced. These protocols could set clearly articulated and accepted boundaries between political leadership and operational responsibility, enabling Members to have a defined point of contact with officers. This would prevent confusion in communication and responsibility and also remove the threat of the disparate responsibility and accountability.

Confidence from members in a future programme management system should also address the tension that can arise from projects and schemes receiving political 'in principle' agreements and subsequent full approval. This interim period of 3 to 4 months in the planning of the Lendal Bridge scheme proved critical and raised tension between political expectations that the scheme would be implemented and officers prioritising a scheme, which from their perspective did not have a formal approved status.

CYC should consider the introduction of a range of more formal audit trails. This would mean additional resource would be required to produce formal agendas, minutes and action points of meetings and briefings but would provide a clear reference point to ensure that all the attendees of meetings have a subsequent single understanding of the action points thereby significantly increasing efficiency. Minutes and action points need to be clear in their assignment so that individual officers understand their role and deadlines. To strengthen this point further, minutes of meetings should be agreed by the nominated Chair of those meetings prior to their circulation.



Programme Management

In future new schemes and projects should not be brought forward in isolation. Activities and ambitions should be set within a framework of a whole programme approach, which is coordinated and prioritised as each existing scheme progresses towards delivery. This would enable Members to assess choices on scheme ideas and fully appreciate the any possible multiplier effects as delivery of individual schemes and projects commence.

A realistic programme management approach is perhaps most efficiently achieved through the introduction of robust project management as a baseline. Time invested at the start of a scheme design and feasibility should ensure that;

- Adequate resources and funding streams are highlighted
- Each stage of a project development is set against realistic predictive milestones, including plotting of each stage from design through to delivery
- Realistic budgets and spend profiles are plotted, which can be tracked against timescales for delivery
- Expected outcomes and benefits are listed which would enable an estimate of benefit cost ratios to be introduced

Within CES a new Programme Delivery Board has already been created to provide new governance for transport schemes, with the inaugural meeting diaried to take place in mid July. In order to be fully affective this Board will need to agree a formal role and remit and reporting protocols. Membership needs to be at a senior level, with individual project managers reporting progress on their scheme. In future this approach will facilitate a clear understanding of delivery progress at a programme level. The programme and project management of non-transport projects is currently under a separate in-depth review process.

The new Programme Delivery Board should also deal with on going prioritisation of scheme delivery. This will demand a flexible and supportive approach, as inevitably some schemes will suffer slippage through a range of unforeseen circumstances that are beyond officer control. However the Board needs to ensure that slippage or increases in budget are transparently and pro-actively managed so that officers do not feel the need to hide unforeseen risks or make promises on deadlines, which cannot be realistically achieved.



The new Programme Delivery Board could also consider Member involvement. Invitations to attend, perhaps on a quarterly basis would enable members to feed in any political concerns direct with operational and technical officers within an informal setting and facilitate scrutiny and questioning of project managers within a structured environment. A quarterly longer meeting could facilitate this with an additional dedicated agenda item included. Minutes and action points of these discussions will create a clear audit trail of the decisions reached.

The lack of governance surrounding the Lendal Bridge project led to a contradictory mix of officers not being empowered to make technical and operational decisions that are within their expertise and job function alongside those same officers being left to make individual critical decisions that are not checked or set within a defined process driven framework. This leaves individual officers vulnerable and not protected by agreed process and transparent audit trails and facilitates a culture of individual task management, which is difficult to hold to account. The new Programme Delivery Board needs to ensure each project has a clear critical path analysis which highlights key decision points, auditing the rationale behind these decisions during the planning and delivery phases.

Project Management

Standard robust project management, which is designed to facilitate a series of transparent gateways and standards, would ensure that projects are not progressed unless they have been fully planned and costed with a detailed understanding of the overall deliverability of a project. This in turn would enable officers to practice realistic programme management best practice, enabling future comparisons between individual schemes and informed choices to be made. A robust programme management system would provide clarity on likely impacts across the whole programme if one individual project suffers slippage.

Project gateways should include an agreed transparent set of criteria, which ensures a scheme is planned and plotted throughout its life. These criteria should take account of broader factors, such as likely maintenance and whole life costs and also bring to play the need for marketing the project and the likely media and public response. It is recommended that the Communication team are given early sight of project plans so that, when required they can fully contribute to a communications plan and its required resources before a potentially high profile project is agreed.



Efficient project management will prevent over focus on one delivery issue. In the case of Lendal Bridge during the trial period a lack of management input allowed for a technical disagreement to emerge which effectively became support for the ongoing application of rigid enforcement versus pressure to change the signage. This focus prevented seeking an understanding of learning points from similar schemes elsewhere and an understanding that contravention rates in York were reasonably consistent with other similar enforced schemes with signing regimes appearing to have little impact on overall contravention rates.

At the height of the trial one officer had spent time observing the Bridge, watching drivers initially following the signs which placed them in the correct lane only to then divert from this lane and the clearly defined loop in order to drive over the Bridge. In their opinion having observed driver behavior the desired traffic flow was made clear through the signage but drivers still diverted over the Bridge. The focus on signage did not consider the potential confusing effect of additional signage at locations, which already displayed a range of traffic management information. An additional issue was the refusal from Satellite Navigation companies to re-programme their automated directions at this stage in the trial, which caused yet further driver confusion and complaints from motorists relying on their satellite technology.

New project management processes need to plan for risk and contingency during delivery to enable officers to consider a full suite of options rather than allowing for focus upon potentially reactive solutions.

In future it is perhaps worth considering a broader approach to scheme impact and response from the public. There is evidence to suggest that there are a number of residents in York who are deeply committed to the 'place' where they live and engage in pro-active responses to the actions of CYC. It could be argued that this position is further exacerbated by the fact that York still has a dedicated daily newspaper, whereby in comparison a number of similar sized towns and cities have either weekly or regional newspapers reporting on local issues.

CYC does invest heavily in consultation and has a track record of seeking opinion on future schemes in terms of their design but in the case of Lendal Bridge the trial was initiated with the almost immediate requirement for PCN's to be issued to offending drivers. There does not appear to have been a detailed consultation process, which highlighted this factor, and any general support for active traffic management schemes may have been given without this understanding. There are examples of other areas that have introduced enforced schemes, when driver behaviour has been monitored over a period of time, giving access to solid data before enforcement is introduced and had this approach been adopted it may have reduced the unpopularity of the scheme.



During the course of the review CMS felt that despite the failures associated with the scheme both officers and the Cabinet Member had acted with individual integrity and a genuine desire to deliver the best possible outcome for York. However, the positive benefits of this approach could not be realised due to inadequate governance, poor project management, unrealistic deadlines which led to a culture of reactive decision-making.



