



INSTITUTE OF HIGHWAY ENGINEERS

Anthony Sharp, IHE President
Thursday, 10 December 2009-12-17
Speech at launch of IHE
Cheneygates, Westminster Abbey

It gives me very great pleasure to welcome honoured guests and members of the Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers past and present to this reception to formally launch the **Institute of Highway Engineers**.

As a professional Institute we can trace our roots back to 1965 when the **Association of Highway Technicians** was formed. Its first chairman Bill Taylor, Assistant County Surveyor for Cambridgeshire at the time, and it was Bill who oversaw its evolution into the **Highways and Traffic Technicians Association**.

In 1988 the title of Technician Engineer was replaced by the new title of Incorporated Engineer following which the **Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers** was created in January 1989. I'm pleased that the first president of the IHIE, Kevin Walsh, is able to join us here today.

The decision to re-launch as the **Institute Highway Engineers** has been one driven, as always, by it's members and the dropping of incorporated from our title in no way indicates the demises of that qualification, Far from it!

At the core of the Institute will always be professional, experienced, knowledgeable highway engineers operating in a range of specialist fields such as development control; highway design; maintenance; traffic management, or traffic signal control.

It is they who are responsible for much of the day-to-day operation of this country's highway network involved in its design, construction and maintenance.

Whilst we understand the work of the "Incorporated Engineer" the designation or a suitable alternative is something that has exercised the engineering council and it's registering bodies for a number of years (and is likely to do so for a number of years to come) and it is a title that the public have very little knowledge or affinity too.

The removal of the word "incorporated" from our title also recognises that our membership is now broader than it has ever been with Engineering Technicians, Incorporated Engineers and Chartered Engineers all now able to be assessed and registered with the Engineering Council through us.

The loss of Incorporated in our title should be one less stumbling block in our engagement with politicians, policy makers, and most importantly the public.

The newly named institute will continue the IHIE's desire to encourage and accept into our membership not only those who are just entering our profession but also the long serving engineers. This includes those who, whilst working in highways, may not always have the full educational base to progress immediately to registration but can, as members, be encouraged to develop their skills, engage within the profession and progress via the technical report routes.

The construction and highways industry face a number of significant challenges in the coming years. In particular the prospect of reduced funding, the issues of climate change, a significant reduction in those killed or seriously injured on our roads, and shortage of trained professional staff.

Construction, and highways, in particular, will always be an "easy" target for central and local government cut backs and whilst there has been significant investment in major infrastructure projects and some increase in maintenance works, the poor state of the existing network is becoming more evident. The public's view, expressed in a recent pole by the National Highways Transport Network, is that the condition of their roads is more important than congestion and public transport. This means that a continued increase, (at best), or at worst a standstill in investment in maintenance must be pursued if the national asset that is our road infrastructure is not to decline beyond the perilous state it already finds itself in.

Irrespective of the current debate on the science behind climate change we now see far more significant variants in weather than we have been use to. Certainly a colleague from the north of England has seen his third occurrence of a "once in a hundred year" event in the last 18 months!

Whether this is part of long term global cycle or a reflection of man's recent impact on our planet leading to global warming I'm not able to comment. The decisions on how we address the problem globally will, hopefully be addressed in Copenhagen. What I do know is that as recently demonstrated by the events in Cumbria we as engineers need not concern ourselves with the science more we need to respond to the challenge and play our part in designing and building what has been described as a climate change resilient Britain

This year Government consulted on its strategy for road safety beyond its present 2010 targets.

"A safer way" highlights that whilst Britain's roads have for many years been some of the safest in the world we have of late started to be matched by a number of countries, notably the Netherlands and Sweden who are now starting to see the benefits of their systematic approach.

At its heart the Government's proposed strategy has the need for a systematic approach to addressing the number of casualties.

In particular Road collisions should be seen as a failure of the WHOLE traffic system rather than a JUST a failure of the driver

The goal is to make our roads the safest in the world. This will be no small commitment due to ever increasing traffic volumes. The past 30 years has seen an increase of more than 90% in traffic on our highway network, and the continued improvement of other countries means we need to aim for a 1/3rd reduction in Killed & Seriously injured (possibly more?) by 2020 if we are indeed to have the safest roads in the world.

As far as staff recruitment and retention is concerned I would like to turn to the maiden speech in 1963 of the newly elected member for Luton

In a debate on Science and Education he noted that

"There just are not enough engineers to go round. We should talk less about the need for more scientists and more about the need for more practical engineers."

That shortage of "practical engineers" is as real today, if not worse, than when Will Howie, Now Lord Howie, spoke of it 46 years ago

Then he thought that there were 3 main reasons for this

The "poor status" of engineers in our society in comparison to other traditional and emerging professions such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, journalists and even advertising men

The "relatively poor reward by way of income enjoyed by engineers"

And "engineering's low status as an academic study"

Whilst the first 2, status and financial reward, it could be argued, are **still** barriers to our young people following careers in engineering, The latter, higher education, has seen some progress and the IHE played a pivotal role in the setting up of the Joint Accreditation Panel that accredited relevant technician and Higher national courses in the UK until it was succeeded by the Joint Board of Moderators in 2002. Today, we are still an active partner in JBM accrediting higher education courses.

Although, even here, if I might be controversial, perhaps we have still to get it "right" with Sartor3 and then UK spec eventually setting the educational base for Incorporated Engineers at a bachelors degree, the result has been that an arguably tried and tested root of the Ordinary and Higher National certificates, which allowed those studying such qualifications to also learn their craft "on the job" have all but disappeared and major employers, principally local authorities, who use to "grow their own" have significantly cut back on their training provisions.

I wonder then, should we be surprised that we are now seeing a shortage of technician level engineers where further education was a more likely progression route to employment than Higher education?

And is there also the likelihood that for those who DO follow a degree qualification there will be a bleeding away of the brightest and best students into more financially rewarding employment when the economy does begin to strengthen.

The "Baby boom" generation that was just entering the profession when Will spoke in 1963 is now retiring (in the last 20 year the number of workers in construction aged 60 years plus has doubled yet the number aged 24 years and under has fallen by 27%) and we need to replace them if for no other reason than our to maintain our economic competitiveness.

Project Brunel reporting earlier this year identified a significant future shortfall in transportation sector engineers and whilst the current recession may have delayed the impact of such a shortfall it will occur unless something "significant" is done to encourage more into our profession.

IHE will continue to encourage commitment by employers to staff recruitment, development and retention and will therefore once again in 2010 be promoting its annual employer of the Year award as part of the Highways Magazine excellence awards.

I can, therefore, only wish Graham Dalton, recently appointed as the first Transport Skills Champion and Paul Morrell the first ever chief construction adviser to government the best of luck in their works to promote skills training to existing and future engineers and to be wise council to central government on the importance of a vibrant engineering sector and especially that of highways.

As part of this re-launch we thought it important to revisit and revise the institutes Vision and Mission and shortly we'll be inviting the current council members to formally sign up to our statements that the institute is

To be at the forefront of developing and maintaining the national transport infrastructure to the highest international standards

And in doing so that we should

Provide professional leadership in highways engineering and help our members to advance their careers

Bill Taylor, unfortunately, passed away at the beginning of this year at the grand age of 95 but I am very pleased that some 45 years on a number of the founding members of AHT and members of HTTA are here today and will continue as members of the institute in its new guise.

I'll conclude by thanking Amey for their financial support for this event and All the staff at Russell Square for their work over the last year and especially the additional work involved in our re-launch.

I'd also like to thank Council members past and present, local branch representatives and organisers and all the members of the institutes' steering groups all of whom continue to give so freely of their time.

I am very proud to be the 11th president of the IHIE following on from the 9 chairman of the HTTA

But I am even prouder to be the first president of the new Institute of Highway Engineers

Let me take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy Christmas and hopefully for all of us, a prosperous new year.