

M1SMP J13-16 Delivery Partner & Handover – Perspective from Operations Directorate East

Working as the Integration co-ordinator for the region, it is my responsibility to interact with the Major Projects in our area and one such project is the M1 J13-16 SMP.

Shortly after I joined, Highways England, the scheme started construction in the summer of 2018. New to role, it was a baptism of fire to be dealing with the outfall of the impact the new traffic management routine had on the travelling public, but slowly and with collaborative working things started to quieten down.

Being fairly new to role, I was aware of the negative experiences that Operations have had in the past, generally around lack of communication and input into the scheme designs which has caused issues when the scheme is operated and maintained. The exasperation made more prevalent as historically the project team move on and it is difficult to rectify any problems, I was mindful therefore that a critical part of the project process is the Handover.

I was therefore pleasantly surprised to receive invitations from the project team inviting me to Handover meetings – 2 years before completion of the project. The handover of a 'live' road obviously has additional barriers to those where the road is yet to open to traffic, opportunities for Pre-Opening Inspections (POI's) are more restricted. But to have 2 years to plan for the handover was a welcome invitation.

At this point it might be worthwhile giving an insight into the culture around the relationship that OD has with the SMP team. At the very first meeting I attended, the then Sponsor, Tabatha Bailey, made it clear that OD was a 'delivery partner', we weren't a stakeholder or consultee but a partner in delivering the project. This definition is important as it sets a standard for how the project should be delivered and delivered with OD as part of the team. This dynamic, to my experience, is effective in delivering a more sustainable project and working towards improving teamwork across the organisation. Don't get me wrong, there are times we have strong disagreements and make challenges to the team, but we are part of the process and therefore have a greater understanding when difficult decisions have to be made. A level of trust exists between us and I genuinely hope this continues.

When you look at the elements required for a handover into Operations, then the need to begin the process early makes a great deal of sense. The vast amount of data and the different data sets required in order to safely and effectively maintain and operate the road are monumental: from drainage to structures, as built certificates as well as care plans for protected species residing in our trees! Costain Galliford Try are the contractors delivering the scheme on the M1 and as part of their team they have a dedicated handover delegate. The benefit of this is that they have garnered experience from the earlier schemes that have been delivered and are able to put their knowledge into practice.