

Symposium offers something for everyone

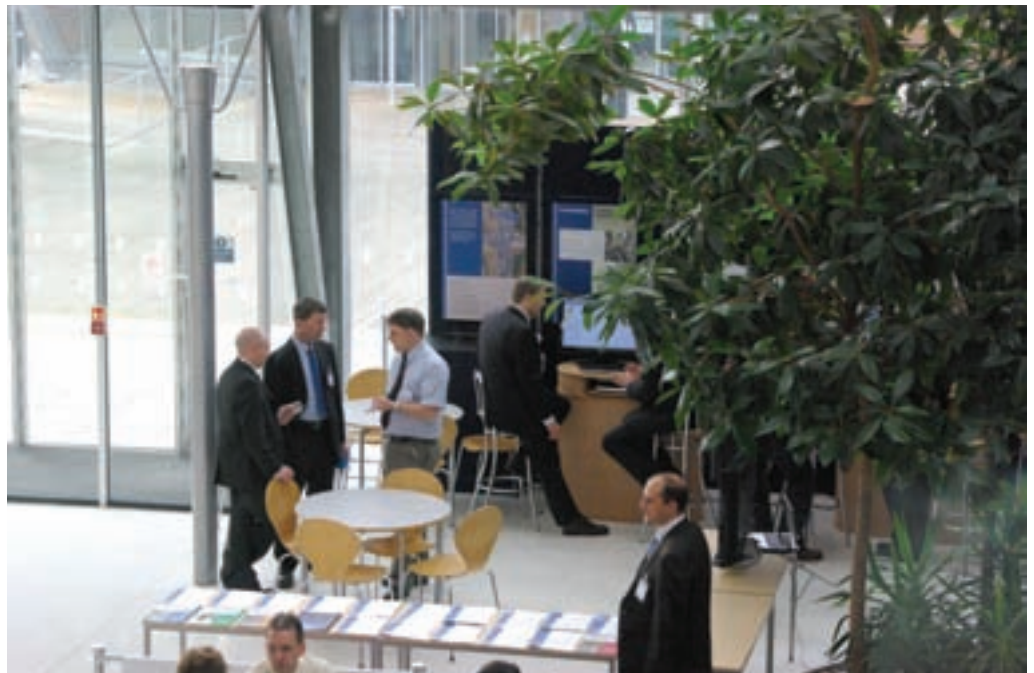
Whoever it was who said a specialist traffic signals event would be boring couldn't have been more wrong, as the 2008 symposium proved.

This year's JCT symposium was the last to be held at the Jubilee Campus in Nottingham and in case delegates were feeling rather forlorn at the thought of saying goodbye to a comfortable and familiar environment, Helen Simmonite took the time to give everyone a preview of what next year's venue had to offer.

So, after thirteen happy years in Nottingham, the 2009 JCT Symposium will take place at the de Havilland Conference Centre in Hertfordshire. This state-of-the-art conference facility will offer on-site accommodation (with hotel accommodation available for those who fancy a bit of luxury), integral sports and leisure facilities so having a swim before the programme starts, or winding down in the gym later in the day, will all be possible, and enhanced exhibition space. All in all, JCT say the move promises to be a step change for the better in the conference facilities.

There was something for everyone in 2008 programme. Peter Bull, Chief traffic engineer with Sheffield City Council, kicked the programme off with a look at the broad canvass against which the traffic signal community operates. His presentation was entitled Double Whammy – the impact of climate change and peak oil on traffic control. As the title suggests, there wasn't much to celebrate here – we all know that to mitigate climate change all of us should travel a lot less. Peter's conclusion was that because of Peak Oil we may all be forced to do so. Peak Oil is defined as the point when further expansion of oil production becomes impossible because those new flows that come on stream are fully balanced by production declines elsewhere – the moment when half the reserves have been used up. Estimates of when Peak Oil will be reached vary but it may well be almost upon us.

Peter Bull's view is that the industry



must change from being traffic controllers to traffic enablers. He defined enablers as those that help move people and goods around in the most energy efficient way. 'If we don't make this transition, then our employers and customers may look for someone else who will.'

He pointed out that the traffic control industry has developed to control increasing traffic flows which are dependent on the continuing availability of cheap energy. 'We tend to focus our resources on the busiest times of day and the most congested parts of the network. When we look at efficiency, we tend to define it in relation to the delay and capacity, not energy.'

There are lots of questions to be answered, he said. Should we be optimising timing plans for minimum use of fuel and not so much about delay? Could we design junctions which could be safely switched off? Do we need as many heads as we are now

putting up? Could reduced peak levels of traffic give us the opportunity for different layouts?

So far we don't have the answers, he admitted. But there was one thing Peter Bull was certain about and that is that these changes are coming. 'It will be up to the rising stars of our industry to develop the engineering solutions which the world needs to move people and goods in a less energy dependent future.'

There were plenty of rising stars at the symposium but when it comes to youth and inexperience, nobody made more impact than Helen Simmonite. Helen has just completed her MSc Eng in Transport Planning and Engineering at Leeds University and chose for her dissertation the comparison of fixed time and MOVA control on a signalled roundabout. The idea had come to her as a result of the 2007 symposium when a discussion had taken place and it emerged that there were conflicting

The dates for next year are already agreed – September 22-24, 2009 at the de Havilland Conference Centre in Hertfordshire.



Nicola Baker prepares the Siemens Traffic stand.

views about the most efficient signal control method to use on a roundabout.

In short Helen's paper – and you can read it on page 391 – suggested that at the Hobby Horse roundabout, at any rate, fixed time control was more efficient by quite a margin than the single stream MOVA that is currently operating. As a result of this Helen asked a number of questions the most important of which was whether the Highways Agency standards should be reviewed to offer specific advice for sig-

nalled roundabouts. She also said the ambiguity as to whether trunk road roundabouts should be controlled by MOVA should be addressed.

This was a highly controversial paper and the audience was divided in its response. By chance, however, sitting in the audience was Stuart Beniston of AMScott, the current contractors to the Highways Agency for the part of the network that includes the Hobby Horse roundabout. He says that MOVA control was introduced to comply with TD3506 which states that all trunk road junctions should have MOVA as first choice. As a result single stream MOVA was installed at the roundabout in a classic design and it is Stuart's view that because of the slight limitations of the software, it has proved to be less flexible in some respects than the fixed-time model that Helen had applied, though he's also mindful that it has the classic MOVA advantage of being highly responsive. He agrees with Helen's suggestion that the HA's advice should be looked at again. 'With MOVA as it's been traditionally applied to smaller roundabouts, perhaps there should be a wider range of circumstances where alternative methods of control can be considered. However, developments with linked MOVA may help reconcile the alternatives.'

Linked MOVA was beyond the scope of Helen's investigation and the jury is still out on whether it would produce a better result. And while the MOVA specialists felt that they could, if invited, achieve a better performance from MOVA than is currently being achieved, there were a lot of people in the audience who sympathised with Helen's point that there could be a lot



INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mark Pleydell is a familiar figure at the JCT symposium but this year he came sporting a different name tag. Mark has spent the last 14 years in the industry, the last few years with TSEU, but has now decided to go independent and says he is thoroughly relishing the experience.

He describes himself as an independent technical consultant. 'I am not a traffic engineer, I am not part of the normal process. My job in recent years has been to set strategic technical policy so I am used to standing outside the process and assessing it. I think there is a real need for someone who can help appraise current technology and systems from an independent standpoint and I have been surprised and gratified by the opportunities that have already come my way.'

Mark has an impressive record in the industry. He has spent over ten years contributing to specification and standards development in EITAC on behalf of ARTSM where he is past chair of the Traffic Control and Management Committee. He chairs EITAC's Signals action group and is a member of the detector and standards groups. He has been an enthusiastic supporter of consortia such as the 3GRSE project reported in October's TEC as he sees huge benefits to the traffic industry from open collaborations between suppliers and users.

He says he has always believed in the partnership approach to problem solving. 'I have always thought that the way forward for the industry is for different suppliers to work together to find the best solutions. I am now in a better place to promote these partnerships and I am really enjoying the prospect of working more closely with the people I have met and discussed problems with over the years.'

If you want to tap into Mark's experience and expertise, you can contact him on 0797 111 3070 or by email at mark.pleydell@pleydell-technology-consulting.co.uk





NEW CHALLENGES

Another familiar face in Nottingham enjoying the challenges of a new working environment was Dave Stoner. Dave was the ITS Manager with Kent County Council between 1996 to 2008 where he was responsible, among many other things, for the establishment and on-going operation and development of the Kent Traffic Management and Information Centre and the evolution of the UTMC software. Having spent three quarters of his working life with Kent, he says he felt he should do something different for the remaining quarter and so, earlier this year, he jumped ship and joined Tenet.

It wasn't that life with Kent was boring. 'I was fortunate to be involved in some leading edge (sometimes "bleeding edge") projects in my time with Kent from the first commercially purchased SCOOT system in the early 80s through the Kent Bus Priority and RTI system and its contribution to the success of Fastrack. I have known of Tenet since the early days of the UTMC programme and worked with them on a couple of projects and then as the supplier of Kent's Common Database and Operator Station. They were looking for someone with expertise in the transport domain to work with their existing clients to try and get more benefits from their UTMC systems – I was looking for a new challenge.'

In his new job Dave will be Tenet's client liaison representative. He says his job will be to understand what clients want to achieve and capture their requirements so that the engineering team can configure the right software module and then ensure it delivers the anticipated benefits.

He says he's thoroughly enjoying life in the private sector. 'I am working with local authorities across the UK and seeing their different problems and I am still involved in several of the projects I was working on previously – just from the other side of the fence.'



Brian Simmonite reflects on 13 successful years in Nottingham.

of roundabouts which are currently operating under less than optimal conditions.

Given this interest in signalised roundabouts, it was fortuitous that Colin Ridding of Mott MacDonald was on hand to update delegates on the status of the Signal Control Design Options for Roundabout Junctions project which Mott's are conducting on behalf of the Department for Transport. Colin pointed out that there is currently no real consistency throughout the UK on the location or type of roundabout where signals are provided and he said the aim of the project was to draw up a new guidance document for signalised roundabouts so that practitioners could follow a more consistent methodology. The evaluation work has been done and it is understood that the DfT are hoping to issue the guidance document, following consultation, during 2009. On the thorny issue raised by Helen, Colin added that the project team had come up with similar findings and that in very congested conditions adaptive controls were not showing significant benefits. For the full story, you will have to wait until 2009.

Asked to name their highlights, delegates mentioned Alistair Gollop's contribution on Black Arrows – this will be published in the December issue of TEC – and Dave Hall of Peek Traffic's paper on the roll out of the £7m UTMC system which is nearing completion in Coventry and which will stand as an excellent example of the key UTMC objective of interoperability.

Margaret Bell updated delegates on the new wireless sensor network that has been developed at Newcastle University – these inexpensive pervasive

sensors will be used for traffic and environment monitoring. Martin Wylie unfortunately was not able to attend the symposium to present his papers but John Spence and Mark Pleydell stepped in for him. One of these papers focussed on what is an extremely topical subject, the energy consumption of traffic signals and described Southampton City Council's evaluation of the potential energy reduction options for traffic signal adoption.

Questions from the floor are a good indication of whether or not a topic has touched the spot with delegates – certainly this year there were plenty of genuine questions and meaningful discussions and every indication that the JCT symposium is maturing into the principal national forum for signals engineers.

Barbara Chard enjoys her first symposium as part of the home team.

