

Benefits check

Jane Lappin talks about her tenure as Chair of the International Benefits Evaluation and Cost Working Group and the changes, visible or otherwise, occurring within the organisation

Established at the ITS World Congress in Chicago in 2002 and developed out of an informal network of individuals who had been organising special sessions on ITS evaluation at World Congresses since 1999, the International Benefits Evaluation and Cost (IBEC) Working Group exists to help address oft-asked but no-less-important questions about ITS's efficacy by providing an opportunity to plug into best practice as demonstrated by deployments from around the world. It remains a voluntary organisation with membership open - and free - to all those with an ITS- or transport-related interest.

The last 12 months or so have seen major changes take place to its day-to-day working, with the ending of UK Department for Transport (DfT) funding for the group and the draw-down of the operation of its secretariat functions by the UK's TRL Ltd. Secretariat funding continues, from the Welsh Assembly Government via the STREETWISE Euro-Regional Project, albeit at a reduced level (the secretariat function is now handled by UK consultancy FaberMaunsell). It means that it is now the task of IBEC's individual Management Committee members to find support for their individual areas of responsibility such as outreach, the group's website, and taking care of membership functions.

But with the pain comes some gain, says Jane Lappin, who is just coming to the end of her term as IBEC Chair. (Chairs hold the post for 12 months and hand over to their successors at each ITS

World Congress. Lappin will pass the leadership baton to the current Vice Chair, Steve Morello of Egis Projects, at the 2006 ITS World Congress in London in October.)

"The support from DfT and TRL were tremendous gifts but they were also time-limited," she explains. "To a degree, we've lost the efficiency of centralisation but the upside is that we bring more people into 'active service' as a result. There are big quality and enrichment gains to be had from that."



Cross-boundary emphasis

The Management Committee is made up of those members who have elected to step forward and take a wider role in IBEC's functions, often with their employers' or other external support. No-one is paid for the work they do for IBEC but Lappin

is quick to point out that no-one loses by being involved - there is the opportunity to capitalise on association around common work and objectives, she says.

While many governmental ITS projects have a proportion of their overall budgets set aside for the purposes of evaluation and reporting, IBEC has a unique role as an international conduit for information exchange.

"As well as the governmental effort that goes into evaluation and reporting, there are also voluntary groups which are looking to bring good decision-support information into greater visibility - we're among the latter," Lappin continues.

"It's worth noting though that government programmes tend to be national. We, IBEC, bridge internationally. Ours is very much a complementary role with great potential benefits. The results of an evaluation of a deployment in Scandinavia could inform decision-makers in Minnesota or elsewhere in the world, for example."

Reach and outreach

With that refocusing of the Management Committee's responsibilities has come a desire to extend the reach of IBEC. This manifests itself in quite a number of different ways.

Efforts have been made to increase cooperation with other organisations which have broadly similar aims. Agreements have been reached on closer working with the TRB ITS Committee and joint work is being planned with the PIARC Network Operations Group. Links have also been forged with the European Evaluation Expert Group and AASHTO, among others. In addition to these efforts to cooperate more closely, there has also been a broadening of the areas of interest - all very necessary, according to Lappin.

"Generally speaking, we've been more active in the issues affecting the individual traveller. I thought that we also needed to address issues such as safety, freight, parking and urban mobility. It's very much a case of being more than a sum of our parts: the more members who are actively involved in helping to organise panels and discussions, the broader our scope of subjects becomes."

Geographical reach is also important. Just over 80 per cent of IBEC's original members are located on just two continents, Europe and the US. This is a product, or accident, Lappin feels, of the

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Pre-World Congress Workshop

This year, IBEC's programme for its pre-World Congress 'tour' of ITS will focus on areas of mobility and safety which it feels are gaining in prominence. There will be an opening presentation on London's 'Traffic Vision', then others will deal with: urban mobility and access in large cities; automated enforcement systems and the associated social, legal and political issues; intelligent parking systems - managing demand and improving utilisation; and understanding ITS benefits and costs. A series of brief presentations will also describe recent ITS studies from around the world.

The programme is being produced in cooperation with Transport for London, the European Commission Directorate General for

Traffic and Energy (DG TREN), Polis, AASHTO, the US Department of Transportation, ERTICO ITS America, and with endorsement from the ITS and Vehicle-Highway Automation Committees of the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies.

The pre-World Congress Workshop will take place on Sunday 8 October at the Novotel ExCel Hotel in London, from 9.30am - 4.00pm. A reception will take place at the Novotel ExCel on 10 November from 6.00pm - 7.30pm.

▼ More information on these, as well as the various IBEC-related World Congress Special Sessions, can be found on the IBEC and ITS International websites.

Online repository

IBEC has an email group designed to facilitate information exchange among its members. Administered through Yahoo! groups, "ibec-its" provides a way for IBEC's members - there are more than 300 in total - to post questions to the working group's entire membership and get answers.

To date, members have posted questions about the costs and benefits of area traffic control, harmonisation of variable message signs, the UK-based Highways Agency's ITS Radar news service and rationalisation of costs for ITS transit systems.

Those interested in signing up for the email discussion group

need to join IBEC first. To do so, interested people should send an email with their full contact information (name, title, organisation, address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address) to IBEC's Membership Chair, Amy Polk of Cairo Corporation. She can be found at apolk@cairocorp.com

➤ origins of the original nucleus of the group: "We've done significant outreach this year to new members in China, Malaysia, South Africa, Chile and Hong Kong. I certainly think we'll be enriched by broader global membership but as we expand we must also promote greater involvement among our members.

"If you were to ask me to describe a typical member, I'd struggle - there isn't one. Obviously, members are involved in ITS or transport. Currently, I'd say that there's a weighting towards consultants and government employees but there are also significant numbers of service providers. Because membership is free, interested individuals can join without having to ask their employers for money to cover fees.

That eliminates a significant barrier for many transportation professionals."

Better 'ownership'

With an eye on promoting more active relationships among members, therefore, significant work is going into improving the IBEC website in addition to the various meetings and events organised by the Management Committee. "Our intention, says Lappin, "is to improve the value of IBEC for individual members, to achieve more meaningful between-conference exchanges and to draw more members into active participation."

More than just a cosmetic exercise - although the site's appearance has been modified - the website update will provide

a single source of information about IBEC, including events, proceedings and past presentations, an electronic library and links to other relevant sites and information sources.

It all builds on the refocusing which went on at the top; improving the experience is intended to be a two-way thing and allow the Management Committee to have better access to and make better use of the knowledge base within the membership.

The end result, Lappin hopes, will be a stronger organisation in all respects. She ends by underlining the positive aspects of being a part of IBEC.

"Through what we do, there is the opportunity to make direct personal connections worldwide with those involved in the operation, maintenance and deployment of ITS.

"There are many different schools of thought and ways of doing things in the transportation sector. These can both complement one another or encourage radical shifts in thinking in some instances. A lot of work, much of which is still ongoing, has gone into making IBEC a great venue for professional growth and I'm confident that the real benefits of the changes taking place within the group have yet to make themselves fully apparent" ■

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