

## Case Study: Portsmouth City Council & Colas



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### Portsmouth City Council and Colas Pioneering Road Maintenance PFI – Five Years On

**A pioneering Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for road maintenance between Portsmouth City Council and Colas has transformed the quality of the road network over the past five years. And Colas, by leveraging Exor’s Asset Management Software for Highways, has been able to prioritise a proactive £60m investment in Portsmouth’s highway network.**

With an extraordinary fall in public liability claims, a massive reduction in reactive maintenance costs, winning an award from the UK’s Institution of Highways & Transportation, and the City coming top in the National Highways and Transport Public Satisfaction Survey 2008 (undertaken by MORI), it is little wonder local authorities around the country – and highway institutions across the globe - are now considering the benefits of a Strategic Approach to Highway Asset Management to address their investment needs to successfully sustain and manage large and complex highway infrastructure assets.

#### Addressing Decline

With general acceptance of a global deterioration in the road network, due to poor investment and maintenance decisions common place. Portsmouth has been bucking the trend. The council identified as far back as 1996 that a new approach was required for road maintenance if it was to reverse the downward trend in its network condition caused by insufficient resources.

Jim Comport, Services Development Manager, Colas, explains, “Portsmouth City Council identified that prevention is better than cure. It was also clear a strategic approach would deliver better value to the citizens and taxpayers of Portsmouth, therefore it was essential to change the traditional mindset of a reactive maintenance and piecemeal approach to the assets by assessing the state of the network as a whole.”

New sophisticated IT tools such as those provided by Exor were emerging which enable highway managers to gain a better understanding of the overall condition of the highway network and facilitate assessment of the network as a single entity. In addition optimised intervention levels can be programmed as part of an integrated strategy to ensure any new investment gives the best rate of return

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The council began to implement this strategy, leveraging Exor’s network management software to create a single source of all linear asset information, from roads to pavements, street lighting to bridges, for the first time to drive more effective maintenance strategies. “The Exor solution provided the council with a vital management tool to deliver a holistic approach to road maintenance,” Comport confirms.

#### Strategic Funding

The council was constrained in its vision by the traditional funding process: it was simply not possible within the annual funding budget to release the funds required to undertake such a radical proactive maintenance programme. As a result, the council looked for alternative funding arrangements and, in 2005, embarked upon the first road management Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract in the UK.

The 25 year contract was awarded to Colas, part of the International Colas Group, which specialises in the construction and maintenance of highways. The contract passes responsibility for the road network to the organisation and involves the rehabilitation of the network, life cycle replacement and global operational maintenance.

“The objective was to deliver value for money by ensuring carriageways and footway resurfacing was undertaken when needed, not just when budgets permit,” adds Comport. The contract also passed to Colas most of the risk associated with managing a highway network including third party claims, along with decisions relating to what work is done and when, providing the outcomes specified in the contract are achieved.

To ease the transition from Portsmouth City Council, Colas opted to retain the Exor software – and provide Portsmouth with access to the solution to ensure complete visibility of performance at all times. Colas undertook an initial set of road status surveys to ascertain the state of the Portsmouth primary, secondary and tertiary road networks.

The information was loaded into Exor, enabling Colas to highlight areas of weakness and prioritise proactive maintenance activity. In the five years since the contract began, Colas has treated 90% of the primary network, 60% of secondary and 20% of tertiary.

Comport confirms, “Exor has been critical to the success of this first PFI for road maintenance in allowing Colas to take a more strategic outlook on the network and deploy advanced asset management processes to deliver improved planning and efficiency.”

#### Meeting Targets

In addition, Exor is playing a key role in the ongoing reactive maintenance programme. Eric Brangier, Highways Manager, Colas, explains, “Under the contract, if a new pothole appears in the road, Colas has to attend within one hour to make it safe; then undertake a functional repair within 24 hours and a permanent repair within 28 days.”

Information on new events, such as failed street lighting or potholes, are recorded either by Colas inspectors or by Portsmouth via its direct link into the Exor Public Inquiry Manager tool where it logs citizen reports relating to the network. This information is immediately available to Colas, enabling the dispatcher to determine the urgency of the problem and action the response team. Every action, from the initial making safe to the permanent repair, is recorded on Exor to provide a complete history of the defect.

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Both reporting faults and recording repairs are now being improved with the introduction of mobile technology from Exor. Colas are deploying PDAs to its inspectors to enable information to be immediately uploaded to Exor and, in the future, to ensure every remote operator, including road crews, will have mobile access.

“Mobile technology will significantly improve productivity, reducing the need for inspectors to come into the office and ensuring road crew have immediate access to both job information and detailed history of the relevant part of the road network,” says Brangier.

He continues, “Throughout the contract Colas has worked closely with Exor to enable compliance to software upgrades and legislative requirements such as the Traffic Management Act in 2008, which went extremely smoothly.”

#### Close Monitoring

“In addition to providing a centralised view of all network information and a complete history of maintenance activity, Exor is also a critical monitoring tool,” says Brangier. “At the end of each month, we pull reports from the Exor solution to monitor our performance which we present to Portsmouth City Council. Key to the success of this contract has been the close working relationship between Colas and Portsmouth. The ability to demonstrate to the authority the level of service, via the Exor software, has contributed significantly to building a trusted relationship.”

In addition to the reports, Portsmouth has live access to the Exor system, enabling the council to audit Colas’ performance at any time. “This complete system visibility is paramount to demonstrate that Colas is delivering the required level of service,” he insists.

And the benefits have been recognised. Over the five years to date, which represented the core investment element of the 25 year programme, Colas has invested £60m on capital work to bring Portsmouth’s highway infrastructure to a high standard – with the council receiving recognition from Portsmouth’s resident committees, community groups and its business community.

As well as coming top in the National Highways and Transport Public Satisfaction Survey 2008 the City Council and Colas were awarded the Institution of Highways and Transportation’s 2008 Award for Effective Partnerships

Furthermore, there has been a significant reduction in money spent meeting public liability claims which have dropped from an average 200 personal accident injury claims per year prior to the PFI to just 40. Comport says. “The roads are in great shape and Colas is spending less money on reactive maintenance, allowing more cash to go into the infrastructure.”

The ongoing focus is now on improving the day to day services, from street cleaning to grass cutting, to improve the overall quality of the road network and, says Brangier, to ensure this information is shared with the citizens of Portsmouth.

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### Conclusion

A growing number of local authorities are now looking closely at the benefits of a strategic approach to highway asset management in the drive for efficiencies and improved public satisfaction. The PFI model for road asset maintenance is one method of securing investment which requires a long term perspective to be taken. Approximately £10b of UK road maintenance projects is now in the pipeline using this service delivery approach; indeed many organisations around the world are benchmarking this project and visiting Portsmouth to see how the road network improvements have been achieved.

Comport concludes, "The long term service arrangement required by the PFI has resulted in a highly effective partnership between Colas and Portsmouth City Council which has improved the quality of people's lives in the locality. We have reduced congestion, increased road safety and improved the quality of the road network which has delivered a better infrastructure for business and in turn is helping to regenerate and rejuvenate the City for its future citizens."

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