

GeoPlace and JAG(UK) – a working partnership

On 1 April 2013 GeoPlace and JAG(UK) signed an agreement to work closer together and provide additional support and services to JAG(UK) members. Two years on, how has that partnership gone?





Who are GeoPlace and JAG(UK)?

The Joint Authorities Group (UK) (JAG(UK)) represents all 209 Street and Road Authorities in Street and Road Works matters relating to the New Roads and Street Works Act: 1991 and the relevant parts of the Traffic Management Act 2004. JAG(UK) is the mechanism through which Street and Road Authorities are represented on the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee(UK) [HAUC(UK)] which in turn advises the Department for Transport and the Government in Street and Road Works matters. JAG(UK)'s member organisations are primarily local authorities and similar bodies whose principal activities are governed by highways, street, road and traffic management legislation.

GeoPlace is a limited liability partnership jointly owned by the Local Government Association and Ordnance Survey. It is the centre of excellence for spatial address and street information in Great Britain.

GeoPlace maintains the National Street Gazetteer (NSG). The NSG contains definitive information for streets in England and Wales. Primarily it allows local authorities to manage all road works carried out by themselves and street works by statutory undertakers in an efficient manner on the national road network.

Why partner up?

Streets are part of the country's infrastructure through which many citizen centred services are provided. Consequently there are a range of street related issues such as congestion, capacity planning, street works, accidents, incidents and maintenance which affect them.

JAG(UK) and GeoPlace have work plans to manage the street infrastructure, and by pooling resources, both

organisation's central aims can be achieved in a more efficient and joined up manner. The key objectives of both organisations are to:

- develop a definitive national reference system used in the notification process and the coordination of streetworks
- safeguard efficiency of highways
- develop consistent implementation of regulations
- identify and promote good practice
- support practitioners with guidance and information
- represent the traffic and highway/roads authority view
- maintain cooperation and balance with all interested parties

The JAG(UK) manager, David Capon, transferred to GeoPlace and works closely with the Simon Bailey, the NSG Custodian, to devise a plan to help local authorities identify common goals and deliver robust and efficient solutions, giving local authorities a louder voice in presenting logical joined-up solutions to central government and other parties.

What did the partnership want to achieve?

In short, the partners wanted to work closely to better achieve their joint strategic objectives - both communities are integral to everything that happens on streets.

Joining-up operationally combines community power and influence, bringing together different contacts within central government, the Local Government Association (LGA), the Department for Transport (DfT) and utilities that undertake work on the highways.

And by working closely together, it was thought that local authorities could be provided with better support services from a co-ordinated centre.

Has it worked?

Both organisations have benefitted from the partnership.

As an organisation which achieves its aims predominantly through voluntary contribution of expertise and time from officers in its member organisations, JAG(UK) had minimal office resource to communicate its achievements widely. The relationship with GeoPlace has enabled JAG(UK) to develop its own communications strategy, website and discussion forums which act as a central point of contact and coordination of activities for members.

Using GeoPlace as a 'home', it is providing better support for the JAG(UK) community which has resulted in an increase in membership.

With its range of shared stakeholders such as the Department for Transport, the Local Government Association (LGA), the utility sector, industry, the partnership is providing a joined-up response to initiatives that affect the sector as well as enabling GeoPlace and JAG(UK) to proactively take on responsibilities.

One of GeoPlace's central aims has always been to enhance the information about the highways that local authorities routinely capture as part of their role in maintaining the highways. This data, known as Additional Street Information (ASD) provides the StreetWorks community with more detailed information about a highway before works are undertaken, and provides highways users with intelligence about the network. The relationship with JAG(UK) has enabled more of this type of data to be collected:

- details of ownership
- reinstatement categories
- details of protected streets
- special designations such as
- traffic sensitive streets
- streets with special engineering difficulties

- level crossing safety zones
- environmentally sensitive areas
- streets with special surfaces
- streets with priority lanes
- streets with special construction needs
- height, weight and width restrictions
- direction restrictions.

GeoPlace is collaborating with the Department for Transport and Ordnance Survey to develop a new Highways dataset that will give the most detailed information yet to councils and emergency services. The new dataset, which contains ASD, has the potential to transform how all levels of government maintain and improve roads by detailing information such as road widths, traffic calming measures and height and weight restrictions.

Following are some initiatives that have resulted from the partnership:

Permit schemes

Permit schemes provide highway authorities with the means to better manage and coordinate activities on their road network, to minimise inconvenience and prevent disruption to road users.

There are now 86 permit schemes operating in England and Wales, with 4 implemented during 2014 and a further 20 implemented in 2015 so far. Most of these are working extremely well and have been essential in modernising efficiencies in street works management and communications. NSG data is essential to this process and much work has gone into refreshing NSG data to ensure it is current for Permit schemes.

It is extremely important to consult and develop workable and efficient Permit schemes, and ensure strong collaboration between local authorities and statutory undertakers.

Joint guidance has been released by JAG (UK) and GeoPlace, for Authority Street Custodians to understand the requirements in preparing their authorities' Local Street Gazetteers for implementation of a permit scheme. This guidance has recently been updated following feedback from active schemes and can be found on the NSG website www.thensg.org.uk

With the introduction of permit schemes the processes that are undertaken in authorities are significantly more robust, organised and will provide better relationships across the Utilities sector

HAUC initiative to monitor street works performance; the quality national performance scorecard

HAUC (UK)'s project to produce a quarterly performance scorecard to provide evidence base data has developed well. Indicator data is extracted and sent to GeoPlace for analysis from information routinely input to the local authorities' street works management systems.

The scorecards are not meant to be a league table, but a tool to identify key issues and improvements that can be made in the industry. In quarter 1 2014/15, 98 authorities submitted data to the GeoPlace, more than have ever been submitted previously, enabling better and more statistically applicable data to be gleaned about street data in the UK.

The more data that becomes available, the more evidence there will be for the sector to drive improvements, for the benefit of road users, citizens, local authorities and utilities. Therefore the big push is that over the next two quarters is to get data submitted to the hub.

EToN 6

EToN 6 was introduced in October 2013. This is a big step forward in improving information that is transferred between utilities and local authorities before works are undertaken. EToN 6 files are submitted to the NSG hub when they are validated against the schema before general publication.

This has been the first major change to the streets works noticing process in 4 years, and demonstrates joint working between local authorities and utilities to improve communication and street works noticing.

£3 million mapping project to transform road improvements and maintenance

Transport Minister Robert Goodwill, for Ordnance Survey to work with GeoPlace, The Department for Transport has provided approval and funding for GeoPlace to work with Ordnance Survey to develop a new range of Highways products.

These products will be a combination of the best of data submitted by local authorities through the National Street Gazetteer (NSG) and the Ordnance Survey Integrated Transport Network (ITN) product. These new products will enable better planning, management and more informative routing options across the road network, driving cost efficiencies in government and improved service delivery to businesses and the citizen.

Local and national government currently use a variety of products when planning road projects and maintenance. The new products will bring all existing information together, cutting bureaucracy and saving money spent by councils and government on exchanging and comparing different maps.

The ten Transport Minister Robert Goodwill said: "The government is backing schemes that will make Britain's transport system world-class. This mapping project has the potential to substantially improve how we look after our roads. It will help make journeys more efficient and ensure traffic keeps moving. This funding demonstrates our commitment to funding the technology of the future, which will drive economic growth and create jobs."

Further information

For more information, please visit:
www.jaguk.org and www.geoplace.co.uk