

LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC GAMES TRANSPORT LESSONS AND LEGACY

Article 4 of 7

September 2012

Games Over?

The Paralympic Games finished this week. More quiet success for transport and a palpable sense of achievement. Amongst those who made it work, however, there is a sense of anti-climax. Unsurprising, but something to address. One way of dealing with it will be to capture, preserve and build upon the capability of individuals and teams proven over the summer.

Paralympic challenges to transport have included the change in demographic of travellers: not just in diversity but also increases in background demand due to schools and offices returning after the summer break.

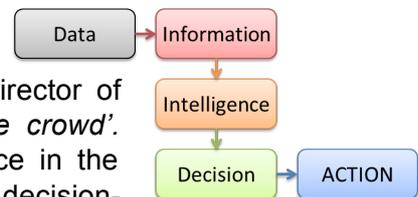
Yet again, congestion was not high on the list of news stories. One relevant and continuing story is around the temporary provision of facilities for the disabled or mobility impaired. For example, a review is [underway in TfL](#) (Guardian, Sep 10 2012) regarding the continuation of enhanced services and access for wheel chair users and others; many of whom had been able to use the Underground for the very first time due to efforts by TfL during the Games.

Capturing the lessons has started, therefore. The Olympic Delivery Authority's transport team held a big post-Games 'wash-up' meeting on 13th September. The general feeling is that everything went better than expected.

Too good a job?!

One aspect of the retrospective will be assessment of how well capacity requirements were forecast and how well optimised were the services provided. This is a set of lessons which will be of real use. For example, it will provide benchmarks for the techniques used to predict the movement of people.

Data-to-Intelligence



In the [first article](#) of this series I quoted [Doug Arnot](#) LOCOG's Director of Games Operations, and his mantra '*Model the crowd. Follow the crowd*'. Accurate, cost-effective modelling and simulation require confidence in the tools and techniques used. I commented on the dependency of decision-making on high quality, smartly processed data in [Article 2](#). Substantial amounts of data have been collected in the course of these Games. They will stand the UK's modelling fraternity in very good stead if well managed. My understanding is, they are not contracted to harvest and process these data. Organisations like the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), DfT and BIS could take responsibility for establishing mechanisms assuring the legacy of London 2012's transport success. Look at what the [TSB's Transport Systems Catapult](#) is proposing for data processing and development of the national transport system modelling capability. There is opportunity here: to be presented and to be taken.

Too good a job? 'No!'

The strong consensus is that transport hit the mark. There has been spare capacity in key areas but that has been predominantly due to successes in others. For example, one former colleague in ODA Transport tells me that *'a lot of areas proved to be quite significantly over engineered and over resourced (e.g. provision v use of LOCOG car fleet, Games Makers, spectator coaches)'*. Of course, another way of viewing this is that there was extra capacity in certain areas for contingency: if the car fleet had been stretched, officials would have complained; if the Games Makers had not been so prevalent, the public would not have been so well shepherded or satisfied.

According to the ODA's Head of Bus and Coach, *'all went well and we carried in the end over one million spectators; all safely and without any incidents, injuries or accidents. Pretty impressive all things considered and what a great team pulling it together'*.

Dealing with the Anti-Climax

Genuine objectivity is elusive when you are wholeheartedly committed to delivering something. A few quotes from people close to the action illustrate this.

'No significant issues with public transport beyond a few rough edges here and there.'

'Queue management generally worked well at most of the venue stations.'

'The Olympic Park Transport Integration Centre ... seemed to work pretty well in terms of C3 ... all the comms. and information flow processes worked well.'

'The spectator direct coaches didn't work as well as hoped and sales were poor.'

'Sustainable modes was a bit of a mixed bag. Cycle parking take up was excellent at venues outside London but not so hot around the Olympic Park.'

'River services went well and were well used without any hiccups.'

'THE highlight was being at the Transport Mall in Stratford on the opening ceremony night thinking how far the project had come from such small beginnings....very emotional I can tell you!'

My own "objective" view: these comments reflect the commitment by those responsible for specific services. They know they can't redo it and they know that perfection was not achieved. But perfection is not achievable and it certainly is not cost-effective or justifiable.

I have tried to set these views from within the camp against some views from outside, via the transport medals awarded in my [previous article](#). Another one offered by a reader is, *'Quiet Deliveries for me was the freight gold medal of the Olympics and this will become in my view a way of life for the UK over the next ten/twenty years.'* For me, this is an indication of someone who is considering how these Games may have permanently changed the way we deliver transport. More on this and freight in a later article.

It's not over till....

Many members of the ODA's transport team have finished their tour of duty and are moving on to the next challenges: some to work on other events such as the Glasgow Games; others are destined to ride with the Olympic caravan to Rio. A small band is left round the dying embers of the campfire at Canary Wharf to wrap up and report on the London 2012 experience. I hope to hear some of the campfire stories at Hugh Sumner's October event: 'How London 2012 will change Transport forever'. More on that later.

I am interested to see how the core of high performing teams from the operational side of the Games can be kept together. Opportunities exist. The next few weeks and months will tell whether the most is (or can) be made of them.

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