



Case study

Name: Highways England in partnership with A-one+

Sector: Professional Engineering

Location: South East, UK

Highways England gains the ability to support its supply chain in creating better internal processes to deliver greater customer value

Following a poor handover from the previous contractor, and the requirement to deliver schemes within a tricky area of the network, A-one+ had struggled to mobilise its contract with Highways England.

But rather than act 'the boss' and berate A-one+, the new Executive Director of Operations at Highways England, Nick Harris, knew that to develop stronger third-party relationships, he had to move his organisation from a 'master and servant' mentality to one of true partnership. To establish the best working relationships, he needed to enhance Highways England's internal ability to deliver and then understand the capability and impact of leadership from both sides, so they could drive the area forward in a more productive and cost-effective manner.

Taking a facilitative approach, Managementors developed solutions in partnership with both organisations to create the internal processes necessary to form a stronger working relationship and ultimately deliver better results for the taxpayer.

Key challenges

- Lack of clarity over roles, responsibilities and processes led to inefficient scheme management.
- Unclear ownership created a lack of leadership to drive the scheme forward.
- The absence of effective targets to drive performance impacted the taxpayers' return.
- There was a requirement to develop a strong partnership with A-one+.

Key gains

- Open, constructive dialogue is fostering a more collaborative relationship.
- Active project management is driving the schemes to deliver better value to the taxpayer.
- Project delivery improved in time and quality.
- An empowered, enabled workforce that's driving towards the same, shared outcome.

Background

With a road network that spans 4,300 miles, and transports a third of all traffic, Highways England carries a heavy burden. Responsible for operating, maintaining and improving the country's motorways and major A roads, the organisation aims to ensure the extensive road network is dependable, durable and safe for Britain's drivers.

Highways England is divided into 13 operational areas, each maintained by an Area Team and contractor partner. Area 4, which comprises Kent, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex, is managed by A-one+, a joint venture between Colas, Costain and Jacobs. But after taking over from the previous contractor, A-one+ had struggled to maintain the high standards of its neighbouring areas.

A lack of effective planning and poor control meant A-one+ was constantly on the backfoot, rather than planning for success. The result was high levels of rework, delays, overrun and all the associated additional cost. As such, and with the taxpayers funding the schemes, the focus was always on the financials, rather than uncovering the root causes of any issues, and working out how to deliver more effectively first time.

Managementors was engaged to deliver the fundamental changes necessary to deliver a more joined up way of working between the two organisations and deliver the roads the taxpayers deserved.



The Challenge

When A-one+ took over the scheme from the previous contractor, not all available data had been effectively transferred, which led to issues mobilising the contract. Within Area 4, the challenge was further intensified due to the roads it contains; Gatwick and the routes to Dover are only allowed to be worked on at specific times to limit disruption, which makes managing the schemes much harder.

In addition, by failing to establish a strong relationship between Highways England and A-one+ from the start, there was confusion about people's roles and responsibilities and the processes they should follow. Ownership of the schemes was unclear, which created a lack of leadership to drive things forward. And without a clear means of controlling the outcomes, A-one+ had no option but to default to a reactive management style, dealing with issues on a daily basis as they occurred.

The result of which was a distinct absence of effective targets to drive performance, the ineffective use of data, and ultimately a loss of control that impacted the return the taxpayer would see on its investment into maintaining the road network.

Change was necessary, but it wouldn't be easy, even with the support of Managementors. Coming from a public sector background, the team at Highways England was suspicious of third-parties; the status quo was to tell contractors what was expected and then leave them to deliver, so changing the mentality from one of 'master and servant' to partnership would be challenging.



Approach

Taking a facilitative approach, Managementors developed solutions in partnership with key individuals who worked within the target areas, rather than prescribing a particular course of action. Working in this way meant the highest levels of understanding, ownership and sustainability of the implemented solution would be achieved throughout the scheme duration.

The first phase of the project involved an operational analysis, where Managementors sought to identify reasons for the non-achievement of optimum performance. Where possible, these issues were translated into a quantifiable recoverable opportunity to create something tangible for the organisation.

Creating a true partnership between Highways England and A-one+ required the free flow of information and ideas exchange between the organisations. An effective communication programme was established to regularly update all affected throughout the project. Now everyone had a comprehensive brief on what was going on and why, the progress made to date, and potential issues identified and rectified before they started to affect the scheme.

Overnight success is never an achievable goal, which is why Managementors developed a programme of focused step-changes that could be implemented over a period of months. These activities targeted specific areas of weakness that were unearthed during the initial analysis phase. It was designed to bring the business under control, by improving performance, demonstrating the scale of the opportunity, and the achievable benefits.

Using its proven methodology, Managementors focused its efforts around five key areas:

1. Clarifying the roles, responsibilities and processes
2. Implementing a PACE (Plan, Assign, Control, Evaluate) tracker
3. Using PACE to actively manage the scheme, set priorities and keep everything on track
4. Creating a master schedule to assist with forecasting and planning
5. Simple weekly reports to track progress against KPIs

“The way Managementors structured the initial phases of the engagement was great – the analysis flushed out what we needed and helped us to really understand the complexity of the relationships. Plus, its ability to engage Highways England and A-one+ meant Managementors quickly transitioned from consultant to a real member of the team.”

Nick Harris
Executive Director of Operations
Highways England



Outcomes

Communication at Highways England is now more open, with staff having a constructive dialogue. By the end of the project, Managementors had helped to create a more collaborative environment where Highways England and A-one+ could work in partnership. Active project management with clear roles, responsibilities and streamlined joint processes, meant that Area 4 is now performing in-line with its neighbouring Areas, and ultimately delivering better value to the taxpayers.

Chris Sheppard, General Manager at A-one+ Area 4, commented, "With Managementor's help we're now working more collaboratively with Highways England. Before we felt like the business was controlling us, which is evident in our reactive working style. But now, we speak a common language that everyone understands. We know the focus of the schemes, the process we need to follow in order to deliver, and the role we have to play, so we're confident that what we're doing is right for all involved."

In particular, the new way of working has helped to ensure the changes became business-as-usual, by keeping the scheme on

track. By having robust plans and meaningful reports the organisations can easily relate the number of scheduled activities that are completed by the end of the week. Before its introduction, 53% of activities were completed. That figure has now improved to 95%. And through this process, meeting effectiveness has also improved with both parties now focusing on the true challenges affecting the business rather than legacy issues.

"Many of our staff agree that PACE is a useful process. It's helped to improve team morale and collaboration, because they're sharing examples of how issues were resolved in the past when another team member encountered a similar issue," said Nick. "Now, we have individuals that feel empowered, and a change control process that enables people to just get on. It's a big achievement."

Nick concluded: "Probably the most significant benefit is gaining a better understanding of the performance gap, so we know where and how we're not meeting expectations, and what to do about it. With this new insight, we have the ability to move forward together."

"Having Managementors guide us through this process has reinvigorated our management team. We know A-one+ is really pleased and seeing the value in it, and we're confident that we now have the ability to help the rest of our supply chain create better internal processes that ultimately deliver better results for our clients."

Nick Harris
Executive Director of Operations
Highways England

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