

## Editorial

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In choosing the twin themes of 'community' and 'safety' for this issue of *Municipal Engineer*, the Editorial Advisory Panel was conscious of the potentially wide scope of activities and descriptions which can be ranged under each of these banners. We were also aware that the themes were likely to have resonance across both national and cultural boundaries. And so it has proven to be.

Our contributors have addressed aspects of safety ranging from the individual accident through to community-wide and nationwide events. They have considered dangers that are man-made, either from deliberate action, such as terrorism, or from political inaction, and those which arise from natural causes or from the day-to-day interaction of people within the community.

The geographic spread of examples covers Canada, Europe, America, Japan, Africa and India as well as the UK. All are relevant to municipal engineers, wherever they practice, and the issue demonstrates the breadth of knowledge which makes up the profession of municipal engineering.

From Canada, Roth reports a study of a local community and its struggle to overcome the twin dangers of forest fire and bacteriological infection brought about by an inadequate public water supply. The competing demands, for the municipality, of development control matters versus the demand for a modern clean piped-water supply and the political history behind them, will have a familiar ring to practicing municipal engineers everywhere.

ten Brinke *et al.*, from the Netherlands, use a modified version of the chain of safety approach to undertake a comprehensive comparative study of the way in which various countries, around the globe, deal with the potential and the reality of major flood events. Topography, frequency and type/cause of flooding are shown to be key influences, but so too is the culture of the country concerned. Using this approach the paper identifies elements from other countries/cultures from which Dutch practice could benefit. In a time of increasingly rapid climate change the paper advocates a review of Dutch policy and strategy. It is timely advice for engineers and policy makers generally.

Jon Coaffee and his team, from The University of Manchester, England, tackle the all too relevant topic of terrorism in the

public realm. The paper looks at the vulnerability of places and transport systems in the modern world to the threat of terror and the various elements which might assist or deter the urban terrorist. It concludes that all relevant players within the community must be fully involved, not only in the planning, design and construction of public places, but also in their continuing operation and management in order to give resilience towards ever more innovative forms of terrorism.

From Portugal, where municipal engineers are not blessed with free access to police traffic incident reports, Carvalheira describes the urban road and traffic network as 'chaotic'. The paper describes the development of a road safety management system, governed by these constraints, for the small provincial town of Coimbra. Working only with accident clusters augmented by detailed physical analysis of the cluster sites, Carvalheira has produced a procedure for improving road safety with low cost interventions which is transferable to similar small towns with similar constraints.

On a more local scale, Wackrill and Wright seek to create a model to enable the definition of safe routes to school, from within the community, using, as a pilot study, the local area surrounding a primary school in north London. By simplifying the road network and pedestrian flows they are able to achieve near optimum results without advanced computer programs. The approach is commended as a starting point for the possibility of modelling safe routes to school on a local authority area-wide basis.

The paper by Bird homes in on the most common of all public realm injuries: the footway trip. By analysing causal factors, identified in third party claims, and correlating these with hospital treatment records and human biology, he postulates the potential for a predictive model to enable costs and benefits of different maintenance regimes and intervention levels to be ascertained. Further refinement of the model is suggested through the medium of standardised data collection in order to create a working tool for maintenance managers.

Finally, Bradbury and Quimby return to our international theme but with the community seen, not as a victim of danger, but as a force for good. In a series of international comparisons they identify that in-school road safety education is effective in those cultures where universal primary school education is

the norm. Unfortunately, in many parts of the developing world, this situation does not pertain. In these countries an alternative approach is needed and examples are given which show that involving the whole community in road safety education, that is parents and children together, has achieved lasting success.

In addition to the peer-reviewed papers, we also include in this issue three briefing notes. First, we have a comprehensive briefing note from Alan Young which spells out the 'quality places' concept which lies behind the recently published *Manual for Streets* (the replacement for design bulletin 32). It identifies the long awaited change of emphasis from traffic movement to people needs. Included in the manual is the concept of 'shared space' which is said to humanise mixed-use streets and redress the pedestrian/vehicle balance.

Our second briefing comes from Carol Thomas of Guide Dogs for the Blind, which reminds us, should we need reminding, that nothing in the world of the municipal engineer is black and

white. The briefing identifies that, both in the UK and continental Europe, shared space streets are creating 'no-go' areas for blind and partially sighted people. The note reports the, as yet unsuccessful, trials being undertaken, on behalf of Guide Dogs, to try to find a suitable set of materials and layout details which will overcome this very serious drawback to shared spaces without compromising either the comfort of other disabled groups or the concept as a whole. Clearly further work is needed before the shared space concept can be considered to be universally acceptable.

Finally we have a briefing from Jo Parker, of Watershed UK, giving an update of continuing research into the ever present problem of disruption of the highway by utility street works. Although not yet completed there is promise, in this briefing, of a brighter future for municipal engineers with regard to the problem (the largest project in the programme, Visualising Integrated information on Buried Assets to Reduce Streetworks (Vista) will be reported on in more detail in a forthcoming issue of the journal).