



KEY INSIGHTS

THE PROMOTION OF MAJOR
INFRASTRUCTURE:

DELIVERING ENGAGEMENT
EXCELLENCE

2024

WELCOME TO KEY INSIGHTS - DELIVERING ENGAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

What's driving - or preventing - the efficient promotion of major projects right now, and what will be at the top of the agenda in the next five years?

This was the question that we asked **65 industry leaders** across the major projects community, from sectors including government, energy, utilities, transport, engineering, construction, legal and more.

These invaluable insights were published in our first edition of the Key Insights report and presented to the Major Projects Association.

In this edition, we examine the main findings related to **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**.

It is acknowledged that effective stakeholder engagement is critical to the successful development and delivery of any major project - so why is it that it's seen to be struggling on so many schemes?

Here we present the findings of our research, feedback from the MPA Seminar and propose solutions, including practical actions, innovative ideas and initiatives.

These can help improve stakeholder engagement to deliver better outcomes for projects and the communities that they impact.

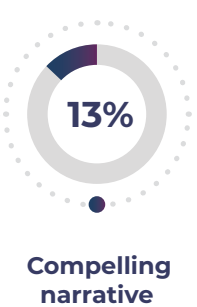
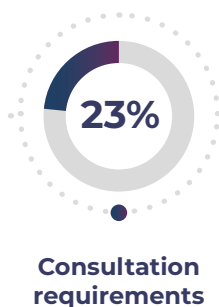
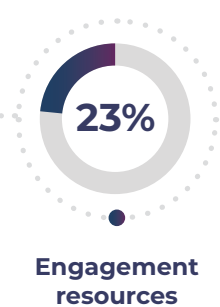
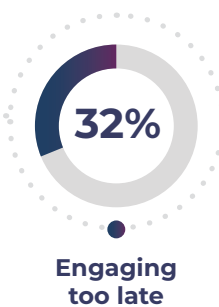
VIEWS FROM THE TOP

CJ Associates would like to thank the Major Projects Association and its members and other industry leaders who gave their time to share their experiences and insights to create the Key Insights.

Who we talked to:



WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE IN ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND THE COMMUNITY?



“Engagement needs to be seen as a continuous process that’s well resourced to deliver effective engagement throughout the project, from inception to operation, rather than starting just before the DCO process and ending shortly after consent has been given. Any break in continuity of engagement time and resources is normally very disconcerting for the community.”

Robbie Owen
Partner & Parliamentary Agent
Head of Planning & Government Affairs
Pinsent Masons LLP



“Local communities always start off sceptical about projects ...To build trust and buy-in you need specialist resources that consistently engage with stakeholders, communicates the benefits and provides continuity throughout the project.”

Dr Francesco Di Maddaloni
Lecturer in Project Studies & Major Infrastructure
The Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction
University College of London

COMPLEX STAKEHOLDER ECOSYSTEM

Challenge

The volume and complexity of the stakeholder ecosystem was cited by more than 40 percent of the industry leaders. Major projects, especially linear schemes, impact multiple stakeholders, councils, businesses, land owners and diverse communities.

The difficulty in understanding and managing the expectations of a wide range of stakeholders should not be underestimated. Solutions need a strategic and tailored approach that proactively delivers a range of engagement and consultation activities that meets their needs.

Solutions

Map your stakeholders: Thorough analysis, mapping and segmentation at the outset is critical to understanding stakeholder interests and influence. It is also essential to map potential beneficiaries, which helps provide a balanced view.

Know your stakeholders: Develop a deep understanding of their views, knowledge, interests and concerns. Research, dialogue, news and social media provides a greater insight that can support more effective engagement.

Advocates & champions: Projects should identify those who can connect with communities and help build trust.

Collaborate & co-design: Local authorities and community representatives are experts in their local area.

By involving them in the mapping and engagement planning, you can harness their knowledge and advice on how to effectively reach a wider, more diverse community including 'rarely heard voices'.

Tailored engagement: A strategic engagement approach with defined outcomes is essential. Engagement is not a one-size-fits-all approach; it should be tailored to the needs of each group.

This ensures engagement is inclusive and consultation is meaningful, and enables local and technical knowledge and views to help shape proposals.

Digital & data: Spreadsheets are dead! Digital platforms and the use of AI support managing, monitoring and reporting of stakeholder relationships. This includes their activities, interests and sentiment, and can enhance the level of tailored engagement.

Social media: This has changed how we access, discuss and share information. It can bring people together or be divisive, making it harder to find common ground.

Projects should embrace digital engagement and communications tools to help navigate the complex stakeholder ecosystem.

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Lower Thames Crossing - Options Phase

For over 10 years we have delivered engagement and consultation on LTC. At the outset of the options phase we designed the strategic engagement, communications and consultation programme with these principles.

We mapped and analysed 1000s of stakeholders and developed a targeted cohort approach, with a tailored engagement programme to manage the complex stakeholder ecosystem.

We secured project champions and industry advocacy, fostered effective relationships with 150+ organisations, local authorities, statutory environmental bodies, land owners and local groups, and delivered the UK's largest roads consultation - receiving 46,000 responses.

LTC continues to build on this approach, having successfully engaged stakeholders and the community through the DCO process and is now well positioned for the delivery phase.

ENGAGING TOO LATE

Challenge

Engaging too late adds risk to the planning and delivery of projects, and misses out on the opportunity to incorporate local knowledge and insight.

Solutions

Plan from the start: Project leadership teams should include a senior engagement lead responsible for developing a strategic approach that engages stakeholders from the outset.

This will help the programme navigate external constraints and stakeholders' concerns, and manage expectations, de-risk the programme and help deliver a successful outcome.

Early & ongoing: There is a hesitancy about engaging stakeholders too early, but the benefits of bringing stakeholders into the process from the outset are proven.

Engagement must be seen as a continuous thread and not an event that just happens at certain stages. Engagement should commence from the inception of the project to mitigate risk and reduce objections.

Planned & proactive: Balancing stakeholder expectations and project requirements is not easy. Proportionate and timely engagement is essential to provide stakeholders the opportunity to influence proposals as the project progresses.

Engagement must be planned, proactive and aligned to the project programme to enable early identification and resolution of issues, encourage open dialogue and build trust in the process.

Technical interfaces: Local authorities, statutory and environmental bodies, businesses, emergency services, major land and asset owners all call for early engagement to help mitigate the impact on their activities before it becomes a critical issue.

While statutory bodies are struggling with ever-shrinking resources, we must help them engage in the process from the outset.

Empower & educate: The complexities of major infrastructure projects and the planning process can be difficult to convey to stakeholders. The large amounts of technical information is overwhelming for many people.

A key element of the engagement programme should focus on educating and empowering the community with knowledge about how and when they can get involved, both informally and through the statutory stages. This creates stakeholder confidence and trust.

Engage empathetically: Remember we are dealing with people. Treat stakeholders as you would expect to be treated, with respect, transparency and understanding.

People do not want to feel as though the project and decisions are pre-determined, that they have no influence, and are not being listened to. Early and ongoing engagement empowers stakeholders and supports communities to have a say about their lives and their futures.

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A66 Northern Trans-Pennine

We managed the stakeholder engagement programme from an early stage, demonstrating a commitment to working closely with the community through the design development and DCO process.

The project engaged technical, statutory and community stakeholders from the outset, seeking their knowledge, views and formal representations to help shape the scheme.

National Highways acknowledged that the early and ongoing tailored engagement helped enhance the project's reputation, foster positive relationships and smooth the DCO process.

Stakeholders who are engaged early can help shape proposals, mitigate impacts and identify opportunities to deliver efficiencies, social value and community benefits – and importantly creates goodwill.

ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

Challenge

Stakeholders are seen as an essential element in any major project. Yet the industry often does not place sufficient resources or invest in the right skills to manage them.

As a result, expert stakeholder managers who have experience of complex infrastructure projects, the planning regime and consultation requirements are rare.

This impacts the ability of the industry to meaningfully engage and consult stakeholders and communities and adds risk to the development and delivery of major projects.

Solutions

Mindset change: The industry needs to value stakeholder engagement in the same way as a technical discipline and deploy suitably skilled and experienced specialists.

Including a stakeholder lead in the senior leadership team demonstrates a level of commitment to external parties that will stand the project in good stead.

This ensures that project programmes are developed with an awareness of stakeholder requirements during the development, consenting and delivery of schemes.

It also minimises the potential for legal challenges and the associated increase in costs and delays.

Well-resourced teams: While budgets are increasingly constrained, projects should allocate an appropriate level of engagement specialists to ensure an effective stakeholder engagement programme and, where required, legally compliant consultations.

Invest in innovation: Encouraging a wide range of stakeholders to engage with major projects is becoming more challenging. It's more than just a few meetings and a newsletter.

We recommend a multi-faceted, integrated programme of digital and traditional engagement, innovative communications, research and consultation tools to be deployed and tailored to each project.

Engagement training: Interacting with stakeholders can be challenging. Project teams are calling for training to improve how they manage interactions with stakeholders.

To address this, we deliver training with role play sessions for project teams in preparing for public engagement sessions. This provides teams with the practical knowledge and confidence to manage any situation.

Well-being: The major projects environment can be stressful - particularly during the DCO process. We must ensure the well-being of our teams by creating an environment that encourages teams to raise issues and discuss well-being.

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“Effective stakeholder engagement is critical to project success.”

We hear this time and time again, but we do not always see sufficient funding for an experienced, well-resourced engagement team to design and deliver a strategic integrated engagement and consultation programme.

Major projects are complex and stakeholder expectations are high. Fostering relationships, managing concerns and building consensus is difficult. It requires experienced leadership.

Our clients who understand this value having an engagement workstream capable of managing external interfaces and identifying any early risks that could delay the project.

A strategic, proactive and project managed approach to engagement and consultation will bring benefits to projects and communities.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Challenge

During the development of major projects, particularly in the non-statutory early consultation period, projects are grappling with how and when to involve, inform and consult stakeholders and the communities they impact.

Consultation requirements and stakeholders' expectations are typically not aligned, which can result in suboptimal projects and delays.

Solutions

Expert advice: Understanding the statutory requirements, case law, government guidelines and best practice is critical to delivering consultations and safeguarding against legal challenge.

It is essential to rigorously plan the consultation and provide sufficient resources and time to develop the methodology, materials and questions.

Adequacy of consultation: Developing a programme of compliant and robust non-statutory and statutory consultation throughout the project lifecycle is critical to meeting the consultation requirements as prescribed by the Planning Act 2008.

Informed stakeholders: Stakeholders and the public cannot be expected to understand the difference between non-statutory and statutory consultations.

Taking the time to explain the process, their role, and how they will be consulted will create greater trust.

We need to demonstrate our commitment to meaningful consultation and clearly show how stakeholders' feedback is being used.

Who & when to consult: Quite simply, consultation should only be undertaken when the feedback can influence or change the proposals.

Consult widely to encourage greater participation and diverse views. Involve stakeholders, customers and communities located further afield who may feel the effects or benefits from the proposals.

Consultation assurance: Sometimes the simple ideas can have the greatest impact. Create a Consultation Assurance Checklist that sets out all requirements of the relevant legislation (Hybrid Bill, DCO, TWAO, TCPA etc) and best practice to ensure they are addressed in the planning and implementation of the consultation.

Digital & traditional: The pace of change in digital tools and AI continues to improve how we can reach and consult communities. Together with traditional methods, digital tools can encourage more people from across the community to get involved in consultations.

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Striking the balance of proportionate engagement and consultation is not easy, but we recommend more early and meaningful engagement and consultation, rather than less.

Stakeholders should be informed that the engagement and consultation phases are distinct, but part of an holistic approach to manage their interaction with the project.

Consultations need to take place at a stage when changes can be made as a result of the feedback. This builds trust and demonstrates a commitment to involving and listening to stakeholders.

We have run numerous statutory and non-statutory consultations, and found this approach increases stakeholder confidence and mitigates risk.

COMPELLING NARRATIVE

Challenge

Creating a compelling, clear and consistent narrative is vital to building trust and support. Stakeholders and communities often feel that projects 'are done to them' and they are not always clear on the benefits.

Solutions

Inspiring vision: Develop a clear and inspiring vision that focuses on the long-term benefits and social value that the project will bring to the community.

Clear culture: Develop a clear culture and set of behaviours and values. These are integral to creating an identity that supports the project narrative and builds trust with stakeholders.

Compelling story: Develop a simple and compelling evidenced-based story (narrative and key messages) that easily and consistently communicates the benefits of the project.

Narratives need to connect to people, to help them imagine 'what's in it for them' whether that's social, environmental or economic benefits.

Brand: A visual brand is important for conveying the project story and should be developed with customers and stakeholders in mind.

Political buy-in: Political support is critical to the successful development and approval of major projects.

Ensure the compelling narrative is suitable for the political landscape at a national, regional and local level and reflects the benefits of the scheme.

Build trust, be trustworthy: Projects should build trusted relationships with their stakeholders. To establish trust project teams need to be transparent, responsive and deliver on any commitments they make.

Communications: A lack of clear and consistent communication can create a 'vacuum' that is often filled with misinformation.

Early, ongoing and transparent communication builds trust and project credibility. It is essential to keep stakeholders informed at all stages.

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A compelling narrative can help win hearts and minds, but many major projects fail to develop a clear project story.

Messaging is often focused on technical aspects rather than community benefits and social value.

Projects should develop an inspiring vision, culture and brand that reinforces the project story and helps stakeholders understand the aims of the project, the potential impact and longer term benefits.

ADAPT NOW

As government looks to us to drive efficiencies through the development and delivery of major projects, the importance of engaging stakeholders effectively is becoming increasingly important.

The relationship between projects and their stakeholders can last for many years - we need to get it right from the outset and take stakeholders and the community on the journey with us.

The benefits are clear to see - through strategically planned, early and ongoing engagement, projects can build trust with stakeholders to ultimately gain support and buy-in for major projects. The solutions are in our grasp; we can rise to meet the challenges and accelerate progress with:



Strong project leadership
in deploying a meaningful
stakeholder engagement
approach



Investment in
engagement resources



Compelling
narratives focused on
social value that connects
people and projects



Proactive engagement
approach from the outset



In the next edition of Key Insights, CJ Associates will publish the findings from the discussions on the planning aspects of the report presented to the Major Projects Association, and will include tangible actions, innovative ideas and initiatives to help address the issues raised - and deliver better outcomes for all.

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