

Strategic master plans for ports

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For around five years airport operators have used strategic master plans as tools for aiding the growth and development of airports across the UK. The master plan process has helped them set out their development proposals; inform planners and communities about their future objectives; and engage with local and regional stakeholders.

Now the Department for Transport wants to replicate that success in the ports sector, so in December of last year we published guidance recommending that all major UK ports should produce master plans in consultation with their key stakeholders, and advising on how they might best achieve this.

What are the main priorities for port master plans?

First and foremost, each master plan should present a port's broad strategic intentions over the medium to long term. It might discuss the port's main markets and principal traffics of importance; its expectations for future traffic growth; and any predicted expansion of the port estate or changes in the way it operates.

The plan would also consider in some detail the impact of port activities – and especially of any future growth – on the local environment, community, economy and transport infrastructure, and how these impacts might be managed.

Most fundamentally, the master planning process helps to clarify a port's strategic thinking, and provides a framework within which the future direction of the port can be considered. Given the operational demands of running a successful port, it can be all too easy for day-to-day matters to leave little time and space for strategic planning, perhaps harming the future competitiveness of the business, and delaying the lead-time for future projects.

Consulting with stakeholders

Consultation with stakeholders is an essential part of the process, and helps to ensure that plans are comprehensive, deliverable and sustainable.

In particular early consultation with local planning authorities and transport infrastructure developers can be an effective way to support the successful delivery of future development plans. For planning authorities, early engagement means that port expansion plans can be included in the relevant planning documents, while for transport infrastructure developers, early consultation provides more time and space to consider the port's future infrastructure requirements.

Being open and transparent about future plans and engaging with local community groups, employees and port users will help to improve local working relationships and raise the profile of the port. It's also likely to make the process of development approval much smoother since key groups will have been consulted, and their problems addressed, at an earlier stage.

In short, master planning provides an excellent opportunity to build key stakeholder partnerships that will be important for the long-term success of the port, as well as for clarifying the port's intentions for the future.

Flexibility and timing to suit each port

Ports are diverse organisations – each with its own local issues, and each with its own way of doing business. The Department's guidance does not attempt to set a fixed template for how UK ports should go about producing a master plan. Instead it lays out a set of pointers that a port may wish to consider when developing a master plan.



London Gateway: The plan would also consider in some detail the impact of port activities – and especially of any future growth – on the local environment, community, economy and transport infrastructure, and how these impacts might be managed.



Courtesy: The Port of Felixstowe

Port of Felixstowe: The master planning process helps to clarify a port's strategic thinking, and provides a framework within which the future direction of the port can be considered.

One such pointer is to work in a way that complements the planning system. For example, rather than trying to fit into a rigid national timetable, master planning should be phased to suit local circumstances – to fit with pre-sifting for major individual planning proposals, or with reviews of regional strategies and planning documents.

The amount of time needed to produce a master plan will vary from port to port. For example, it will vary depending on the size of the port, the scope of the development plans, and the number of consultees involved.

But broadly speaking a master plan is likely to take a minimum of one year from start to finish, and considerably longer than that for a large port.

In considering the work involved, it will be important to account for a sufficiently long consultation period to engage with stakeholders on a draft of the plan. The guidance suggests that 12

weeks might be sufficient, but a port may decide that – in the case of a longer or more detailed master plan – further time, or an additional consultation period, is appropriate.

The consultation could usefully encompass a broad range of stakeholders, including shipping lines, hauliers, tenants, local amenity groups, local business associations and community groups, national NGOs, regulators, transport network providers and regional and local planning bodies. In addition to formal consultation with these groups, informal engagement in the formulation of the draft master plan is almost always worthwhile.

Once published, the success of a master plan is largely dependent on its ability to react flexibly to the changing planning environment. It will be essential for a port to arrange regular reviews to gauge progress, and to renew the plans if necessary.

Broad value of master plans

Everyone benefits from the master plan process. Planning authorities and infrastructure developers are better informed, and can adapt their own plans accordingly. Local community groups, employees and port users become more engaged with the future direction of the port and are able to make their concerns heard. The port itself, meanwhile, reaps the benefits of strategic thinking and improved engagement with its stakeholders.

Of course, the manner in which these objectives are achieved will be different in every case. That is why the Department is actively encouraging ports to come up with innovative ways of tackling the planning process, engaging with stakeholders, and reaching out for the numerous benefits that master planning can bring.

The DfT guidance on port master plans can be found at: www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/shippingports/ports/portspolicyreview/portmasterplans/



Port of Portsmouth: A master plan is likely to take a minimum of one year from start to finish, but could be considerably longer than that for a large port.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE ORGANISATION

The **Hon Paul Clark MP** is the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport. MP for Gillingham and Rainham since 1997, he was previously Parliamentary Private Secretary to Ed Balls MP at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. Mr Clark has also been Assistant Government Whip at HM Treasury and Parliamentary Private Secretary to the former Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott MP. Before being elected as an MP he managed the TUC National Education Centre in North London.

Mr Clark graduated in Economics and Politics at Keele University before completing a Diploma in Management Studies at the University of Derby.

The UK **Department for Transport's** aim is transport that works for everyone. This means a transport system which balances the needs of the economy, the environment and society. The Department for Transport provides leadership across the transport sector to achieve its objectives, working with regional, local and private sector partners to deliver many of the services.

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