

South Yorkshire County Council, UK

Ensuring smooth & safe traffic flows on South Yorkshire's roads



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Peter Bull, syITS project manager

“Transport facilitates economic regeneration.” That understanding was the starting-point of South Yorkshire’s (UK) ambitious Intelligent Transport System (syITS) project. With at its heart: a state-of-the-art Traffic Control Center to monitor and manage road network operations and emergencies, using CCTV and automatic traffic detection. Since December 2008, an advanced Barco visualization solution has been helping operators at the brand-new Center ensure smooth traffic flows, improve mobility and foster safety.

BARCO

Visibly yours

The main settlements of South Yorkshire (UK) grew up around the old industries of mining (coal) and steel manufacturing. With the decline and fall of these industries in the 1980s and 1990s, unemployment in the region rose sharply, catapulting South Yorkshire onto the list of the least prosperous areas in western Europe. Regeneration was an absolute must and an improvement of the existing transport network a key pillar of the economic regeneration action plans. As part of the transport scheme, the disparate systems and outdated tools used to monitor traffic would be replaced by innovative, sophisticated technology, bundled together in a brand-new Traffic Control Center.

Control Center from scratch

Peter Bull, syITS Project Manager: "We decided to create a Control Center from scratch and issued a series of competitive tenders for hardware, software and all other equipment. Thinking Space Systems, specialists in the provision of technical furniture for control rooms, soon proved to be the best partner to manage the project. Together with our architects, they created a complete ergonomic working environment for the operators, ensuring that the design and furniture conforms to all necessary standards and health and safety requirements for a 24h environment." To bring visibility into the control room, Thinking Space Systems suggested Barco. "We have been harvesting success already with Barco in quite a few projects," explained Paul Roberts, Traffic Information & Control Team Manager at Thinking Space Systems. "Barco really is synonymous with innovation and quality, at a competitive price." Visits to existing control centers in Wakefield, Exeter and Manchester convinced the syITS team that the Barco solution would suit its requirements perfectly.



Brightness and user-friendliness

In December 2008, five months after the project kick-off, South Yorkshire's Control Center went live, featuring a 8 x 50" Barco video wall, controlled by a Barco display controller and management software. Peter Bull and the operators mainly praise the system's brightness and user-friendliness: "The rear projector display cubes render razor-sharp, crystal-clear images, even under high ambient light conditions. You can really walk from one side of the room to the other, the pitch will always remain excellent. Operators easily monitor and switch between images being provided by the 50 CCTV cameras and other visual sensors. In addition, the layout of the screens can be customized smoothly, not only on the main display but on individual control-room consoles as well."

Helicopter view

The return on the control center investment is difficult to quantify, according to Peter Bull, as traffic flows, congestion and safety depend on many factors. Still, he is convinced the control center really helps to keep traffic moving, minimize delay for travelers, and improve their safety, resulting in a clear economic benefit. Bull: "The operators now have a real-time, total

overview of the transport network, so that they can react quickly and make fast, accurate decisions about incidents and conditions on the road. The controllers help them to interface with their displays, use image-processing tools to highlight events, think up potential solutions and communicate these visually with other users, either in the same location or remotely."

Flexible and scalable

As a result, communication and collaboration with the emergency services, other highway agencies and neighboring authorities' control centers has enhanced greatly. Having real-time traffic flow information also means the Center can provide up-to-date information for variable message signs, weather conditions and potential hazards such as flooding. "And we are sure the system holds plenty of potential: we are, for example, planning to install automatic number plate recognition cameras to monitor average journey time. The input of these cameras will be fed onto the Barco wall. Another idea for the future is to use real-time traffic information for air quality monitoring. Barco has certainly provided a crucial element which now has the flexibility and scalability to grow as road usage looks set to increase," Bull concluded.

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