REDUCING THE ADVERSARIAL NATURE OF
CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS: A
METHODOLOGY TO HELP IN THE DESIGN AND
CONSTRUCTION STAGES OF CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

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Abstract
The current design methods for high profile construction projects are being challenged by the changing needs of both society and local populations. The approval process in the UK is encountering difficulties addressing rapidly changing and contradictory environmental concerns, particularly for road schemes where the time taken for design, consultation, approval, and construction can be up to 12 years. Such long development times can promote construction at the expense of changes in environmental, sociological, and technological issues. The research project described in this paper suggests techniques for speeding up this process, especially through better communication with the public. For example, the public could interactively manipulate the route of a road to ascertain the effects of scheme modifications. This would allow more informed discussion, provide more transparent access to government information, make the public confident that they are fully informed about all factors affecting the development, and promote better opportunities for a genuine consensus.

Keywords
adversarial, co-operative, consultation, roads and highways, visualisation, process improvement, productivity

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on work carried out for the Highways Agency in the UK, which started with a desire to use visualisation and virtual reality more effectively. There were several interdependent objectives of this research:

• to reduce the delivery time of potentially controversial high profile construction projects;
• to evaluate existing processes and identify actual and potential areas for conflict;
• to make information that ought already be in the public domain genuinely accessible and in a form that is useful;
• to develop methods to encourage collaborative working; and
• to demonstrate the potential of this new approach.

There has been a noticeable weakness in potentially controversial high profile construction projects achieving their promised delivery times. An examination of large projects that involve extensive consultation with stakeholders and rigid approval processes leads to the conclusion that these take considerably more time to reach a consensus than they should. Efforts to identify the root causes often focus on production rather than on organisational issues. A feature of such consultations which regularly causes conflict is the number of times when stakeholders are required to make reasoned judgements based on low quality or inadequate information. One area considered in some detail has been the public inquiry. Macrory and Lafontaine