

Nick Richardson - Technical Principal in Integrated Transport

**Royal
Geographical
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Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Technical Principal, in Integrated Transport

Location: Global, based in the UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I have been involved with transport since graduating with a Geography degree and completing an MA in Regional Planning. However, government became unfriendly towards the planning profession which eliminated opportunities for new entrants. Instead I worked as a bus driver for three years before moving to Bedfordshire County Council to take up transport planning. This required a broad understanding of the county's geography and transport networks. I expanded this by moving to Hampshire County Council with a much wider variety of places and transport problems. In doing so, I progressed to a more senior role with involvement in the County Structure Plan Review i.e. land use planning to frame Local Plans and to manage transport initiatives in several parts of the county including the historic city of Winchester, the more recent but growing area of Basingstoke and south Hampshire with its coastal geography within and between Portsmouth and Southampton. Having worked with local authorities for 14 years, I moved to the private sector with MVA Consultancy and then Mott MacDonald, providing advice on a wide range of transport issues. In addition to the experience I gained previously, I provide specialist advice on passenger transport systems. I have always been involved with professional organisations and have had many roles including a term as Chair of the Transport Planning Society and key roles with other organisations.

What are you responsible for?

My project work varies and can involve determining transport strategies for specific areas, identifying links with sustainability and responding to different travel demands in a variety of contexts from development areas in the UK and beyond. As a passenger transport specialist, I advise on bus network improvements, bus rapid transit and light rail options. A key element is making the connections between geographies and transport through land use decisions, transport networks and wider influences such as economic structures and the need for sustainability. Understanding the contexts is critical to implementing the right solutions and what may be a perfect fit for one location will not be appropriate in others. Over the past year I have advised on proposals to create more walking space in a major city centre and the effect this would have on bus routes, considering a monitoring framework for rural and urban bus services, advised an independent panel on public transport options in south east Wales and evaluated bus infrastructure. Currently I am working within a multi-disciplinary team to determine access options to a National Park and advising on creating a coherent bus network in part of Malaysia.

What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

An ability to communicate is essential. Clarity is needed within large project teams, other advisors and clients which can involve individuals, businesses, local authorities and government agencies. Dealing with politicians is especially important and requires experience. Leadership is also important and I try to stay up to date in ever-changing scenarios and to support colleagues as they progress both in technical capabilities and in building their individual profile. I present at events and conferences and have presented evidence to the House of Commons Transport Committee and its equivalent in Wales.

How does geography feature in your work?

Transport is a core element of geography, linking places and moving people and goods in various spatial and temporal contexts. Understanding the interactions continues to elude some decision-makers; this results in inappropriate planning decisions such as creating large housing developments with poor accessibility and building roads that are not necessary. Positive decisions require imagination and innovation, drawing together geography, planning and transport with lasting outcomes that benefit individuals' wellbeing, the business community and



social cohesion such as supporting a population of mixed age structures, incomes and opportunities. Creating more sustainable transport is an important contribution to addressing emissions and climate change.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I have a variety of work, often with two or more projects in parallel. Determining solutions to difficult problems requires a good grip on the basic principles, for example access options for rural communities, dealing with the pressures of urbanisation and understanding why and how people make travel decisions.

What are the opportunities for career progression and where might you be in 5 years?

Transport always provides career opportunities in central or local government and related agencies, in consultancy or for the charity sector. It is possible to build your profile over time and gain accreditation and experience along the way, particularly through getting involved outside day-to-day work through professional networks. Developing a specialism is also useful.

How do you maintain your knowledge and interest in geography outside of work?

Transport is all around us! Being a consumer of transport as a bus, tram or train passenger, car driver or simply walking or cycling is invaluable to appreciate the pluses and minuses of travel options.

Why did you choose geography?

Geography is a core subject that provides a sound basis for subsequent work. In my case, this led to planning and transport planning, widening my understanding of how people and contexts interact. It has provided insight into travel behaviours and infrastructure requirements.

*** This interview was undertaken in 2021 and was correct at the time of publication. Please note that the featured individual may no longer be in role, but the profile has been kept for career pathway and informational purposes.**