

The AGI... it's all about Collaboration



If there's one thing the geographic information industry is good at, it's creating tools that get us from A to B. In other words, we're brilliant at delivering a great strategy. While speculation is only to be expected from the community, we've been told that the new Geospatial Commission does have a very firm and specific strategic remit – to derive greater value for UK plc from the many agencies which are creating or using geographic information in government.

If we cast our minds back, the AGI was created in 1989 as one of the outcomes from the long-awaited Chorley Report. The report examined all information on the future handling of geographic information in the UK, and took into account developments in information technology and of market needs at the time.

If you, like I was at the time of its release, are not familiar with the Chorley Report, then please be assured that it is not the most exciting of reports. What it does best, however, is remind us of how far we've come, and how much further we still have to go. Pulling together feedback and evidence from over 400 organisations, there were some significant findings, which, almost 40 years later, sound a little familiar. This includes points about the inherent misunderstanding of our work, as well as the enduring struggle by the industry to communicate the significance and potential of its products and services. Thankfully though, some things are very different.

In 1989, Lord Chorley's team was given a wide-ranging remit for their work. They were asked to question the value of geographic information; what it would be used for; the difficulties in handling spatial data, and how they could be overcome. They were also asked about the benefits which could be derived from sharing datasets, and how that could be achieved, with integrity and confidence, for the data users. They were even asked about the lessons which could be learned from studying related overseas developments. Today's Geospatial Commission will focus on bringing together the 'cousins' of government in order to maximise the value of the UK government's locational data, and, as an outcome, to help create jobs, and stimulate a vibrant and innovative economy.

Against the backdrop of such an ambition, the Commission will also be discovering that what we're experiencing, generally, is a slow but sure change in the way location data is being used, both inside government and outside. Sector-wide, we're all moving away from project-based professional silos towards more integrated outcomes that have greater social and economic impacts.

The problem with any system is that the more of them we develop, the more we need to accelerate that development. This makes getting ahead of the curve quite difficult. What the Geospatial Commission will be doing, to some extent, is trying to avoid a scramble at the top of that 'Law of Acceleration' curve within the government. It will focus on delivering a positive outcome which both supports innovation and enables the momentum which is yet to come. Considering the above, the good news is that the AGI organisation exists for the purpose of delivering benefits across, and for, the UK's geospatial community which can help the Commission to achieve its objectives.

The AGI's National Groups commercial interests will be impacted positively by the outcomes of the Commission's work; and we are uniquely and ideally placed to source independent views that can help shape the future of GI in this country. Furthermore, one of the government-mandated responsibilities that we have as an organisation, is to deliver and maintain a suite of geospatial standards in the UK. This is a key factor in bringing the same government's data and organisations together effectively!

Over the coming weeks, we will deliver a programme of activities that engage our members' views, especially in relation to the forthcoming Geospatial Commission. We will start with a special AGI Breakfast Briefing, so please follow all of the latest news by following @geocommunity on Twitter or via our member newsletter. There will also be a Briefing report made available shortly after the event, which will start to bring our members' views on the Commission's work together.

On a personal note, in 2018 and beyond, I look forward to the exciting pace and momentum of change in our industry. I also look forward to meeting with as many of our members as possible, and to learn about their views on the future of the UK's GI industry.

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