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The Last Mile – Some thoughts for event organisers

One of the breakout workshops from this year's SGSA conference discussed the concept of the last mile and offered delegates the opportunity to explore the subject in a little more depth. The SGSA 'Alternative Uses of Venues' guide already makes reference to the last mile. As the Authority embarks on the latest edition of the 'Green Guide', it is an opportune moment to look again at this area.

The concept of managing the last mile is, in reality, nothing new. Indeed, some of the earliest memories from my police career as a young constable in South East London were of policing Millwall football ground in the early 1980's when one of the key tasks was escorting the fans between the stadium and the railway station – the space we now refer to as the 'last mile'. The purpose back then was to maintain segregation between the home and away supporters during the dark days of UK football violence and it was an accepted responsibility of the police.

However, since then we have seen significant change in the policing approach and what is accepted as the responsibility of the police compared to the responsibility of the club / event organiser or other party; not only in regard to football, but at all large scale events.

Additionally, in recent years we have seen the security threats evolve, resulting in the need for enhanced security searching at many venues to mitigate the threat and offer reassurance to those attending. However, a poorly managed search operation can have a direct impact on crowding outside the ground. If flow rates and customer engagement are not effectively managed within the 'last mile' space, the security risks can grow significantly.

In other words, ironically, it is easy to create an 'unregulated crowded space' (a recognised security risk) outside a venue due to the queues and delays caused by the very security operation that has been implemented to protect visitors. This is perhaps just one security related example of where effective management of the last mile can smooth crowd arrival profiles, provide better information flows to both the visitors and organisers, and ultimately lead to a safer and more positive experience for all involved.

But it's not all about security; different events will have different last mile considerations and it was undoubtedly the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games that started to focus on the 'last mile / grey space' issues. The rationale at the time was around ensuring a high quality customer

experience, with clear signage, safe and secure pedestrian routes, personal interaction and appropriate facilities, all whilst minimising the impact on local communities wherever possible.

Establishing the route to delivery was always going to be a challenge; a number of parties recognised the need, but no one wanted to take the lead and the financial implications were seen as a concern. However, these issues can be resolved through the development of open / no blame partnerships.

Every venue is unique and every location can offer an opportunity to enhance not only the customer experience, but also the efficiency of the venue, promotion of the local authority and businesses and potentially offer marketing opportunities.

The operational sharing of information can assist with local traffic management planning, public transport demands and wider local government services. But for large events over a few days, the benefits can go further in regards to such issues as impact on utility services, local deliveries and links with other parallel events.

As with any new concept, there is always nervousness and concern, however collaborative working is without doubt the solution. This involves establishing the relevant parties, agreeing the requirement and then working together to establish who is best placed to co-ordinate the effort. The skill is remembering that co-ordination is exactly that; pulling together the needs of different groups in an integrated way to the common benefit of all. It is not about taking full responsibility.

Depending on the event, the co-ordinator may not always be the event organiser; indeed, for London 2012 the co-ordination role was taken by local authorities and transport authorities, as well as the organising committee; determined by the location and its various dynamics.

To conclude

The principles are simple; through partnership working, you can...

- Provide safe accessible routes for spectators offering a great experience
- Get crowds moving and keep people informed
- Intervene when there is a safety need (road crossing, flow change) or change in direction or decision, and
- Manage arrival flows, creating a safer, smoother and more enjoyable experience for all.

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