



## **Communicating the international transport by sea of nuclear material**

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### **ABSTRACT**

With a strategy of proactive stakeholder communications and issues management, International Nuclear Services (INS) aims to match its world leading transport capability with a complementary approach to the delivery of its communications.

Undertaking the global sea transport of some of the most controversial and emotive hazardous materials that exist requires a clear strategy and the application of tried and tested tactics across global political, media, government and industry stakeholders to contribute to the successful fulfilment of its customers' requirements.

INS's communications approach for transport operations is as follows:

- **Openness** – be as open and transparent as possible
- **Authority** – timely communications with key stakeholders to establish relationships and authority
- **Service** – recognise the needs of customers, regulators, media, government officials, politicians
- **Clarity** – simple messages on safety, security, legitimacy of the business
- **Context** – explain security framework and restrictions on releasing information

As part of the operations project team from the start, the communications team draws on internal and external support to deliver programmes of overseas public acceptance missions to en route states; welcomes key stakeholders to its terminal in Barrow-in-Furness to visit its vessels and facilities; works in partnership with its customers to understand their requirements – all well in advance of any transport operations.

Integral to the transport operations, INS's work delivers comprehensive communications plans that encompass local, national and international stakeholders to contribute to the successful completion of the shipments.

### **INTRODUCTION**

International Nuclear Services (INS) is the world's leading global transporter of nuclear materials. As well as the operational expertise of INS and its subsidiary, Pacific Nuclear Transport Ltd, its approach to the delivery of stakeholder engagement as an integral part of transport projects has contributed to its leading reputation and helped secure notable successes over its 40-year history of worldwide nuclear transports. These include successive programmes of transports of mixed oxide fuel; spent nuclear fuel; plutonium; exotic fuels; material test reactor fuels shipped under to the USA's Global Threat Reduction Initiative; and vitrified highly active waste.



The quality of the nuclear debate over the decades has meant that any transportation of such materials has created controversy both in the countries of origin and arrival, as well as among en route states. Details of the international public acceptance work, which is delivered for INS by our contractors Gavin Carter & Associates and Jacky Clarke and Associates, is described in detail in a complementary paper *Public Acceptability For International Sea Shipments Of High Level Waste And Mox Fuel*.

This paper focuses on the planning and delivery of UK stakeholder management.

Integrating communications in to the transport projects from the start has allowed the project team to manage a broad range of stakeholder interests, manage relationships to a state that aid, rather than hinder, the success of transport operations, as well as contributing to the broader, more longer term formation of opinions and judgements of these transports.

All stakeholder management is planned and delivered according to the following principles:

- **Openness** – be as open and transparent as possible
- **Authority** – timely communications with key stakeholders to establish relationships and authority
- **Service** – recognise the needs of customers, regulators, media, government officials, politicians
- **Clarity** – simple messages on safety, security, legitimacy of the business
- **Context** – explain security framework and restrictions on releasing detailed information relating to specific shipments

Each transport requires the management of the following challenges, to varying degrees:

- **Security primacy** – regulations prevent proactive detailed communications to stakeholders, therefore there is a risk of information vacuum
- **NGOs** – vocal, emotive, force INS and customer to appear defensive, often effective at filling any information vacuum
- **Vessel** – can be a focus of criticism, sometimes serving to increase profile of shipments
- **Nuclear debate** – avoiding being drawn in to wider nuclear debates within nation states

The key strategic goal of the communications strand of the project is of course to contribute to the safe and successful completion of international nuclear transports.

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

### Agreeing a strategy

The first aim for INS is to agree a joint communications strategy with the customer, ensuring it will help deliver the service that is required by the customer and that it complies with all national and international guidelines.

INS's preferred approach is partnership working because this is the most effective manner in which to deliver stakeholder management from the start to the finish of the transport operation. It is



particularly important when the media and stakeholder focus heightens in the customer's country where inevitably they are seen as the owner of all issues associated with the cargo and its transport.

Every communications strategy aligns with the principles set out above, which have been arrived at following decades of experience and also independent peer review. They are not immovable and INS is always evaluating and learning from experience, however they are tried and tested solid principles that are simply the right way to do business.

## **DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

From this strategy flows a plan, which is mapped out and delivered as a project. For the purposes of robust planning, tracking, quality and compliance, the communications team has its own place in the overall transport project's work breakdown structure, with clear accountabilities, scope and schedule.

As with the development of the communications principles over time, the format of the plans has undergone a similar process, with the level of detail allowing for fine tuning to suit each project. For example, key messages, supporting information, issues management, stakeholder mapping, are all discussed and agreed on a project-by-project basis.

This planning process has also been independently peer reviewed and was found to be robust and effective at managing stakeholder relationships and the media.

Communications planning is broken down into two distinct phases: preparing stakeholders and supporting the transport operation itself.

### Preparing stakeholders and key media

The preparation phase takes the form of a programme of face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders domestically and abroad and is delivered from up to two years in advance of the start of a transport programme and continues until the point of that programme being completed. This work is supported by the preparation of simple, multi-lingual information packs that are both printed and available on PNTL and INS websites.

The audiences are broad and include numerous opportunities for public scrutiny, either directly or by elected representatives. Where appropriate, the programme of briefings also includes selected media, although the proportion of individual journalists is low compared to that of stakeholders. This is because in many news organisations, the application of a generalist approach and lean structures means that there is often no way of predicting who will be covering a story even days in advance, let alone months or years.

Examples of these briefing programmes, include a series of UK stakeholder briefings in 2005 prior to the commencement of Mox transports to Europe, which commenced in 2006.

In addition, in 2008 both Sellafield Ltd and INS began a programme of joint briefings about the progress towards the commencement of the first return of vitrified highly active waste from the UK to Japan and Europe that took place in January 2010. During this particular programme, Sellafield Ltd and INS jointly briefed on a number of occasions more than 30 different stakeholders – from



UK government officials and regulators, to local and national politicians – on the progress towards the commencement of the first return. The main objective was to prepare stakeholders sufficiently for the first transport, so that all subsequent transports in the 10-year programme achieved a business as usual feel in the UK, an objective which was demonstrably achieved by a very low key second transport in March 2010.

This preparation phase is critical, both in the UK and abroad, because it allows for open and challenging discussions about the general principles of security and safety governing transports; reassurance to be communicated by INS and PNTL representatives about the rationale for the transports; and challenges to be answered regarding the legitimacy of the business of transporting this material around the world. It avoids detailed questions relating to the timings and routes of specific transports, which is an area where information disclosure is greatly restricted for security reasons. This maximises the opportunity to be open, transparent and authoritative, and removes the risk of being prevented from answering detailed questions relating to specific transport arrangements – the outcome of this approach is greater trust, stronger relationships with stakeholders and some third party advocacy.

#### Operational phase

The type of communications approach applied to the transport operation is different in that it is dealing with a compressed and intense period of activity with stakeholders – the priority audience; while dealing in tandem with the fickle nature of the media – a secondary audience but with a vastly disproportionate reach and share of voice.

While stakeholders – including some key journalists – will be well briefed in advance of the transport, most of the media will be new to it and if the news agenda provides the right conditions for widespread coverage then the focus can be extremely sharp on the operations.

If managed well, then the media – most of which is either internet-based, or accessible via the internet in words or video – can provide an invaluable, permanent bank of authoritative information for future transport operations, be it later in the sequence of a transport programme. Most crucially, in the event of a crisis, all web-based information will be searched in seconds, interpreted and judged in minutes and replayed to the world within a matter of hours.

If managed poorly, then you are likely to have a series of damaged relationships with journalists and producers; secondary damage to the perception of INS and its customer; and an indelible interpretation of the transport, which could be the basis for the judgment of nuclear transports in the event of a crisis.

The operational communications plan is delivered from approximately a week or so before the departure of a transport and is active until after the arrival of the cargo at its final destination.

Its characteristics are different in that it needs to cater for the maintenance of the relationships already created with key stakeholders – demonstrating the delivery of a promise; while ensuring that the fickle immediacy and information-hungry media machine, particularly the broadcast media, gets as much information as can be given.



It is at this point that many of the challenges referred to in the introduction come in to play. Security restrictions are extremely stringent and have primacy when it comes to information disclosure. For example, no details of any transports are able to be disclosed in advance of a transport operation, not even a confirmation of a vessel's imminent departure when the preparation of the vessel is clearly visible.

It should be noted that the UK Office for Civil Nuclear Security is extremely aware of the needs of industry to manage its stakeholders and this insight is articulated in its 2005 publication *Finding a Balance*, which gives guidance on information disclosure.

However, the restrictions that are necessarily in place and adhered to by INS can occasionally lead to difficult relationships with the media; the reinforcement of the heavily-peddled perception of secrecy by the industry by detractors; and an information vacuum relating to specific details of the transport.

While the preparation phase is designed to target priority media relationships in order to counter such difficulties as far as possible, it is in the vacuum stage where the detractors' share of voice peaks. However, the degree of coverage of nuclear transports is dictated by the news context at the time, and not by non-governmental organisations. In business as usual operations, a slow news day can mean a front page; a busy news day can mean no attention in the UK at all.

Regardless of the level of interest, during a transport information is available for release but in order to remain within agreed security parameters, it must be managed by the structured activating of pre-approved statements, which are triggered by the sequential milestones of a transport operation. These are used to handle media enquiries, or to provide a limited number of key stakeholders with a narrative of the transport as it happens.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

INS seeks continuous improvements in all its work and undertakes detailed reviews of each transport – the delivery of the communications is included in this scrutiny.

The strategy and planning methodology has been independently peer reviewed to ensure that it is as good as it can be currently, and it is anticipated that the approach will inevitably develop in the future as communications methods change and tactics adjust to suit.

The enduring elements of the communications process are encompassed in the principles of openness, authority, service, clarity and context. When delivered in partnership with customers, these fulfil both INS's and its customers' needs, minimise opportunities for detractors to undermine what is a safe, secure and legitimate business activity and maximise opportunities for open engagement with stakeholders.