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MILTON KEYNES: THE ART OF DATA-DRIVEN CITIES

Milton Keynes is one of the fastest growing cities in the UK. Alan Fletcher, Chief Liaison Officer, MK:Smart, called it a "fantastic economic success story".

Fletcher said that while some cities are facing problems related to post-industrial decline, Milton Keynes' challenges are around growth.

Milton Keynes' population is forecast to grow to over 300,000 by 2026. This will create demand for up to 28,000 new homes, as well as new jobs. It could also increase travel demand by 60 percent. At the moment it is rare to experience traffic congestion in Milton Keynes, but that could quickly change unless the city acts. It has already taken a number of key steps, including putting together the MK:Smart initiative.

MK:Smart

MK:Smart was created to understand how the city could bring all the potentially siloed projects together in one place – therefore, at the heart of MK:Smart is the Data Hub. All the smart city projects produce an enormous amount of data and also rely on a large amount of data to make them work.

MILTON KEYNES

Established: 1967

Population: Approx. 267,000

Home of: Bletchley Park where Alan Turing cracked the Enigma code

Famous for: Concrete cows art installation – and now, the Concrete Cow Brewery and Big Moo festival
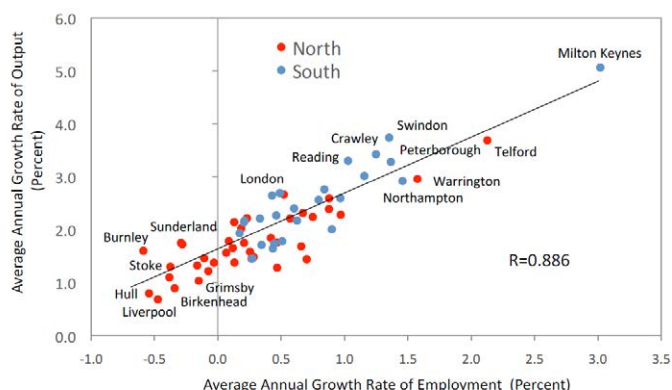
1970: Hosted Future World festival

Now: Live-testing autonomous vehicles

MILTON KEYNES IS A FANTASTIC ECONOMIC SUCCESS STORY

The evolving economic performance of UK cities: city growth patterns 1981-2011, Foresight Future of Cities: working paper, August 2014

10 cities with highest jobs growth

1	Milton Keynes	24,400	18.2
2	London	769,500	17.1
3	Cambridge	12,400	15.7
4	Brighton	15,100	11.1
5	Bournemouth	15,500	10.0
6	Portsmouth	18,800	9.2
7	Coventry	11,800	8.4
8	Newcastle	29,300	8.0
9	Aberdeen	13,300	7.9
10	Nottingham	21,400	7.7

Growth in Jobs
Cities Outlook 2015, Centre for Cities

"We started to think about what you can really do with that data in a way that makes sense for the city," Fletcher said. Like many of the speakers, Fletcher talked about the importance of understanding and involving city stakeholders: "Unless you begin to include stakeholders, you don't get the groundswell of involvement that creates real applications. If you don't recognize the people in the city you are not going to get very far. Smart city isn't something you do to people; you want them to be involved."

Refining the new oil – data
It's often said that data is the new oil. Fletcher said the important thing now is, "How do you refine it so it will make a difference?" So the Data Hub is about much more than storage – the most important thing is the curation.

"I like to think of it like art gallery curation," Fletcher said. "Like the National Gallery: it takes you on a journey through art history. And there's about 10 times as much stuff stuck in the basement."

He described the role of the curator – whether that's data or art – as exposing exactly the right things that people can make sense of and use. This is growing in importance as data is growing exponentially.

As well as collecting open data that already exists in government, Milton Keynes is also encouraging citizens and businesses to think about what their data might mean, and working to make sharing data simple. Then, applications and services can be built using that data.

This will only ever work if you build a support network around it. Fletcher said, "It's not good enough to say 'build it and they will come' – we've got to get out there and promote it." The city has developed a support network with local and national businesses.

Creating a marketplace of data
Milton Keynes is looking at how to create a marketplace of data, including tackling issues such as: What are the models around who will pay? How much will they pay and how will they pay? This is something that the city has been exploring through a TM Forum proof-of-concept Catalyst project.

"Smart city isn't something you do to people, you want them to be involved."

The Data Hub includes lots of different types of data sets as well as simple visualizations and a developer sandbox. MK:Smart has built some early applications using the data to show people the types of capabilities there are.

This includes work around mapping where and when traffic accidents typically occur then using predictions to try and reduce them. Another initiative is around water and using social nudging to help citizens understand and reduce water consumption – Milton Keynes is one of the driest region in the UK. There's another stream of work around energy, and how to best balance the load of energy in the city.

Citizens: At the heart of change
The MK:Smart platform allow citizens to have a voice and share ideas. "What is really surprising is that they told us things we didn't know or hadn't thought about in that way," Fletcher said.

He added, "Citizens are at the heart of change: If we want to make our city smarter, engaging citizens is one of the most important things we can do."