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Doing more with less

When it comes to saving money and driving efficiency, exploiting accurate location data is not the first thing that springs to mind. Yet, as Robert Andrews reports, the public sector has been saving itself a fortune doing just that

A study conducted last year by Ordnance Survey (OS) found that public sector organisations are currently saving more than £125 million annually by exploiting accurate location data and have the potential to boost that figure fourfold.

The use of mapping and location data, or geospatial information as it is known by map enthusiasts across government, has grown significantly since the turn of the century. So too has recognition of its benefits. Today, those benefits are even more tangible, thanks to the availability of mapping data through the Public Sector Mapping Agreement (PSMA).

Free at the point of use

The PSMA (www.os.uk/psma) is a 10 year agreement that enables public service bodies to utilise the best possible OS location data. Even better, that data is free at the point of use, whether by local or central government, the education system, the health service, emergency services, or other agencies.

Not only does it enhance the quality and efficiency of delivered services – from waste management right through to national security – it also makes taxes stretch further. Indeed, many public services would fail to function effectively without it.

On offer to PSMA members is a portfolio of premium products that range from large-scale topographic datasets to a database of 30 million residential addresses. They can also access water and transport network data, as well as flexible vector mapping products that are ideal for web and mobile applications. All are created from the OS geospatial database that comprises 460 million geographic features and is updated 10,000 times a day.

Top applications

With unrivalled quality, accuracy and currency, it is data in which all 561 organisations signed-up to the PSMA can trust and rely. A further OS study identified the 15 most popular PSMA-based applications as:

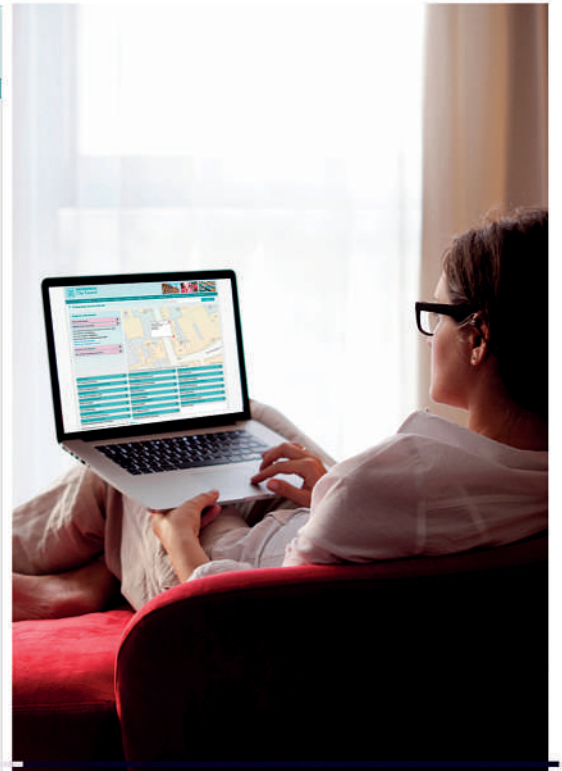
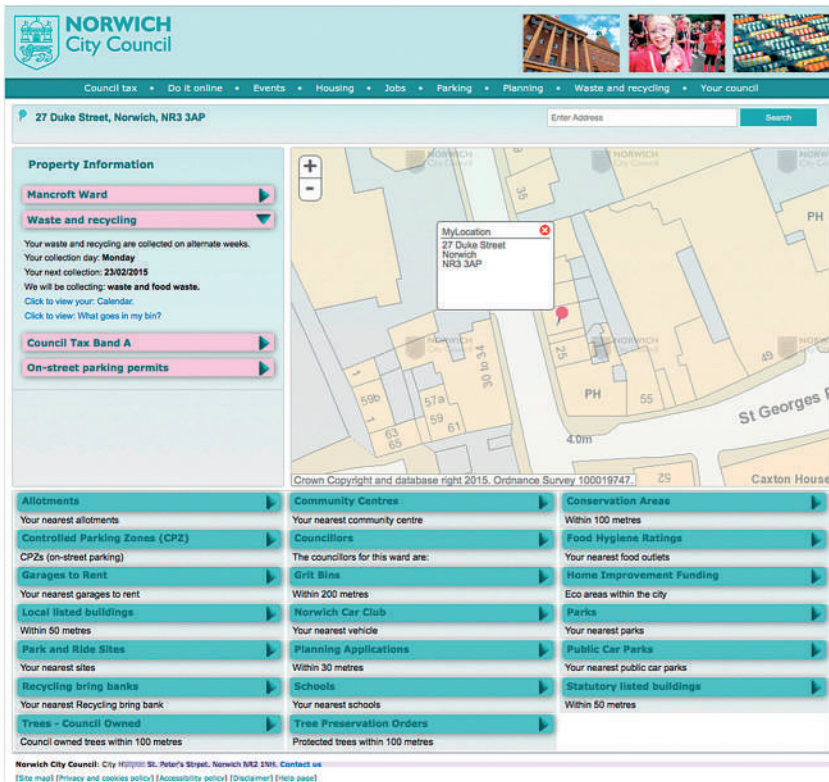
- Civil contingency or emergency planning and response
- Fraud prevention/analysis/detection
- Highways - maintain, plan and build
- Identifying future needs for schools
- Local transport services
- Location of winter grit bins
- Protection and conservation
- Public sector estate rationalisation
- Regeneration - urban & rural
- School & special educational needs transport
- Service demand management and future planning
- Siting and enabling access to public services
- Statutory consultee planning obligations
- Transforming citizen engagement
- Waste Collection and recycling

An analysis of the above reveals that local authorities, police forces and fire services are already saving over £125 million every year. The report also highlights scope for even bigger savings, e.g., if a majority (75%+) of local authorities and emergency services were to implement just the 15 most popular PSMA-based applications, annual savings of more than £0.5 billion could be realised.

From bed blocking to emergency response

The PSMA is also playing a critical role in central government departments and across the health sector. One partnership, between OS and the NHS, used geospatial information to create a 'bed-blocking' map that not only pinpoints bed availability but, most importantly, identifies areas of potential risk. By providing a mechanism for early intervention, it both streamlines bed management and enhances patient care.

Another example highlighting the important role of location data is the development of a relatively new mapping tool for emergency response. Known as ResilienceDirect, it provides a secure



As well as financial savings, applications based on PSMA data can streamline public-facing services as shown in this example from Norwich City Council

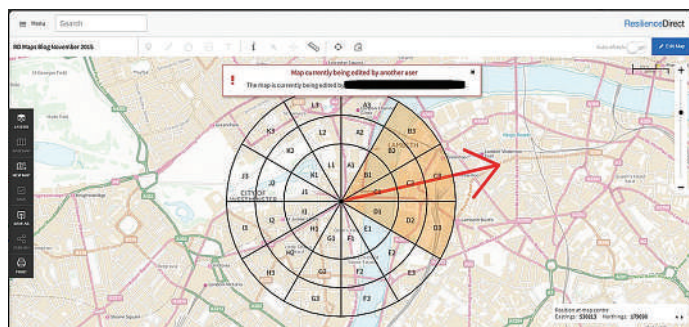
web-based platform with which emergency responders and those agencies responsible for planning, response and recovery can share information. With this Common Operating Platform, users can pull in other government datasets that are relevant to an incident and which could prove vital in planning, say, an evacuation. The platform also incorporates mapping tools with which users can add markers, show radius information for incidents, and highlight critical landmarks and features e.g. schools, hospitals and utilities.

Greater insight

Thanks to the PSMA, location data has become an important tool in projects and decision-making across government. Yet efficiencies and savings are just the start; location data also plays a critical role in gaining greater insight into and intelligence about communities. For



The Royal Borough of Greenwich is focussing on improved data analytics in its move to Smart City status



Initially launched in April 2014, ResilienceDirect provides a secure platform across which multi-agency partnerships can share information in both emergency planning and response

example, crime statistics can be mapped to speed tactical response and to improve preventative measures.

In looking to the future, location data is already recognised as a key ingredient in the Smart Cities concept, as well as the Internet of Things. In October of last year, the Royal Borough of Greenwich became the latest local authority to adopt a smart city strategy in

its effort to deliver better citizen services. The strategy will focus on improved data analytics to deliver smart transport, to build capabilities around the Internet of Things, and to embrace Building Information Modelling. OS data will be used within the smart transport strategy for public transport routing, to support vehicle-sharing apps, and to provide the data infrastructure for autonomous vehicle navigation.

With budgets under pressure, location data has already proven itself a valuable ally in doing more with less. It's likely to assume even greater value as central government departments contemplate a £20bn cut in their day-to-day spending following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Spending Review.

Robert Andrews is a Head of Corporate Communications at Ordnance Survey (www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/)