SAILING INTO VIEW

THIS YEAR SHOWED THE WORLD THAT SHIPS ARE STILL VITAL TO THE WORLD ECONOMY

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For most people, ships are glamorous, quaint, dangerous or utilitarian. Maybe they think of times gone by and sailing ships navigating around the world; round-the-world challenges and yacht races; ways to get across bodies of water that cars can't cross; or cruises to far-flung places. Vital components of world commerce? Probably not. Isn't that all done by plane now?

They were sorely disabused of their notions last year when the Suez Canal linking the Red Sea with the Mediterranean was blocked by a huge cargo ship for six days (*see page 31*). The incident brought the world's supply chains to a halt, with the maritime data company Lloyd's List estimating that the ship held up $9.6 billion in trade each day, based on the volume and value of goods flowing eastwards and westwards through the canal. And that was only the first of several such incidents last year that resulted in shortages of goods in numerous countries, not all of them so catastrophic.

Shipping's positive importance to the world might have gone unnoticed by the mainstream until last year – about 90% of all globally traded goods are ferried around the world by sea – but so has its effect on climate change: 300 million metric tons of dirty fossil fuels are used by merchant ships each year, emitting roughly one billion metric tons of carbon dioxide in the process – the equivalent of the annual carbon emissions of Japan. Could geospatial technology and information help cut that?

A QUESTION OF TRUST

MANY READERS WILL PERIODICALLY RECEIVE A NOTIFICATION FROM GOOGLE MAPS TO REVIEW THEIR LOCATION HISTORY. USEFUL? PERHAPS. BUT FOR WHOM IS THIS DATA REALLY GATHERED? AND WHY?

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To be fair, you can view, edit and delete this data anytime. And while Google says it does not share location history or other identifying information with advertisers, it equally says it will use it to serve us more useful advertisements. Who else might be interested in tracking our whereabouts, with or without our consent? And who can we trust?

To help answer such questions, March 2021 saw the Geospatial Commission, together with the UK Research and Innovation's Sciencewise programme, fund a nine-month study to probe public perceptions about the use of location data. The findings from this dialogue were published in November[1] and presented the following month in an online forum hosted by the Alan Turing Institute.

Perhaps inevitably, public concern centred on data breaches and misuse, privacy and discrimination. On the other hand, location data was perceived as most beneficial in areas such as emergencies, planning, health and convenience. Overall, the opportunities and benefits often related to society while risks were focussed on individual impacts.

All credit to the Commission for initiating this dialogue, the findings from which will influence its guidance on location data ethics, to be published this year in support of the UK Geospatial Strategy[2]

1 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-dialogue-on-location-data-ethics

2. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unlocking-the-power-of-locationthe-uks-geospatial-strategy/unlocking-the-power-of-location-the-uks-geospatial-strategy-2020-to-2025