



CHRISTIAN MERRETT

The importance of an integrated project Master Baseline Programme

In the first part of a series of three, Christian Merrett outlines why the development of a well-coordinated master baseline programme is crucial to a project's success

Failure to plan is planning to fail, it's a fact! From the smallest group of planned tasks to large multidisciplinary complex mega projects the consequence of failure is inevitable. The majority of contracts in use particularise – to varying degrees – the obligation of the contractor to produce a construction programme. From this the employer (usually through the engineer) will monitor the performance of the contractor and assess the progress of the works. The contractor will similarly use it for progress and reporting purposes but will also monitor costs, risk and identify key stages in the works to initiate key activities. Often the programme is only issued for acceptance once the contract has been awarded and the focus is on the contractors undertaking the works and not the project as a whole.

This article is part one of a three-part series that considers the following.

- The importance of developing a functional and well-coordinated master baseline programme;
- The significant part the employers' management team have in that process;
- The problems that arise in the absence of such a programme. So many times

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projects fail as a result of being reliant on the contractor's programme and in the case of multi-contract projects; very little consideration is given to the integration of individual 'package' contracts into the whole project delivery until it is too late. Imagine a large infrastructure project where due to its scale and complexity there is a requirement for several large contractors to undertake the works. Each of the contractors is engaged under an (EPC) contract to carry out its own portion of the works.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that critical processes such as design submissions and approvals, long lead for the delivery of specialist equipment could potentially have a significant impact upon the completion of a section of the works but more significantly, failing to meet a particular date is likely to have recurring effects upon other contractors.

Employers often get caught into the trap of thinking that the contractors will all fall nicely into line with little or any intervention from the project management team. Unfortunately not!

Right at the preconstruction and tender stage the contractor(s) should be made aware of their duties in respect to coordination between the consulting engineer and the other parties. Similarly the employer's management team must also be in a position to not only be aware of this but have the tools to manage and monitor the process.

Typically the Employer itself must develop the Master Baseline Programme by considering the following the simple yet essential areas.

- **Bid and scope interface** – Work Scope for each contractor must be clearly and precisely defined as quite often the 'thing' that is forgotten is often the 'thing' that causes the



problem, regardless of size. Don't assume that someone else will take care of it.

- **Timing and details of critical information exchange** – It is important not only for the Contractor to demonstrate his knowledge of his critical programme issues but also the Master Baseline Programme must take this into consideration and reflect this.
- **Periods of review and approval** – Something that is very much open to abuse. Quite often all parties consider that they are entitled to more time than agreed or than is reasonable in the absence of clear agreement. The employer feels as though there are so many comments to make on a submission due to what is perceived to be an issue of non-compliance, that any additional time taken is the fault of the contractors and that a prolonged review period is therefore justified. Similarly, contractors feel they need more time to factor in the

employer's preferential design changes; and so it goes on. These periods can compound and be responsible for very large delays.

- **Bid negotiation periods** – These often fall foul of extension to incorporate several rounds of queries and meetings. It is not necessary for the Master Baseline Programme to be of particularly high detail but as a minimum it should reflect and identify all the project stakeholders and the key milestones showing handover/deliverable stages. Furthermore the process must be clearly communicated and managed throughout the project and not assumed that the contractors are always adhering to these principles.

Part Two of this series will be published in the next edition of **Big Project ME** and will further explore this topic by presenting detailed scenarios of the typical problems encountered when a properly constructed Integrated Master Baseline Programme is not present.

Driver has been recently involved in several complex mega-projects whereby failure in providing an Integrated Master Baseline Programme has proven problematic for all parties when managing the works and in subsequent claim scenarios.

On all these occasions Driver promptly and successfully identified these issues and undertook the process of reconstructing an integrated Master Baseline Programme in order to properly assess and evaluate delay claims.

In situations such as these we strongly advise our clients to engage a planning consultant at the earliest possible stages of the project so as to significantly reduce – if not eliminate – the likelihood of these scenarios taking place on a construction project. ■

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