

CONNECTED PLACES

MASTER TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 68: IPEC LIVE FROM UKREIIF

INTRODUCTION

[theme intro]

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INTRO:

Welcome to Connected Places; a podcast about the future of our towns and cities, and how we live and travel in them.

I'm Ivor Wells, the producer of Connected Places, which is brought to you by the Connected Places Catapult.

We're the UK's innovation accelerator for cities, transport and places.

We help to connect businesses and public sector leaders to cutting-edge research and new technologies that can spark innovation and grow new markets.

Music bed

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Ivor:

We all know that money is tight, right?

And I don't just mean the cost of living and the pressures your personal finances.

If you work in the public sector in particular, say for example a local authority, you'll know that money has been tight for years now.

In fact, municipal budgets in our towns and cities have not only been cut, they've had to be completely re-imagined.

That said, every year the UK public purse spends £380bn on third party suppliers - £60bn of that is spent by local government.

And a big part of that, a big part of any budget, is what to invest in and spend on.

And a big part of spending, is the question of what to buy, and how best to buy it.

Now, if we're talking about purchasing goods and services with public money – the technical term is procurement.

And you may know very well from personal experience just how important public procurement processes are, but also how complex and time-consuming they can be when they're not fit for purpose. Especially if what you're wanting to procure is innovation.

I'm talking about a corner of the public sector where creativity can very easily be stifled right at the get go.

So, in this episode we want to revisit what's happening in the world of public procurement, and what's being done to not only improve the UK's procurement regime, but also make it more innovation-friendly.

We were recently up in Leeds at UKREiiF – that's the UK's Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum, and we hosted a number of talks in our pavilion.

And I had the pleasure of facilitating a panel all about innovation procurement – and the more fundamental question that underpins it.

What stops the public and private sector working better together? And how do we fix it? And where does procurement come in?

I was joined by Rikesh Shah:

Rikesh Shah:

Good morning all. So, Rikash Shah, I'm the Head of the Innovation Procurement Empowerment Centre at the Connected Places Catapult. I've been here for about seven months now. Previous to this, I was the Head of Innovation at Transport for London. I was there for about 22 years. Also, I do some lecturing at the Royal College of Arts and Harvard University. So, yeah, lovely to see you all.

Ivor:

Emma Frost

Emma Frost:

Hi, everyone. I'm Emma Frost. I'm chair of the UK innovations District Group, which is a network of leading innovation districts across the UK. I'm also freelance consultant working internationally and nationally on innovation ecosystems and place-based innovation development. And I come from a background of actually establishing and running an innovation district. So I understand this stuff from the ground up.

Ivor:

And Amabel Grant

Amabel Grant:

Morning everyone, I'm Amabel Grant. I'm Chief Executive of Bloom Procurement Services, and we provide a fully end to end managed service for the public sector. So we essentially connect the public sector with a huge network of suppliers, around 95 percent of those being SMEs.

Ivor:

So, if you're ready for an enlightening conversation on the future of procurement and the dynamic synergy between the public and private sectors, you're in the right place.

[STING]

Ivor:

I want to start with that fundamental question then. Why does procurement matter so much in what we're doing here at REiif? What do we mean when we're talking about innovation in procurement? What's the value proposition here? Rikesh, over to you.

Rikesh Shah:

I think I'll start with what you said earlier. Sometimes we get hung up on the word procurement. And as soon as you talk about procurement, it becomes a contractual conversation, it becomes a very specification, contractual conversation, we need to take a step back.

In the UK, we're spending 400 billion pounds a year through the public sector on procurement, and that's a lot of money. And I think what we need to think about is the challenges that local authorities are facing right now are unprecedented and the level of challenges we have across the UK are unprecedented.

So how do we do things better, cheaper and quicker? And that means fundamentally transforming or reforming how we think about engagement with the private sector. What happens far too often is the public sector over specifies what it wants. Or it tries to build things itself. I did it at Transport for London because we're different. We're special.

So we will create our own solutions. Actually, there's an opportunity that opportunities with advances in technology, we are seeing new types of innovators coming out that weren't there 20 years ago, even 10 years ago. Whether they're startups, whether they're scale ups, whether they're academic spin outs, whether they're accelerators or venture capitalists.

So how do we create the right culture, the right conditions that allows better public private collaboration? And by that I mean, you need to create the right trust, you need to create long term partnerships, you need to think about the role of the public sector, which is get better at defining problems.

Far too often I'd sit in a room with senior leaders and politicians. Let's say it's a two hour meeting. We spend the first minute on the problem, and the next two hours on the solution. Let's get better at defining the problem. Let's think about what assets we have. We're at a real estate conference. Put the public sector as a significant landowner. How does it create that landowner into a testbed? How does it bring other people in to solve challenges? And how does it curate the market to co-develop long term solutions?

Ivor:

I like what you say there about lingering on the problem for a while before you start launching off and having long conversations about solutions. Let's linger on the problem for a minute, Emma. How do you see the problem?

Emma Frost:

Happy to linger on that problem because it's a big one. But actually, yeah, just building off exactly what Rikesh just said. I heard a great phrase yesterday in one of the debates that was, rather than thinking about procuring a solution, we need to think about procuring a partner and just that simple sentence kind of sums up a lot of what you're saying about the collaborative nature that's needed.

But just rowing back to some of the problems, I think the first one you rightly point out is we're talking about big sums of money. You know, into the billions, big billions. And we could make that money work so much harder if we were able to enable more innovative procurement processes and outcomes. And then I think a second point is a lot of these procurement deals, contracts, you know, they last for multi, multi years, you know, and that has a long tail impact on the communities and the people and the services that they're providing.

So think of everything from like highways to hospitals, you know, these are really significant procurement deals that need to be done and they last for many years. So we've got to get them right. And that means taking the time to understand the relationship value in the outcomes focused collaboration that Rikesh was talking about.

A third thing I'd point to is if you've got a really knotted, tangled system, as we do with procurement at the moment, people will work, you know, outside the loop, they'll find ways to kind of create loopholes and then work in the loopholes. And that doesn't help anyone. We all know it's happening. But actually, having such a complex and bureaucratic and overly structured and prescribed process, as you say, Rikesh, just means that a lot of people end up working outside the rules and that can be really damaging. But I think the most important thing is exactly what you were saying that in order to actually create the solutions that we desperately need to tackle some very, very big problems, we've got to be able to unite the innovation capacity that rests when you can merge the public, the private, the community and the academic sectors.

And until we've got those brilliant brains working together, we can't unleash that innovation capacity and you need more innovative procurement to be able to tap into that.

Ivor:

Amabel, I know you've got a unique perspective on this from a framework perspective and the work that you guys are doing at Bloom. Tell us about your angle on this.

Amabel Grant:

Yeah, sure. So, and also building on what the panelists have just said, I'm just picking up on a couple of things there. So, you know, the definition of that outcome, what's the problem and how do we actually define the outcome rather than trying to clearly specify what we need?

And I think also it's very much about, you know, we don't know what we don't know. So there are some really innovative suppliers out there with some fantastic new technologies, strategies, products, approaches, and how do we expose those to public authorities? And give them visibility of a new product that they might not even know was a solution to one of these problems or outcomes.

So that's what it's about for us. It's up front, you know, defining that outcome. And then collaboratively working with our network of suppliers to deliver those outcomes.

Ivor:

I'm keen to hear a bit more about those outcomes in a minute because I know you guys have been launching a pretty exciting initiative at UKREiif this week, but we will come back to that. I want to just sort of bring in the lens of place into this as well because that's very much our special source here at The Connected. Places catapult. We work very closely across the worlds of cities and transport systems. And that includes obviously working with large public authorities like councils and transport authorities.

And I know, you know, when we're thinking about place, you know, this question of why are test beds in places so important when it comes to testing new innovations and solutions, particularly when it comes to this question around how you de-risk innovation, where does that come in?

Emma Frost:

Well, I think it's fundamental. So I'm a big advocate for testbeds. And when we're talking about testbeds, I'm talking about real world environments where you can really put into practice the prototyping and the piloting, this sort of iterative learning that is fundamental to the whole innovation process, but they can be digital testbeds or they can be physical testbeds.

And often we need a blend of both, but it's the access to those testbed environments that's absolutely critical. And it's so important because if you think about how we are very familiar working with clinical trials and the medical testing process, there are very clear steps to the pathways. You know, you go through lots of lab assessments, then you go through your clinical trials, and then you go through your user testing.

There's quite clear delineation. And actually the same is very true in technology readiness levels, but we need to adopt that or translate that mindset to all types of innovation, testing and development. And I think that testbeds are fundamental in filling that kind of last stage real world application and adoption

testing, which you can only, it's the stuff that you can't find out on a computer or in a lab or in a factory or at your kitchen table, you know, you have to be doing it for real.

One of the first ones that Rikesh will probably remember that really made it land for me was working on the Olympic Park in London with one of the first fully autonomous buses. So it was a trial. It was all very well controlled, but it was in a real public park with people walking and running around.

And actually what we discovered through running that test was everything worked perfectly. The technology was awesome. The sensors worked really well. The real time responsive, you know, information feeds were all amazing. But the sensors were at just the wrong height to pick up the average height of like an 18-month toddler.

They weren't quite low enough. Like no one got hit. Don't worry. Everything was fine. But my point is you never would have known that unless you were doing rigorous testing in a real world environment with real people with real practical challenges. So there's all sorts of examples like that, that you can only learn through doing, and they're critical to how we move through the whole kind of innovation pathway.

And we see testbeds coming now at lots of different scales. So just within the innovation districts group, for example, we've got the Olympic Park, as I mentioned, in London doing quite a lot. They started doing testing on e scooters before e scooters were even, you know, common. They weren't really allowed or around much.

And the results of that back in 2018, informed work that TFL were then doing and the DFT, so really directly informed guidance and regulation and other policy developments. So that's a very practical example of where testbeds can fit in the whole kind of pathway, if you like. But then also one scale up thinking about what's happening in Bristol Temple Meads, thinking about the innovation station.

So that's a partnership with Connected Place Catapult and Network Rail. Just the amount of intelligent testing that can be happening on everything from ticketing to platform design, to the way that people move and flow around the stations, that's all got to be done in a real world testing environment. And then you can draw on somewhere like Liverpool that actually did a whole citywide test bed for COVID, you know, with the introductions of the vaccines. And that was phenomenal for the city and for the knowledge quarter there in unlocking their capacity to understand the real world dynamics and how people

Respond to different technology or different vaccines or different regulations and controls.

And that's fundamental when we're thinking about the technology and the innovation adoption levels, which is often something that isn't given enough attention. It might work fine, but what's the critical adoption path. And again, real world testbeds are a core part of that.

Ivor:

And building on from that, Rikesh, I know you've got, you know, experience at TfL doing this. I'm keen to hear your thoughts on this, but I think more also just with a Catapult hat on, what does this mean then for the, the scaling and the adoptability of new solutions off the back of a testbed?

Rikesh Shah:

Yeah, sure. And building on some of the things that Emma said, I think the first thing I did, it's a controversial one. I banned accelerators at TfL unless the conditions for success were set out right at the beginning. Far too often we're running R&D experiments that weren't going anywhere. So we had to define why we're doing something up front. So that was number one, because as soon as you do that, that gives you a route to scale because you're thinking about that right from the beginning and building on the e scooter point, yeah, Bird operated in the Olympic Park and suddenly COVID happened and the government announced e scooter trials across the UK and in several weeks and months, we had to create a new set of e scooters in London, which ultimately DOT, TIER and LIME, but before then, you know, what really worried me as, as a person that was responsible for it is will I have to go to the coroner's office and explain why someone's died?

So actually as a public procurer, you've got to make sure you're asking the right questions up front. Because e scooters are great, and you can have lots of fun with them. But what happens if something goes wrong? So, that's where the testbed is critical, because what it allowed us to do is accelerate our learning.

It allowed us to learn that, if it's GPS controlled, what's the level of accuracy? And we got that from the Olympic Park, which allowed us to then accelerate that learning, and move on to the next step.

A couple of other examples around test beds. We took over Brixton high street and turned that into a test bed. And this is an example of public-private collaboration. Bosch approached us and said, we want to invest a few million pounds in London. It was great.

So we gave them a wishlist. And they came up with lots of ideas and part of that wish list was to diversify the ecosystem. So they brought some startups in and we gave them a couple of challenges. One was around air quality. And what the experiment was, if we change traffic signals, so if Brixton station is densely populated, so if traffic can smoothly flow through Brixton station, what impact is that having to the air that people are breathing in?

Bosch bought some world class sensors, which were at height level of a human. And the near quality is quite complicated to measure because you're looking at typology of buildings. You're looking at the types of vehicles that are going by, the weather and lots of other things. So Bosch bought a series of startups in, we've got here maps in, we've got King's college London in and various others.

And by using that test bed, we assess whether that experiment could work. So we held the traffic back. It smoothly flowed through. It reduced exposure to bad air by 20%. We then apply that same model to 1200 traffic signals across London. So you can see with 10, 000 people dying per year in London as a result of respiratory diseases, we're directly having an impact through that experiment at significant scale, and then scaling it across London.

And there are several other examples where we've done this. brought startups in and we've used procurement to do R&D and then sort of contract multi million pound contracts through that same procurement.

Ivor:

I want to pick up on this question of impact because I think this speaks to a lot of the stuff that you guys are doing at Bloom, Amabel, this question of how do we ensure that the needs of Buyers or in this case, public authorities, are at the heart of how we think about this. I'd be keen to just unpack a little bit more about what you guys are doing at Bloom and your Bloom sustained initiative that you launched this week. Tell us a bit more about that. But I'm particularly keen on getting a sense of how we put the needs of the buyer at the, at the heart of all of this.

Amabel Grant:

Sure, absolutely. So I guess, you know, it comes back to those, what's the problem, what's the outcome that we're looking for? But you know, the supply chain in sustainability is still quite immature. Hence the need for testbeds and I think it's really about working with a specialist network of suppliers who are capable of delivering the technical innovation.

And being able to do that in a really agile way, being able to pivot when things don't work as you expected, so that you're able to do something else. And Bloom Sustain is all about bringing together that network of suppliers. It's also about the concept of potentially building consortiums of suppliers. So you won't necessarily have an SME who's able to lead potentially on a program. So if we can get them working with some lead delivery partners to deliver consortiums in this space, then we can really focus on delivering those outcomes. So yeah, we're very excited to launch the product this week.

Emma Frost:

Just picking up on that because I totally agree that's a really important point about consortium kind of matchmaking and de risking by sort of complementing different, uh, strengths and packaging things up so that a buyer can feel confident that there is a very clear delivery route, even if it's a new supplier or a very nascent market.

And that's the other thing, you know, building on what you were saying, Rakesh, The test bed process, as well as that matchmaking service is so important to allow for quicker scaling because actually the process of going to market and then scaling is really hard, especially, you know, as new technologies emerging all the time.

So anything we can do to almost put a bit of a rubber stamp on through using test beds and prototyping projects to show, you know, how it's been applied, how it's been rigorously stress tested to show the learnings of You know, what did go wrong and then what's been changed in response to that. That really helps public sector buyers have the confidence to say, we will try this, even though it feels possibly at the edge of the comfort zone of, you know, what we've used before or what we're really familiar with. And that's a big deal because we're dealing with a lot of trust dynamics here. So de risking is critical.

Rikesh Shah:

Just coming back on that, because I think in the public sector sometimes, you know, when we're reporting upwards, we have a spreadsheet, and everything's got to be green.

Amabel Grant:

Yeah.

Rikesh Shah:

And if we get something wrong, suddenly it's, we've got to explain ourselves. So why is it amber or red? And I think what a testbed gives you is the opportunity to get things wrong. And then you can kill things really quickly because we'll just drag things out. You know, if you know it's not working after two weeks, close it. Whereas what we'll do is try and make it work six years, you know, six months, six years later.

So I think what a testbed says to you is gives you the license to get things wrong, because you're saying it's a controlled environment.

Amabel Grant:

I don't think everything should be green on a project plan. Otherwise, you're not being honest.

Ivor:

That's a very good point. Coming on to this question of scale that you just touched on, Emma, I want to just step back a little bit, because I think there's also Again, from the Catapult's perspective, we're also, we're ultimately about creating new markets. And I'll be keen to hear your thoughts on, you know, how do we ensure that UK PLC more broadly is up for the innovation challenge that we're talking about? And how do, what are some of the tensions that play out at the local level that local leaders need to sort of be mindful of, particularly when they're, you know, whether it's public sector leaders working with industry or vice versa?

Emma Frost:

Yeah, there's a lot in there. So maybe just taking a step back. First of all, I think one of the fundamental questions that we need to ask ourselves is actually what do we see the role of the public sector in doing in stimulating new markets? How much market making should the public sector be doing? And that is a big question, you know, but when these sectors are so emerging the public sector, as we've said, is a big, big buyer. So they have a huge amount of power and it's about how do we use that really strategically? A good example actually is where kind of innovation procurement meets regulation.

I think regulation plays a really important part of that mix. So just thinking about, um, in Denmark. This year in January, they launched new regulation and policy around recycled materials in the construction sector, actually no longer accounting for any carbon credits. So they're carbon neutral. If they're recycled, they're carbon neutral.

So it really simplified the kind of complex algorithms that they'd previously been using. If they're recycled, they don't carry carbon for this. But what that did was actually stimulate the whole circular construction industry. So they've now got. Whole new products in the market that have come about because suddenly the construction industry is really keen to use recycled materials where they weren't before.

So, you know, even things like interchangeable and demountable internal walls, there's a whole new system for how you can now create those. And that's actually pushing Denmark quite far ahead on an international scale and market because of really strong regulations. So I think there's a big place for clear, strong regulation and consistency that is public sector led to help actually stimulate and make the markets, you know, and Mariana Muscatu writes a lot about this really wonderfully on like the role of the state in, in informing kind of market growth and development.

I think there's a lot that we need to play into how we think about innovation procurement even within that and the blend with regulation. It's also really key to. Understand the, the strategies and clear delivery plans that have to flow from that. And as we were just talking about before, building that credible, consistent leadership, particularly the sort of more localized place leadership that enables a collaboration and co design approach to problem solving, because that's what we Innovation procurement should be is problem solving, but you can only get to that stage if you've got the trust, if you've got the relationship building, and that takes really good leadership to be able to create the space and the time and the resource, you know, it's costly to do, but it will save you money or make you money in the long run.

So it's worth investing in upfront. But I think that leadership always has a place dynamic to it, you know, and it's really, you know, key to see that that will have variations, you know, in different places.

Ivor:

Rakesh, do you want to come in on that? I'm just thinking about your time with a leading transport authority.

Rikesh Shah:

Transport for London had a 12 billion a year budget. So it's pretty significant. And we had 600 commercial managers, but the commercial managers were brilliant at us not getting sued or challenged. Right. So they're brilliant at sticking with the status quo. And the challenge I have is surely the role of the commercial managers to be more entrepreneurial.

So actually if challenges do come in, how do we deal with them and manage them? But surely it's about being much more open and transparent about the challenges you're facing. We're responsible for taxpayers money or fair payers money in that case. So as a result, how do we go out early to say, this is our pipeline that's being developed.

And we want to share that with the market and see if the market has some interesting ideas. And that comes from leadership. That means that right at the top level, incentivization of senior leaders paid should be linked to how much value are you creating overall, and not just sticking with the status quo.

Cause what happens is if you get rewarded by sticking with the status quo far too often, in my view. So how do you correct change that culture, which is we've only got finite money. What does best value mean for our organization? And as a result, how can we be more commercial? And then, you know what happens?

The supply chain is excited. Your staff are more excited. Citizens are more excited because they start seeing some innovative things and you start creating better value. But unfortunately we worry about the media. We worry about the politicians. We worry about getting things wrong. And it's just, how do you put those safeguards in place?

So things will get wrong. And in my team, I immediately said that we're going to do 20 things. 18 are going to fail. So immediately you create a culture, which is. Actually, if we get things wrong, let's close it quickly. But the two that will come through will pay for the team and more for the next three, four years.

Ivor:

I know you're at the coalface of working with public bodies a lot on this. And I'm sure with senior leaders, how does this chime with your experience?

Amabel Grant:

Oh, absolutely. And I'll build on what Rakesh has said. So we've got everybody excited. We think we've got a solution. We've certainly got a problem to find and an outcome, then we get funding in place, then we've got to go through a procurement process.

Right, so that can be quite lengthy and protracted and you don't want for everybody to stop, uh, the excitement to go, the momentum to go. And this is where, um, You know, the right kind of procurement in, in the public sector can help because we can do it at pace. We can be agile and we can pivot when we need to, and I think that's absolutely key.

Emma Frost:

Just one example from another conversation yesterday on exactly what you were saying Amabel. So large, uh, well known investor, I won't say who, but you know, really quite far down the line with a project on housing retrofit. So critical, you know, if you think about climate emergency, how can we change housing stock?

So it's, um, more energy efficient and safer to live in. Um, And they can't get the project over the line purely because of procurement issues. They've got the money. They've got the money lined up. They've got the site. They've got everyone willing, as you say. And it's procurement issues. It's the single blocker that's preventing it going live. And I just think that's, that's a good summary of how critical the issue is, but how big the stumbling blocks can be.

Rikesh Shah:

And this is why I think we need to find a way of system, and it sounds like an oxymoron, but systemizing innovation. I remember having conversations with my head of business planning, and when they're allocating money to different parts of the organization, if they're planning to do something in three years time, I'd be having a conversation now to say, please give that bus's person 10 percent less, because we think we can do it better and cheaper by bringing some innovation in.

So suddenly, instead of getting a billion, they might get 800, 900 million, but they're forced to then work with the innovation team. To say, how do I bring that new value in? And then what we would do is bake in the procurement right at the beginning and make sure all the right people around the organization, because when you're a public sector buyer, even if I've got budget.

I have to get sign off from 20 other people. So how do I align all of those people right at the beginning to say, are we all on the same page here and do we care about this? And if so, let's design the procurement now and move forward. And if it doesn't work in terms of the idea, the procurement is the only thing we've wasted time on, but if it is successful, we can then scale.

So I think we need to work back to front a little bit and make sure we get all the conditions of success aligned at the beginning, not at the end.

Amabel Grant:

Well, no, I totally agree. And I think, you know, you innovation, uh, can sound scary and in in in the public sector. But actually, it is also a process. Um, so having those processes aligned, um, is where we'll move fast and get get these outcomes delivered.

Ivor:

Just come back to what you were saying, Rakesh, I think you you're pointing there to the importance of of culture in an organization as much as a regulatory environment or even a policy environment. I want to finish by speaking to that because I'm conscious that later this year, the new public procurement act comes into force.

We are coming into a new policy landscape, which has big implications for public buyers. Tell us a little bit about What that looks like in broad terms, but more specifically, what's IPEC, the Innovation Procurement Empowerment Centre, doing, doing in this space to sort of help, help prepare us for this new world?

Rikesh Shah:

I'm going to do a bit of promo. Please do download this. It's the Art of the Possible report, which is available at ipec.org.uk, which talks very much about the Procurement Act that's going live later this year. And the reason why we've set up IPEC is. Primarily to empower local, regional and central agencies to use procurement as an enabler to bring in new innovation, create new value.

And that's fundamental about doing things cheaper, better, quicker. And what we're trying to do through IPEC is. Firstly, we're trying to empower local authorities to run end to end procurements where innovation is coming in. So I'm delighted to say just this week, we've brought Newham Council, Westminster Council, Derry Council and Bristol City Council on this programme, working on challenges from freight, the adverse impact of freight, air quality, housing retrofitting.

And net zero concrete. And the point there is we're going from end to end. So we're starting with the problem, we're designing procurements, and we're hopefully we'll scout the market and bring some innovators in. So the first thing is about empowerment and we're giving legal support, change management support, design thinking support, and lots of other support.

That's complimenting the local authority to take things themselves. We're not an agency that's just delivering for them. The second part is we're creating new tools. So watch this space. You know, we're creating new tools around demystifying procurement and innovation, you know, what you can, what the rules legally that you can and can't do because far too often procurement

colleagues are trying to protect the organization's interests, but they It's so safe that you can't even talk to the market.

So what can and can't you do? The other area is with the Procurement Act with lots of advocacy going on. We've been trying to convince politicians as to why this is so important and why providing funding to the right people is so critical and then having the right processes in place. And the other area is the community.

IPEC can't do everything itself. So if you're either a seller or you're a public authority, please talk about it because innovation through procurement is happening all the time, but sometimes we get a bit shy talking about it. I talked to places for London about their partnerships with Granger. That's innovation.

Or what Manchester is doing around the B network and contracting bus operators. So my point here is we really want to talk about it. So if you're on LinkedIn, please again, register on IPEC and, uh, talk about some of the case studies that you have. Um, and one yesterday I met with a Qalis fellow. They're working with HS2, they won a contract where HS2 incentivized the tier one suppliers to say, you've got to diversify your ecosystem and not kill your ecosystem by bringing startups in who are solving some of our problems. So there are so many out there and IPEX there to talk about them, but also to provide support.

Ivor:

And I should just add we've got a couple of episodes on in the back catalog of the Connected Places podcast, which looks at what's happening in the world of procurement. And we also showcased the work that we're doing with National Highways and a couple of the SMEs that we're working with on their accelerator program as well.

So do do check that out. There's some interesting episodes there. For me, I just want to say a big thank you to Rakesh Shah, Emma Frost, and Amabel Grant for being on the Connected Places podcast with us, uh, at this live recording at UK Reef. Thanks for coming and great to have you all.

[Long sting]

Ivor:

Well, that's all we have time for in this episode.

But if you're excited about the future of procurement and want to learn more, there are several ways to connect with our Innovation Procurement Empowerment Network, or IPEC, which Rikesh was just talking about.

First, you can follow IPEC on LinkedIn to keep up with all their activities and announcements.

You can also join the IPEC Community on LinkedIn, where you can share insights and connect with other professionals who are passionate about innovative procurement.

And if you have specific questions, or simply wish to get in touch, feel free to email them directly at ipec@cp.catapult.org.uk.

I also want to share the exciting news that IPEC has teamed up with the Startup Ecosystem Stars (SES) to present a special prize at the Public Sector Special Awards 2024 on December 6th in Paris.

The awards recognise excellence in fostering innovation and they are co-organised by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the global open innovation platform Mind the Bridge, along with the OECD and the European Commission, and supported by Microsoft.

IPEC's special award celebrates innovative procurement practices that deliver better, cheaper, and quicker outcomes, fostered through public-private partnerships.

Applications for the SES Awards are open until August 31, 2024. Winning organisations will be invited to the official Award Ceremony at the ICC Global Headquarters in Paris.

Our very own Rikesh Shah will be presenting the awards alongside Alberto Onetti, Chairman of Mind the Bridge.

This is a fantastic opportunity to showcase creativity and boldness in procurement, as well as a great opportunity to be part of a global celebration of excellence.

So if you think you might have a great project or initiative that would make a strong nomination, then all the information you need to apply is in the shownotes to this episode.

Also, if you would like to know more about the Bloom Sustain initiative that Amabel Grant mentioned in this episode, and the work that Bloom does more

broadly with public sector bodies on procurement, then there's more information in the shownotes for that too.

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Theme Music on this episode is by Phill Ward Music

This is Connected Places.

I'm Ivor Wells.

Thanks for listening.