

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

SURFACE TRANSPORT PANEL

**SUBJECT: MINIMISING DISRUPTION FROM ROADWORKS**

**DATE: 19 MAY 2010**

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**1 PURPOSE**

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to update the Panel on the progress being made by TfL to minimise disruption from roadworks. This paper focuses on the actions being taken to plan, coordinate and manage better the large number of roadworks being undertaken across London, and particularly on the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN), in order to minimise delays and disruption to road users, businesses and residents.

**2 BACKGROUND**

2.1 Roadworks are necessary, not only to ensure the provision of essential utility services, but to facilitate much needed development and improvements to the road network, and to ensure it remains in a fit and proper state of repair. However, they also cause significant delay and disruption to the road network and frustration to drivers.

2.2 It is difficult to give an exact figure for the number of roadworks that take place across the capital each year, or the amount by which they have increased or decreased. This is because prior to the introduction of a roadworks permit scheme, under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA), only utility companies were required to notify the relevant Highway Authority of their intention to carry out works. Highway Authorities did not accurately record their own works. A complete record is not therefore available on the central roadworks register (LondonWorks) maintained by TfL.

2.3 In 2009/2010, TfL recorded around 370,000 works across London, carried out by both highway authorities and public utilities. While this is a 20 per cent increase in the number of works recorded on the previous year, this does not mean there were 20 per cent more roadworks; only that reporting of highway authorities' works had improved. There is no indication that the overall number of roadworks has increased. In fact, utilities works have decreased by 0.4 per cent since last year. It would only be possible to give a completely accurate picture of the works taking place in the Capital, if all boroughs implemented the common permit scheme. Given that not all highway authority works are being captured, it is likely that the 370,000 works recorded is still a significant underestimate and that there are well over 500,000 holes dug on London's road network every year, split evenly between Highway Authorities and utilities.

**3 TRAFFIC CONGESTION FROM ROADWORKS**

3.1 London has around 20 per cent of the UK’s traffic congestion. This is estimated to cost the Capital’s economy at least £2 billion a year. In 2009/2010, TfL recorded the main causes of congestion as:

Collisions	28 per cent
Vehicle breakdowns	9 per cent
Highway Authority Works	19 per cent
Utility Works	19 per cent
Special Events	4 per cent
Other issues (e.g. spillages, general volume of traffic etc)	21 per cent

3.2 Roadworks therefore account for 38 per cent of the duration of the most serious and severe disruption across London. A conservative estimate of the total cost of disruption from this work is £752 million.

**4 ROADWORKS ON THE TRANSPORT FOR LONDON ROAD NETWORK (TLRN)**

4.1 The TLRN comprises 580 kilometres (or 5 per cent) of London’s road network. However, it carries around 30 per cent of London’s traffic and, because of the greater proportion of freight and business traffic, this represents an estimated 40 per cent of the gross value added (GVA) of road traffic movement across London. Accurate records of the works undertaken on the TLRN in 2009/10 were captured, as TfL operated a voluntary permit scheme in preparation for its formal introduction on 11 January 2010.

4.2 In 2009/2010, there were 48,247 works undertaken on the TLRN, which accounted for 47 per cent of the duration of serious and severe disruption on the network. The cost of disruption from roadworks alone on the TLRN is at least £300 million per annum. Reducing this is therefore a priority for TfL.

**Planned Works**

4.3 Around 60 per cent of the works undertaken on the TLRN in 2009/2010 were planned, split roughly 50/50 between TfL (including developer related activity) and utility works. They accounted for 27 per cent of the duration of serious and severe disruption recorded on the TLRN over the same period. Of these works:

- (a) Only 2 per cent were major schemes which, while often thought of as the most disruptive, through advance notification and engagement can be well planned and coordinated, and opportunities to combine works explored to minimise disruption as far as possible; and
- (b) The vast majority (52 per cent) were minor schemes. These require a permit application to be made only three days ahead of works commencing. While minor schemes are short in duration, the limited advance notice provides authorities with little opportunity to coordinate works and facilitate the sharing of works sites and traffic management.

## **Unplanned Works**

- 4.4 Around 40 per cent of works undertaken on the TLRN were unplanned works (emergency or urgent), again split fairly evenly between utility and TfL highway authority works. These accounted for 20 per cent of the duration of serious and severe disruption recorded on the TLRN.
- 4.5 Unplanned highway works tend to consist mainly of relatively quick pothole or trip repairs, many of which are on pavements rather than carriageways. Utility companies, on the other hand, tend to have to dig down into carriageways to undertake more time consuming repairs to fix burst water mains and gas leaks and, therefore, cause significantly more disruption. Defects and failures to the gas and water main networks, as well as carriageway and footway potholes, have also been exacerbated recently by the prolonged spell of cold weather.
- 4.6 Over 90 per cent of works on the TLRN (unplanned and minor works) require three days advance notice or less. This clearly demonstrates the difficulties permit authorities have in coordinating activity effectively.

## **5 LONG-TERM DAMAGE TO THE HIGHWAY CAUSED BY UTILITY TRENCHING**

- 5.1 A report by the Transport Research Laboratory (co-funded by TfL) confirmed that utility company reinstatements of excavations, no matter how well patched, result in long-term deterioration of the carriageway, requiring increased maintenance and premature renewal by highway authorities. Highway Authority works, on the other hand, improve the condition of the highway asset, but do not generally damage utility apparatus. It is an ongoing debate within the roadworks industry as to whether utility companies should pay for the cost of the long-term damage they cause to road surfaces, or whether more comprehensive reinstatements should be required for their excavations (e.g. full or half width carriageway reinstatements).

## **6 ACTIONS TO MINIMISE DISRUPTION FROM ROADWORKS**

- 6.1 TfL's overall approach to reducing the impact of roadworks on the road network has been two-fold:
  - (a) to improve cooperation and coordination between highway authorities and utilities to ensure works are coordinated, well planned and all opportunities taken to mitigate disruption; and
  - (b) to develop real incentives for works promoters to apply best practice and reduce the amount of time they spend digging up roads and disrupting traffic.
- 6.2 This approach is reflected in the Mayor's Transport Strategy. The following provides an update on the actions taken thus far, as well as plans to progress the roadworks agenda in the future.

### **Ensuring Best Practice**

- 6.3 TfL's Planned Interventions Team is responsible for inspecting utilities works on the TLRN to ensure that they comply with relevant legislation and standards. They undertake ad hoc sample inspections of works sites but also follow up on

reports or complaints received via third parties. This includes those reported by TfL's front line staff, its contractors, London Bus staff and bus drivers, all of whom are out on the road network providing valuable network intelligence.

- 6.4 In support of the Planned Interventions Team, Red Route Enforcement Officers (Traffic Wardens) are reporting lighting, signing and guarding issues at works sites as well as any period of apparent inactivity by operatives. Images are captured by digital camera and reported to the Planned Interventions Team for investigation and action as necessary. This additional monitoring was initially trialled in eight boroughs but the intention now is to roll it out to the remainder of the TLRN, resulting in over 200 Enforcement Officers checking and reporting on utility roadworks.
- 6.5 The London Buses Communications Centre (Centrecomm) receives reports of incidents and events affecting the operation of the bus network. There are 89 Network Traffic Controllers (NTC) providing a 24/7 response to these incidents, which include roadworks, accidents, burst water mains, assaults, etc. To improve overnight and weekend enforcement, the intention is to provide training and guidance to enable the NTCs to undertake 'out of hours' works inspections to supplement the work of the Planned Interventions Team.
- 6.6 This activity will help increase compliance with regulations and encourage best practice by works promoters to minimise the unnecessary disruption caused by poor practice.

### **The Mayor's Code of Conduct for Roadworks**

- 6.7 The Code of Conduct, introduced in April 2009, brought together TfL and five of the main utility companies (National Grid, BT Openreach, Virgin Media, EDF Energy and Thames Water) undertaking works on London's roads. Signatories agreed to work to ten key principles including: the provision of information boards at works sites; carrying out more work outside peak hours; reducing occasions when works over-run their agreed durations; cooperating with joint working ('workathons'); and considering 'plating' over holes in the road, wherever possible.
- 6.8 Over the last 12 months, the Code has helped to deliver:
  - (a) a doubling of the amount of work that has taken place outside of peak hours;
  - (b) a significant reduction in the number of days of works over-runs; and
  - (c) greater use of plating over excavations to return roads to traffic at peak times (Thames Water alone used over 3.8 kilometres of plating at its work sites last year, keeping roads and pavements open when they would otherwise have to be closed).
- 6.9 There have also been 996 days of disruption saved through joint working. Some notable examples include:
  - (a) Borough High Street, where Thames Water and Southern Gas Networks are jointly using one contractor to lay new gas and water mains. Works by EDF and TfL have also been undertaken simultaneously, cumulatively saving seven months' worth of disruption; and
  - (b) a 72-hour weekend workathon on Commercial Street in August 2009, where 100 different activities were undertaken by TfL and six utility

companies, saving over three months' worth of delays.

- 6.10 On 25 February 2010, TfL, the five existing signatories and Southern Gas Networks Ltd, signed up to a strengthened Code of Conduct which, for the first time, includes specific targets. Almost 95 per cent of the works undertaken on the TLRN are covered by the Code. The Code has been well received and it forms the basis of a National Code of Conduct that the National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) intends to launch on 22 June this year. NJUG hopes the National Code will build upon the success achieved in London and promote best practice and positive change across the country.

### **Expanding the Code of Conduct**

- 6.11 There is an aspiration to expand the Code to include all London boroughs. The Mayor has now written to all borough leaders inviting them to join. Upwards of 25 boroughs have informally indicated their interest in joining the Code. TfL will be progressing this via various forums, including London Councils, London Technical Advisors Group (LoTAG), London Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC) and London Joint Authorities Group (JAG).
- 6.12 TfL will continue to work with signatories to develop the Code further and include additional targets and measures. For example, TfL is keen to introduce a target for signatories to submit permit applications for their minor works at least ten days ahead of the works commencing. This will provide highway authorities with greater opportunities to coordinate and promote joint working and 'workathons', thereby reducing disruption.
- 6.13 TfL is also working with Code of Conduct signatories to develop and deliver a number of 'best practice' workshops, aimed at encouraging works promoters to make better use of innovative working practices to help minimise roadworks disruption. National Grid will be hosting the first such workshop, which has been planned to coincide with the launch of the NJUG Code of Conduct on 22 June and will focus on the use of plating. The workshop will provide attendees (including works promoters, plating manufacturers and permitting officers, etc) with an opportunity to hear how National Grid and others, including Thames Water, have applied the technology, discuss any technical issues, and share experience and lessons learned.
- 6.14 In his letter to borough leaders, the Mayor also indicated his desire to see an increase in the use of 24 hour working to help reduce disruption on London's busiest roads and key strategic assets (e.g. Thames crossings). This is something largely in the purview of borough environmental health officers and, due to the impacts on residents, this is something that sometimes can be difficult to achieve. A balance needs to be found between the economic and social benefits of less traffic disruption and the environmental disbenefits of increased noise pollution for local residents generated by overnight or extended working. The Mayor has suggested that the issue be raised for discussion at the London Councils' Congress in June 2010. In addition, TfL will be attending the next meeting of the Local Authority Noise Action Forum to broach this subject.

### **London Permit Scheme**

- 6.15 A further commitment in the original Code of Conduct was the introduction of a permitting scheme for roadworks. TfL and 18 boroughs have implemented a common roadworks permit scheme, replacing the previous works 'noticing'

arrangements. Permitting means that any organisation (including Highway Authorities themselves) wishing to dig up the roads of these permit authorities, requires a permit to do so.

- 6.16 A further seven boroughs are expected to make applications to the DfT to allow them to implement the London Permit Scheme by January 2011. This will take the total number of London boroughs operating roadworks permit schemes to 25, covering 76 per cent of all roads in the Capital.
- 6.17 A permit scheme enables better coordination of roadworks by giving highway authorities better information about the works that promoters wish to do (thus enabling more joint working). It also gives authorities specific powers to refuse or re-time works to minimise disruption. Since the introduction of its Permit Scheme on 11 January 2010 and up to the end of March, TfL has granted around 12,000 permits and refused almost 1,800 for varying reasons. This alone has helped reduce disruption from poorly planned and coordinated works.
- 6.18 It is a criminal offence to work without a permit or to breach a permit condition. Where a criminal prosecution is taken, the maximum fine available is £5,000 for working without a permit and £2,500 for breaching a permit condition. Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) may also be given under the permit scheme – the maximum charges are £500 for working without a permit and £120 for breaching a permit condition. TfL has given 41 FPNs since 11 January 2010 and up to 31 March - 20 of which for working without a permit.
- 6.19 As well as providing a better opportunity for works to be coordinated, the scheme is also providing a wealth of information on the sort of works being undertaken on the network and how long these should take. This intelligence will be invaluable in future.

### **Reducing the Number of Roadworks**

- 6.20 TfL's Traffic Manager is now able proactively to use the powers provided by the permit scheme to control the number of permits issued and, through this, the volume of activity taking place on the TLRN at any one time.
- 6.21 TfL is aiming to achieve a five per cent reduction in the overall numbers of roadworks, although much higher reductions (up to 25 per cent) are being targeted in levels of peak activity, such as that which occurred in February/March this year and coincided with media criticism. Conversely, during holiday periods, when traffic volumes are lower and network resilience higher, more work will be aimed for. It is hoped that this target can be achieved by increasing the overall amount of joint working between utilities and TfL.
- 6.22 Emergency repairs will not be affected but the number of permits that will be granted for planned works at certain times of year (particularly during the colder winter months) will need to take account of historical increases in unplanned works (i.e. burst water mains and gas leaks).

### **Section 74 Overstay Charge Increase**

- 6.23 TfL has been working closely with the DfT to assist with its proposal to increase significantly the maximum charges that local authorities can impose on works promoters whose works over-run their agreed durations.

6.24 On 1 March 2010, the DfT announced its consultation on proposals to increase the current maximum works over-run charges from £2,500 per day to £25,000 per day. The consultation ends on 25 May. The implementation of any increase could not happen before October 2010. The increase in charges would only apply to traffic sensitive streets. Of the roads on the TLRN, 83 per cent would attract the highest daily charge of £25,000. (TfL currently charges utility companies around £550,000 a year for works over-runs on the TLRN).

### **Lane Rental**

6.25 The ultimate aim is to achieve the introduction of a targeted lane rental scheme, which would see charges applied for the occupation of road space by works promoters at the busiest times, at the most congested locations on the network. This would apply to both utility and highways works and would significantly incentivise shorter durations and better working practices, thereby minimising disruption.

6.26 In order to allow Highway Authorities to introduce a lane rental scheme, the DfT needs to consult formally on and then amend existing legislation. The Department's consultation is scheduled to start in summer 2010, with a view to introducing new regulations in October 2011. TfL has drafted an outline scheme for the DfT's consideration and is working closely with the Department to develop the initiative.

## **7 RECOMMENDATION**

7.1 The Panel is asked to NOTE the report.

## **8 CONTACT**

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