

National Grid Transco plc (NGT)

Streetworks Solution Paper

For consideration by DfT and other key stakeholders

Purpose

NGT recognises that a proportion of its essential works, carried out for the benefit of the community, at times can cause disruption to that community in the form of noise, dust, parking restrictions and traffic delays.

A recent Transport Research Laboratory report quoted in the Highways Agency Business Plan 2002-03 identified the causes of congestion as being:-

- 65% due to traffic volumes;
- 25% due to incidents;
- 10% due to works in the highway (of which about 50% are local authority works, and 50% by utilities).

This paper sets out National Grid Transco's proposals for ways to improve the co-ordination of works carried out by utilities to minimise the impact of these works to the lowest reasonable level. They aim to balance the needs of consumers, residents and road users whether for business, social or domestic or pleasure purposes, set against the background of the statutory requirement of National Grid Transco to maintain efficient, economic and safe gas and electricity networks, including the HSE agreement to adopt an increased rate of replacement of Transco's metallic gas mains.

Background Information

In the UK, National Grid Transco, through Transco, own and operate the vast majority of Britain's natural gas transmission and distribution network, and through National Grid, the high-voltage electricity transmission system for England and Wales.

NGT undertakes streetworks for three reasons – safety, security of supply, and to meet regulatory obligations (customer connections) – and we therefore provide services essential to urban regeneration.

Transco continues to work closely with interested parties, including DfT and TfL to look at ways in which co-ordination can be improved, and we have already provided our programme for major works up to a year ahead.

NGT believes that, with some improvements, the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991 could be made to work more effectively and economically, rather than introducing extra layers of legislation, regulation and bureaucracy. Therefore, the proposals below largely centre on suggestions on how Section 74 could be made more effective.

Proposals

NGT believes that congestion / disruption can be reduced by:

Proposed Solution	Benefits
<p>Improved advance notification, planning and co-ordination – sharing of information by all who undertake road works or streetworks, in a single format, with increased advance notice for all major works (where appropriate);</p> <p>This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High-level Information on streets where major works are expected to take place in the next 5 years to be shared (where possible); 	<p>Local communities, the public, road users and bus users will all benefit from a reduction in the overall number of streetwork days and a reduction in the number of instances when reinstatements have just taken place and an alternative undertaker then digs up the street again;</p> <p>This will result in improved reputations for utilities, and the opportunity for TfL or Local Authorities to demonstrate they are managing a reduction in disruption;</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A rolling 6-month plan of proposals to carry out major works to be submitted; - Confirmation of major works to be provided 3 months prior to commencement; - Proposals for major works to be shared, and consideration given to bringing forward other planned work, where possible, to minimise the risk of breaking up the street on many occasions; - All undertakers to minimise the use of Daily Whereabouts notification and plan more work with a minimum of 7 days notification; - All undertakers to identify the effect on disruption when planning, and diligently look for options to minimise the impact where practical (e.g. alternative routes, techniques used, timing of works etc.); - Highways Authorities to register details of all utility, Highway and other works that affect road space (skips etc.) so that they can easily identify graphically, potential conflicts and act accordingly; - Highway Authorities to share details on their register with adjoining authorities to ensure no consequential impact on their roads; - Government should take the lead in establishing a format to ensure all proposals are submitted consistently, and work with Highway Authorities / HAUCs to require the information to be shared prior to HAUC co-ordination meetings; 	<p>Greater opportunity for co-ordination;</p> <p>Greater opportunity for co-ordination;</p> <p>Holistic approach will enable strategic planning, across Local Authority boundaries where appropriate, and will also minimise the need for utilities to have different administration systems for differing Local Authorities, thus reducing costs for all parties;</p> <p>Reduced disruption to road users;</p> <p>Better information will enable greater planning and co-ordination of works thereby reducing disruption to all;</p> <p>A single format and interpretation of legislation will reduce utilities' and local authority costs negating the need for differing administration systems for different Local Authorities;</p>
<p>Attendance at HAUC / Co-ordination Meetings – to be made mandatory (plus provision by all, of information on major planned works, where appropriate);</p>	<p>Highways Authorities will gain a better understanding of planned utility works;</p> <p>Utilities will gain a better understanding of each other's planned works and that of the Highways Authority – enabling greater co-ordination;</p>
<p>Single Point of Contact at Local Authorities – each local authority to identify a single point of contact for streetworks, with sufficient resources to manage the streetworks programme within their area;</p>	<p>Local Authorities will gain a better overview of works within their area;</p> <p>Utilities will have a one-stop shop who can deal with all their requests in the round, facilitating the opportunity for possible co-ordination with other utilities / Highways Authorities;</p>
<p>Consistent interpretation and application of NRSWA 1991, especially Section 74 - like the Transport Select Committee, NGT would like to see the 2001 Code of Practice refined to give clear guidance on the interpretation of Section 74, and the rest of NRSWA 1991;</p>	<p>Clear understanding by all and minimisation of administration for both Local Authorities and Utilities, associated with disputes over closure notices (and the interpretation of when the street is clear – physically or when the closure notice is sent);</p>

<p>Joint working with other companies – within the framework above, we believe that greater co-ordinated working between utilities and indeed, highway authorities, could be planned, with some work being brought forward, to co-incide with other planned works;</p>	<p>Reduced overall occupation of the highway combined with smaller number of excavations of the road i.e. reduction in the number of instances when one utility or Highway Authority digs up the road, undertakes work, and then reinstates, followed by a second undertaker then coming along a few days/weeks later and digging up the road again;</p>
<p>Electronic sharing of plans and plant information – building on the work carried out by Amtec on the Invest to Save project, develop requirements for an inter utility / Highway Authority database to share plans of known long term works. In addition this should provide a platform for the development of an application to share details of plant;</p>	<p>Sharing of information of both planned works and plant location will ensure improved safety to employees, plant and third parties, and also contribute to the reduction in occupation of the highway due to advance knowledge of the location of plant;</p>
<p>Use of trenchless technology – Transco is a world leader in the application of trenchless technology holding several patents in this area. In undertaking streetworks Transco focuses on the use of minimum dig techniques and trenchless technology wherever practicable and cost-effective. Transco sees this as the way forward, being the most efficient way of working, which should be used by all whenever practicable and cost-effective. We would be happy to set up demonstrations of this technology, if helpful;</p>	<p>Reduces congestion / disruption by minimising excavation of the street. Environmental benefits with reduction in ‘patchwork quilt’ effect;</p>
<p>Independent Traffic Managers – independent overview and co-ordination of works across authority boundaries will allow strategic planning of works. It will be essential however, that any appointees are able to understand the necessity and complexity of work proposed, and be knowledgeable enough to prioritise with other competing works and internal targets to keep traffic flowing. Additionally, the roles, responsibilities and targets of the Traffic Manager /Director should not conflict with the legal and regulatory obligations placed on utilities;</p>	<p>Independent overview of all streetworks (including Highway Authority and other works) across Local Authority boundaries enables strategic planning of works including assessment of the impact of works on the surrounding and further afield streets;</p>
<p>Improved Internal Processes – NGT recognises that there are still some improvements that can be made to its own noticing arrangements to ensure that closure notices are sent as soon as possible after works are completed and works durations are challenging but achievable. Now that Section 74 has been in operation for nearly 18 months, we are currently working to improve these procedures across NGT;</p>	<p>More timely information on closure of works will enable Local Authorities / TfL to better manage traffic flows based on accurate information on road availability;</p> <p>Accurate information will allow both utilities and Local Authorities to focus on minimising the disruption from works, rather than managing the time-consuming and costly administration associated with disputes over overstay charges;</p>
<p>Community Information – For major works Transco provides information to the surrounding community in the form of leaflets and information packs, and as well as the statutory site notices confirming who is responsible for the streetworks, Transco has also provided boarding explaining the purpose, overall duration and timetable for different sections of the works. Prior communication and consultation with affected residents and businesses, and publicity aimed at the wider community is also effective in minimising disruption;</p>	<p>Community consultation and communication enables residents and businesses to understand the need for, and scope of National Grid Transco’s works, and allows NGT to accommodate specific requests where possible and residents or businesses to plan alternative arrangements – this in turn leads to greater acceptance of the works and speedier completion;</p>
<p>Targeted Works – Utilities have limited resources and although we endeavour to complete all works in the shortest possible time, this is not always possible.</p>	<p>Reduction in duration of works and therefore congestion in traffic sensitive streets and surrounding areas;</p>

<p>However, improvements in reducing disruption may be made if resources were firstly prioritised on safety, and then on the impact of disruption. Therefore, in some instances, it may be possible to bolster resources in a particularly sensitive location and complete the works faster, but this may result in longer timescales in less sensitive areas, for which utilities must not be penalised.</p>	
<p>Section 58 Resurfacing Restrictions – If both Highway Authorities and utilities share advance information on major works as above, then the chance of Highway Authorities resurfacing and then utilities digging up the road again, ought to be minimised, and restricted to customer connections and emergencies. NGT believe that this period of restriction could be increased to two years for works that form part of a utility’s annual operating programme. If notification of resurfacing is received two years in advance, it would then be the responsibility of the utility to review its planned major works and consider bringing them forward. In extreme cases, where the utility chooses not to, then before the utility works are formally notified, both parties should meet to consider whether full or half-width reinstatement would be appropriate to maintain the appearance of the road. Customer connections and emergency works should be exempt from this;</p>	<p>Less excavations of the street and greater co-ordination of works thereby reducing congestion and disruption;</p>
<p>Permits – NGT does not support the introduction of a further permit scheme, which will lead to increased administration and cost to both Highway Authorities and utilities. It is acknowledged that utility works are essential, and therefore refusal to commence works would be unlikely. DfT should consider instead, reinforcement of existing powers under Section 56, and gain a commitment from both utilities and Highway Authorities to consider the location of the works, the impact on traffic and the most appropriate timing of works;</p>	<p>Use of existing legislation to effect improvements in congestion and disruption by the consideration of location, impact on and timing, rather than introducing an additional layer of bureaucracy and administrative costs.</p>