



Department
for Transport



March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Following the Government's announcements about controlling the spread of the Covid-19 virus, it is clear that we are now operating in unprecedented times.

As practitioners, we already knew that we faced challenges with the roll out of a number of new permit schemes (PS) and Street Manager (SM) which has been postponed until July 2020, but the issues now posed by the virus have added significant additional layers of complication as to how we continue to keep access to services, the public and the work force safe.

We wrote previously, with the full support of the Department of Transport, JAG (UK) and SWUK to remind all practitioners of the need to continue to work together, collaborate and communicate during the deployment of PS and SM. The need for working together has never been more important than now.

With the rapid escalation of the Covid-19 virus and the significant impact that this is having and going to have on everyone in our industry in terms of administration, on site and field activities, supervision, management etc. and the various support functions, we would again urge everyone to keep the established lines of communication open and all parties informed where difficulties arise.

All of our works are vital in keeping goods, key workers and emergency services moving, deliveries flowing, and safeguarding the provision of utility services to support the NHS, local communities, homes and businesses. Utilities and Highway Authority works promoters will be best placed to assess which of their works are essential to enable a fully functioning network whilst considering the risk to both their workforce and the public and this advice is aimed at supporting and enabling these works.

We also need the public to understand that our staff and contractor teams are working for local authorities, and statutory undertakers to keep both our roads safe and to safeguard our utility services. Everyone working in the highway is performing a critical role for the nation.

To assist with how we should operate responsibly, we have prepared the following advice based on the latest information. Complying with this advice in a consistent



way will help us all through these testing times. We will keep this advice under review and update it as the situation evolves.

This key advice should be followed;

- The Government has made it clear that our roads remain open and they expect works, including emergency and essential street and road works to maintain utility and highway services to continue, ensuring that life-saving medicine, equipment, supplies and healthcare staff can travel across the country to where they are needed most.
- Government advice is, if you can work from home, do so, but if you are working outside then it is important to follow Public Health England guidance on social distancing.
- To ensure that essential works can take place, ask your supply chain to keep operating where possible.
- Plan and communicate well and try and build in resilience should the availability of the workforce be reduced or the supply chain fails at short notice.
- Do not introduce blanket refusals of permits or notices. Other essential street and road works need to take place so continue to process them as usual wherever possible.
- Do not introduce blanket refusals of associated orders such as parking bay suspensions, TTROs etc.
- The highway authority will still need to include national conditions on permits, e.g. work restrictions applied where working in close proximity to a hospital. Utilities should accept reasonable conditions on planning and resilience. Authorities should not introduce any that are not reasonable at the present time e.g. requirement to place heras fencing, netting and matting on all works, or requiring Traffic Sensitive times when there is reduced traffic flow.
- Permits are still needed for works, as well as start and stop notices. Information continues to be needed for network management purposes.
- Early starts should still be used for major works where the network is available (i.e. it is not sensible to block routes to hospitals)
- It is worth repeating this point: act reasonably and communicate.

Enforcement

During this time, a common sense pragmatic approach needs to be applied when reviewing works. Shortfalls that are not safety related should be managed proportionately (e.g. erroneous/no permit info boards). This should also apply for S74s and, where best endeavours are being undertaken, then understanding needs to be given, However, where established requirements are disregarded or abused, promoters may find themselves subject to sanction and redress.



Prioritisation

Although the way in which each highway authority and utility will fulfil its responsibilities will vary depending upon the local circumstances, each will hold as close to a 'business as usual' position as advised by Government (including Regulators) as they can during these challenging times.

However, we recognise that there may be a need to prioritise works to safeguard the delivery of services with depleted resources. Highway and utility depots and offices remain open and work will continue because it has to in order to keep the country going. But should it be necessary to prioritise, the following section provides advice that will be kept under review.

Essential works that should be allowed to continue include the following: Note this list is not exhaustive and works promoters are ultimately best placed to decide what is essential:

- Emergency – immediate & urgent
- Essential Network Rail works (to keep trains running)
- Essential utility work to maintain networks and safety
- Broadband works - network maintenance and fault repairs/customer repairs/network build/increasing network capacity where possible
- Other new supplies to support housing development and Enterprise Zones
- Essential road maintenance & safety improvements
- Essential planned works – microsurfacing and surface dressing as we may lose the window and resources and most need road closures (this will need to be under review as accommodation and resource may become scarce for these migrant teams)
- Critical junction improvements which will increase capacity when the pandemic is over.
- Highway improvement works already in progress
- Other schemes that may lose external funding if not delivered on time
- Works that Gas etc. businesses may/are doing upon instruction from Health and Safety Executive

Examples of works that should be postponed:

Note these are examples and there may be exceptions:

- Non-essential* mains replacements
- Non-essential* infrastructure upgrades whether SU or HA
- Minor routine maintenance schemes

* Non essential means any new work that can be postponed with no immediate impact on supplies, safety or access to services.



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Thank you for reading this letter which has been agreed between the Department of Transport, HAUC England, and HAUC UK. We know you will do your very best to support your colleagues no matter which organisation you represent in these difficult and testing times. The points above should provide a template to keep us all aligned and able to do what we do best keep the public and ourselves safe.

Please also note that the Scottish and Welsh Governments are issuing their own advice. Links will be provided when this is available.

Best Regards

Peter Loft and David Latham

Joint Chairs HAUC England

Agreed by all parties including the DfT, HAUC UK, JAG, Street Works UK and DCMS