

Utility companies welcome delay to London permitting scheme

Utility companies have welcomed the DfT's request for more information from Transport for London and 14 boroughs about their proposed permit schemes for utility works in the capital (*LTT* 3 Oct).

A meeting between the DfT, TfL and the boroughs took place last week to discuss the applications made by the boroughs and TfL to run permit schemes under the Traffic Management Act 2004.

A DfT spokeswoman dismissed reports that the applications had been rejected. "Authorities haven't been turned down, no decision has been made. We've just asked for more information."

London's transport commissioner Peter Hendy told the TfL board meeting at the end of last month that the resubmission was likely to require a more detailed cost-benefit analysis of the proposal. The applicants had hoped to introduce permits in January but TfL has estimated that the extra work could delay approval until 2010.

The National Joint Utilities Group, representing utilities in street works issues, has welcomed the DfT's move. Chief executive Richard Wakelen said: "In NJUG's opinion, the scheme as presented was unable to demonstrate

that there would be any reduction in congestion for the travelling public in London. I hope that TfL will now agree to meet NJUG as the London scheme is revised, to allow us to share our expertise and ensure that London's next submission to Government can be approved."

NJUG director Les Guest told *LTT* that the application on which the boroughs and TfL consulted contained no information on baseline congestion or any method for measuring how the permit scheme could reduce congestion.

Guest also questioned the plans to apply the permit scheme to all roads, saying that new streetworks regulations introduced in April already gave highway authorities more powers over works and obliged utility companies to give three months' notice to major works.

He contrasted London with Kent where the county council had drawn up its permit application in consultation with utilities. The Kent permit scheme would only apply to the traffic-sensitive streets, he said, and discussions

had prompted the council to reduce the cost of some permits. NJUG believes that the additional powers of a permit scheme are only necessary for works on the capital's busiest traffic streets.

It has written to TfL, the boroughs and DfT offering to help devise a permit scheme for London.

<http://www.landor.co.uk/ltxtra/ltpdf/505.pdf>