



NJUG Communications Workshop 30th April 2010

Introduction

Last year the National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) commissioned the independent polling agency ComRes to conduct a survey into the public's opinion of street works. The survey interviewed 1000 British adults by telephone, and the results can be found at <http://www.njug.org.uk/category/3/pageid/73/>

While 85% of people interviewed felt that maintaining utility apparatus was more important than reducing congestion, 45% rated utility companies' communication as "poor" in explaining the steps they are taking to maintain their networks.

As a result, NJUG organised a communications workshop with members and external stakeholders in order to discuss ways that the industry can improve methods of communicating details surrounding its works, both before and during their operation. External parties invited to attend included motoring associations, disability organisations, resident associations, and representatives from pedestrian, cycling, taxi, and bus industries. NJUG was delighted that the majority of those invited were able to attend, however regrettably some road user organisations declined this opportunity. A list of attendees can be found in Appendix A.

The day included a number of breakout sessions focusing on specific areas of communication, as well as several presentations. Further details of these can be found in Appendices B, C, D and E respectively.

Context

NJUG aims to produce a guidance document which will encourage best practice to become standard practice amongst all those who operate in roads. This document will be "live" and regularly updated to ensure that it is of continuing relevance.

The conclusions and recommendations that arose from discussion within the workshop will also be considered during the development of the joint Department for Transport and HAUC UK Good Practice Guide on Communications.

Key outcomes

There were several overarching themes that emerged from the day's discussions, with many important points being highlighted by more than one group. A key theme was the importance of a standardised and consistent approach to the communication of information. It was emphasised that notices must be clear, succinct and contain no technical jargon.

The need to give accurate, timely and regular updates was agreed to be vital. Advance warning was also deemed desirable, in order to give the public as many opportunities as possible to consider revising their route if appropriate. Further consideration must also be given to different groups who will be affected by works, and how best to communicate with them on a more individual basis. It was agreed that opportunities to share information more widely through emerging media outlets ought to be explored.



The different groups also agreed that different approaches may be necessary for works that vary in duration. The potential for a “traffic light” system of communicating information relating to works was discussed, with many feeling that such a system could be useful in transcending normal communication barriers. However various difficulties could arise as a result of introducing such a scheme, which may in themselves lead to confusion.

A summary of each group’s discussion was noted during the course of the workshop, and these can be found in Appendix A.

Recommendations

Many suggestions arising from the workshop will require further consideration to evaluate their individual merits, and their ability to fit together in a cohesive approach to improving the communication of street works information. However, common themes emerging from the group discussions have resulted in several recommendations that NJUG will make to utilities and contractors on communicating information relating to their works.

- Standardisation of signage by all organisations who work in the streets through discussions with the Department for Transport.
- Facts on upcoming works to be communicated through clear, concise, non-technical information at all times
- Relevant website addresses to be included, with these sites providing accurate and timely information, whether the sites are those of the undertaker, contractor or central sites such as Elgin or Morrison Utility Services proposed roadworksinfo website.
- Local radio and variable messaging signs to be utilised wherever possible to give advance and ongoing warning of works.
- Signs to be placed more regularly around works, at earlier junctions to allow road users to detour.
- Customer contact to be maximised, through door-to-door / face-to-face contact and correspondence.
- Letters to local residents/businesses should be marked “Important street works information” on the envelope with the utility / contractors logos, to avoid these being misunderstood as junk mail, and discarded unread

These are inexpensive, straightforward measures which will not jeopardize the safety of either operatives or members of the public. As such they will form part of NJUG’s efforts to encourage best practice to become common practice, by sharing ideas with all those who work in the streets.

Next steps

- An NJUG Group (to be formed) will review the recommendations in more detail and discuss practicalities with relevant parties and test / trial where appropriate before rolling out nationally.
- The group will agree or recommend frameworks and examples for communications / letters etc.
- The group will summarise the suggestions and create an NJUG guidance note for all members
- The group will produce presentations and will share with members at a forthcoming forum
- NJUG will share all outputs with HAUC to encourage consistent practices for all works promoters
- NJUG will share the outputs with DfT for the Department to publish and to Scotland and Wales Govts too.



Conclusion

We would like to extend our gratitude to those who were able to attend the workshop. The wide ranging perspectives of the delegates enabled a lot of valuable ideas to be shared, just as we had hoped.

We would welcome further input relating to the communication of street works information to the public, so please send any ideas you may have to info@njug.org.uk.