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THE SCOTSMAN
Sat 25 Aug 2007

John Goodday: Roadworks commissioner said system of incentives to complete projects early would cut delays and ease motorists' frustration. Picture: Jane Barlow



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Road-digging firms face stick and carrot to finish job on time

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FIRMS digging up the road should "rent" lanes to speed up the job, Scotland's first roadworks commissioner has told The Scotsman.

John Gooday said contractors upgrading roads and laying new pipes and cables would be paid bonuses if they finished early, but fined if the work ended late.

In his first interview since taking up the post in May, Mr Gooday said the system had worked successfully on Scotland's motorways and other trunk roads, which he previously managed.

The proposal was welcomed by motoring groups, but utility firms warned the extra cost would be passed on to consumers.

Mr Gooday said trunk-road contractors were paid £15,000 for each day they completed work early and were fined the same amount for every day they overran agreed finishing dates.

He said: "There is an incentive for a contractor to finish early. This is an area where we could get more speedy results and something I want to encourage as best practice."

Mr Gooday said he also planned to sharpen co-ordination between roadworks contractors and local authorities, which are in charge of all roads except trunk roads in their areas.

This will include a requirement for all roadworks firms to include projects in a Scotland-wide roadworks register.

The commissioner also wants to improve planning on roadworks, with better signage, barriers and space for pedestrians.

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He said: "Tidy sites tend to move forward with pace and have good-quality reinstatement of the street at the end of the work."

Mr Gooday said a particular bugbear of motorists was roadworks which caused disruption although no work appeared to be going on.

He called for contractors to use a multi-skilled workforce to eliminate gaps between stages of the work.

He said: "There are roadworks where someone digs the hole, someone else does the repair and another person backfills the hole. The planning in some cases is not as good as it could have been."

The Scottish Executive's Transport Scotland agency, for which Mr Gooday was previously national network manager for roads, said the lane-rental system on trunk roads worked well.

Examples included month-long roadworks on the M90 near Perth being completed in half that time, and reconstruction of the M8 in Glasgow last year finishing two weeks early.

A spokesman for the agency said: "Transport Scotland and its operating companies build in lane rental to the tendering process for schemes on the trunk-road network to minimise the disruption to traffic caused by the essential maintenance programme.

"While it cannot guarantee that roadworks do not run over their specified duration, it does provide an incentive for the contractor to do everything possible to return the road to traffic in a timely manner."

Neil Greig, the director of the Institute of Advanced Motorists' Motoring Trust in Scotland, said renting lanes was the only way to ensure roadworks were completed sooner than expected.

He said: "This sounds like good news. From drivers' point of view, for utility firms to pay to open up roads and pay more if things overrun is the only way of focusing minds to ensure they do things as quickly as possible.

"There are still far too many examples where roadworks are set up and nothing happens, with lanes coned off simply to protect a set of temporary traffic lights."

But the National Joint Utilities Group of power and telecommunications firms involved in roadworks warned that customers would suffer.

A spokesman said: "A blanket application of a daily charge will simply increase costs to utility companies, and hence utility customers.

"The results of the lane-rentals trials conducted in England were inconclusive as to whether there were any benefits over and above those gained from existing regulations.

"Members of the National Joint Utilities Group are committed to a partnership approach with roads authorities and each other to minimise disruption and make maximum use of minimum dig technology. The results of these activities should be assessed before introducing any such unnecessary levies."

DRIVERS FACE FRESH CRACKDOWN ON MOBILES

POLICE forces across Scotland are to launch a fresh crackdown on drivers who use mobile phones on the move.

The announcement came as three of the biggest forces - Strathclyde, Tayside and Lothian and Borders - revealed that more than 5,000 people had been caught since the law came in.

Tayside Chief Constable John Vine, in charge of road-policing for the Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland, said: "It's been six months since this legislation was implemented to drive home the message that it is not only foolish to use a hand-held phone while driving, but highly dangerous to do anything that detracts from a driver's ability to maintain proper control of the vehicle.

"That's long enough for Scottish motorists to adjust their driving habits to comply with the new legislation."

Last updated: 25-Aug-07 01:13 BST