

## STREET WORKS

# Enthusiasm for permit schemes grows

More 'powerful tool' is seen as better option to curb utilities – **By Lee Baker**

Local highway authorities across England are considering setting up permit schemes, seen by some as a more powerful tool for co-ordinating street works than the alternative noticing system.

The assumption has been that councils would wait for Transport for London and the boroughs to launch a London-wide permit scheme before deciding whether to run the more resource-intensive system.

But Graham Eaton, the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee's co-secretary, said: 'Highway authorities are looking at all the options. Do we want to stick with notices, or go down the route of permits?'

Councils in the East of England and West Midlands are considering common permit schemes for their regions, agreeing standards and region-wide rules, such as which roads are covered.

The regulations to introduce the new noticing system will come into force next April, and the intention is that permit scheme powers will also be in place in 2008/09.

Transport for London and the boroughs want to introduce their permit scheme as soon as possible.

There is considerable political pressure on them after mayor, Ken Livingstone, blamed utility companies for a rise in journey time delays in the congestion charge zone.

But highway authorities covering rural areas are also considering introducing permits, requiring utilities and council highway teams to apply to undertake works, and having to complete them within a certain time.

Dave Capon, Suffolk County Council street works manager, told *Surveyor*: 'Permits are a powerful tool, giving more certainty over timescales. They are resource-hungry, but at least we get some of our costs covered.'

The East of England is poised to make a regional application for common permit rules stretching from Southend in Essex to the Norfolk coast.

But the utility firms were fighting on this week, hoping to influence the Commons' vote on the permit regulations, which need MPs' approval. The National Joint Utility Group believes the Government's regulatory impact assessment does not justify the greater costs of permit schemes over noticing.