NJUG

NJUG statement on Sadiq Khan announcement – 30th July

Les Guest, Chief Executive of NJUG:

NJUG is pleased to welcome Government's approval of Kent County Council's permit scheme. We have worked very closely with Kent over the last year to ensure that the proposal is workable, fair and efficient at addressing its aim – the reduction of congestion. We are particularly pleased that it focuses on works on the busiest streets, therefore allowing utilities to prioritise those jobs which have the largest impact on congestion, whilst allowing flexibility to work economically on other works as demanded by our regulators and customers.

NJUG also welcomes the commitment from Government to introduce compulsory reassessments for street works operatives every five years. This recently looked unlikely to occur. However NJUG, along with our local authority partners, urged Government to commit to five yearly reassessments, as essential to ensuring safe working and we are very pleased to see Government have agreed to implement the scheme. This initiative will ensure that those working in the street are kept up to date with innovative technology developments and that safety and quality of works remain of the highest priority.

Finally, NJUG agrees with the Government's intention to hold a summit later this year to examine how essential street works could be better executed to reduce the unfortunate disruption that can sometimes occur. Only through such communication can all parties truly understand the collective and joint challenges we face and take into account all the factors involved. As part of this process NJUG will be holding a communications workshop with representatives of all road users as part of its commitment to improve communication with the public. By building on all these many joint initiatives already in place we can work together to develop further practical and cost-effective solutions that balance the needs of the public and businesses, who all rely on utility services.

There have also been comments in today's press on street works regulation. NJUG believes that since coming into force, overstay charges have proven themselves to be a very effective incentive for utilities to work efficiently, resulting in a step-change in the reduction of the duration of works. In April 2009, revisions by Government increased the daily charge further and we believe that the levels of these charges are more than adequate to act as an incentive, but that sufficient time has not yet passed in order to judge whether a further increase is necessary or would have any additional effect. NJUG is concerned that some authorities may see overstay charges as an opportunity to boost revenue rather than ensuring works are carried out efficiently, safely and to a high quality. There has also been reference to Lane Rental (a daily charge payable by utilities from the start of the works). Government will be aware that a trial took place in 2001 that did not demonstrate any substantial benefits. Indeed, if Lane Rental is introduced, regardless of how efficiently utilities undertake works their baseline costs will increase, resulting in increases to consumer bills.

Whilst utilities continue to do much to improve the safety and quality or works, whilst seeking to reduce disruption where possible, we must remember that the existing regulations do not apply to works carried out by authorities and their contractors (which make up 50% of the works in a street). Therefore, to ensure that the UK does see a real improvement, similar incentives should be applied to everyone else who works in the street.

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Notes to Editors

For further information about the National Joint Utilities Group please go to www.njug.org.uk. To arrange an interview please contact the NJUG press office at pressoffice@njug.org.uk or telephone 020 7340 8737.

About The National Joint Utility Group (NJUG)

NJUG is the only UK industry association representing utilities and their contractors on street works issues.

Our full members include the Energy Networks Association (representing electricity and gas companies), Water UK (representing water companies), National Grid, Openreach, and Virgin Media. Our Associate Members are Clancy Docwra, Skanska McNicholas, Balfour Beatty, Morrison, Morgan Est, NACAP, PJ Keary, First Intervention, Carillion, Enterprise, Laing O'Rourke and AMEC. Including members through trade associations, NJUG represents thirty-seven utility companies.

NJUG is the utility arm of the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee representing street works in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales known as HAUC (UK). Please see http://www.hauc-uk.org.uk/ for further information.

NJUG's focus is on promoting best practice, safety, quality and co-ordination of works as well as representing utilities in discussions with Government and other stakeholders on street work issues.

Street works are essential activities carried out by electricity, water, gas and communications utilities to maintain, enhance, extend, renew and repair their networks.

Utilities undertake street works for four primary reasons – safety, security of supply, to connect or upgrade customers' supplies, or to divert apparatus to facilitate major transport or urban regeneration projects. Examples include Crossrail, the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, tram projects, or new urban and housing developments.

NJUG and its members recognise the need to improve working practices, and as a result are currently working on a number of initiatives. These include:

- Sharing of potential works up to twelve months in advance;
- Improving communications to motorists, pedestrians, residents and local businesses;
- Plating works where safe to do so to restore the highway for use during busy periods;
- Extensive use of minimum dig technology resulting in severe cuts to the duration of works;
- Implementing a voluntary 'Codes of Conduct' in London and working on a similar protocol in Birmingham;
- Developing permit scheme proposals around the UK, for example in London and Yorkshire, in addition to Kent.

These and many more initiatives are included in the **NJUG Good Practice case studies** available to download from our website: www.njug.org.uk.