

NJUG response to Conservative Party call for lane rental - 22/04/10

[Quotes can be attributed to Les Guest, Chief Executive Officer, NJUG Ltd.]

NJUG understands the concerns around the unfortunate disruption that essential street works sometimes cause and are already actively working with central and local government and the London Mayor to reduce the impact of our works on the UK's roads.

However the volume of works is not going to decrease because utilities are:

- Required to and are investing billions of pounds each year to deliver safe and secure energy, water and communications services;
- Connecting new supplies at the request of customers; and
- Supporting large projects around the UK and in the Capital, such as Crossrail and the Olympics.

Equally, local authorities' are also undertaking similar volumes of work for major resurfacing and traffic management programmes. Therefore we must all work together to co-ordinate works better wherever safe and practical to do so.

Lane Rental is one of many potential solutions to improve disruption and is being actively considered by the main political parties. This would introduce an additional daily charge for every day of occupation of the street regardless of efficiencies or inefficiencies. NJUG has been in discussions with the Mayor's office and the Department for Transport to understand how Lane Rental could improve congestion, and believes that if it is to be introduced, it should focus only on strategic roads.

NJUG believes that any scheme should:

- Be designed to incentivise utilities and highway authorities to work outside peak hours on key, strategic routes or encourage the use of innovative techniques such as plating which, where safe and practical to do so, can temporarily restore the road to use during the day. Charges should only be applied if road space is reduced at peak times.
- Be trialled only on Transport for London's strategic road network to ensure that it allows prioritisation of resources and therefore would deliver the additional benefits;
- Must apply to both utility and highway works in the street; and
- Balance the benefits of reduced disruption against the cost to utility consumers and council tax payers.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in the development and delivery of a trial as well as assessing existing measures, and in the meantime continue to work hard at reducing the impact of our essential works wherever possible.

Whilst Lane Rental is one option, the Mayor's London Code of Conduct has already delivered real benefits on TfL routes by major utilities and TfL working together, better. NJUG believes that all London Borough's should adopt the Code and is looking to share this good practice as a National Code of Conduct.

As the number of works are unlikely to reduce, we must continue to work together to minimise the impact and co-ordinate better than we currently do. This also has proven benefits as demonstrated by the London Workathons, and initiatives to share plans of major works years in advance which encourages and allows more joint occupation.

-ends-

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 and waste water companies), National Grid, Openreach, and Virgin Media. Our Associate Members are Clancy Docwra, Skanska Utilities, Balfour Beatty, Morrison Utility Services, Morgan Est, NACAP, PJ Keary, First Intervention, Carillion, Enterprise, Laing O'Rourke, AMEC and SQS. Including members through trade associations, NJUG represents thirty-nine utility companies and thirteen utility contractors.

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.

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.

Ongoing Solutions

London Code of Conduct – was agreed between the Mayor of London and the major utilities working in London, commencing in April 2009. It has delivered real benefits in its first year including increased use of innovative techniques such as plating to bring roads back into use, out of hours working and greater co-ordination of works.

Indeed, NJUG is so pleased with the improvements the London Code has delivered in its first year that we are now looking to implement a National Code of Conduct across the UK, based on its principles.

Workathons – TfL have led very successful "Workathons" taking advantage of road closures to bring together many organisations to undertake short-term works at one time.

Minimum-Dig Techniques – reduce both the duration and size of works and are widely used by utilities.