

15 May 2020

Covid-19 Road and Street works Bulletin 001.2

Dear Colleagues,

Following the Government's recent updates about controlling the spread of the Covid-19 virus as the country moves slowly back to a 'new normal', it is clear that we continue to operate in unprecedented times where we need to be agile in our approach to work on street activities and still keep both the work force and public safe.

We wrote previously, with the full support of the Department of Transport, JAG (UK) and SWUK to remind all practitioners of the need to continue to work together, collaborate and communicate during the deployment of new permit schemes (PS) and Street Manager (SM). The need for working together has never been more important than now.

The Government's advice in England has now changed and new measures are slowly being put in place, including a request for the construction sector to return to work where it is possible and safe to do so. The government's guidance can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work>

As we move into the next phase of our response to the Covid-19 virus and we slowly and steadily restart activities, we urge everyone to continue keeping the established lines of communication open and all parties informed where difficulties arise. We know that the last few months have had a significant impact on everyone in our industry in terms of administration, on-site and field activities, supervision, management etc, and we need to continue supporting each other in the positive ways we have seen in recent weeks.

All of our works continue to be vital in keeping goods, key workers and emergency services moving, deliveries flowing, and safeguarding the provision of utility services to support the NHS, local communities, homes and businesses. The message from the Government has also now changed to one where all works should be actively encouraged to take place, where this is possible and safe to do so.

There continues to be a need for the public to understand that our staff and contractor teams are working for local authorities, and statutory undertakers to keep both our roads safe and to safeguard our utility services. Everyone working in the highway is performing a critical role for the nation.

To assist with how we should operate responsibly, we have prepared the following advice based on the latest information. Complying with this advice in a consistent way will help us all through these testing times. We will keep this advice under review and update it as the situation evolves.

This key advice should be followed;

- It is essential that our roads remain open and that works to maintain utility and highway services to continue as well as efforts to restore matters to as near as normal as soon as possible. This is necessary to ensure that life-saving medicine, equipment, supplies and healthcare staff can travel across the country to where they are needed most, and the services that business, homes, and health care need to operate, are maintained and available.
- Government advice is, if you can work from home, do so, but if you are working outside then it is important to follow Public Health England guidance on social distancing. Anyone who can't work from home, for instance those in construction or manufacturing, should be actively encouraged to go to work.
- To ensure that works can take place, ask your supply chain to keep operating and reopen where possible.
- Plan and communicate well and try and build in resilience should there be setbacks in availability of the workforce or the supply chain.
- Street and road works need to take place so please continue to process permits or notices as usual wherever possible.
- The highway authority will continue to include national conditions on permits, e.g. work restrictions applied where working in close proximity to a hospital. Utilities should accept reasonable conditions on planning and resilience. Authorities should not introduce any that are not reasonable at the present time e.g. requirement to place heras fencing, netting and matting on all works, or applying rigorously Traffic Sensitive times when there is reduced traffic flow.
- Early starts should continue to be used for major works where the network is available (i.e. it is not sensible to block routes to hospitals)
- Please continue acting reasonably and communicating.

Enforcement

During this time, a common sense pragmatic approach needs to be applied when reviewing works. Shortfalls that are not safety related should be managed proportionately (e.g. erroneous/no permit info boards). This should also apply for S74s and, where best endeavors are being undertaken, then understanding needs to be given. However, where established requirements are disregarded or abused, promoters may find themselves subject to sanction and redress.

Coordination

Although the way in which each highway authority and utility will fulfil its responsibilities will vary depending upon the local circumstances, each will be following the Governments advice to return as close to a 'business as usual' as possible.

To help coordinate works and to support works promoters, it will also be helpful to consider the following advice:

- Give as much notice as possible of works that need to be carried out and the likely timing, using Street Manager from 1 July. Forward plans or major works can even be put on Street Manager now.
- Consider opportunities for joint working or sharing permits. For example, if works are being carried out by the highway authority to reallocate road space to put active travel measures in place or to carry out maintenance works, allow utilities the opportunity to consider a joint work and to deal with any outstanding works they may have before the highway work.
- Do not just rely on the quarterly coordination meetings. Arrange more regular meetings with works promoters to support coordination activity and joint works.
- Use permits (see bulletin ?) to allow more flexibility in terms of working hours etc.

Thank you for reading this letter and the subsequent bulletins which have been agreed between the Department of Transport, HAUC England, and HAUC UK. We know you continue to do your very best to support your colleagues no matter which organisation you represent in these difficult and testing times.

Please also note that the Scottish, Northern Ireland, and Welsh Governments are issuing their own advice. Links will be provided when this is available.

Best Regards

Peter Loft and David Latham

Joint Chairs HAUC England

Agreed by all parties including the DfT, HAUC UK, JAG, Street Works UK and DCMS