



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Street Works team
Department for Transport
3rd Floor Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

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11 March 2024

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I write in response to the 'Street works: fines and lane rental surplus funds' consultation. Too many residents face unnecessary daily delays and disruption due to street works which is having an increasingly serious negative impact on our communities.

In response to a recent survey of residents, 90% of respondents stated they had regularly faced delay and disruption from local road and street works. 69% have experience delays getting to work. 35% have been delayed getting their children to school. 22% have missed or been late for medical appointment due to the disruption. And 20% state their business or income has been negatively affected.

This issue is affecting jobs, education, access to healthcare and the broader economy, and more action is needed. While I support the proposals for extra measures and strengthened enforcement, I believe the plans could go further. I would welcome:

- Stronger financial penalties for poorly managed or poor quality street works.
- Expansion of enforcement powers to also consider disruption caused due to inaction or long-term underinvestment in utilities infrastructure.
- Allowing overrun charges to apply at weekends and bank holidays.
- Reform of highways funding to reflect road usage, so we have adequate funds to meet road maintenance and repair needs.
- Mandatory co-ordination and consideration of the cumulative effect of street works, road works, and diversion routes.
- Serious consideration of changes to ensure no licenses for non-essential street works could be granted in the vicinity of diversion routes.

I set out below my detailed response to each of the proposals and suggestions for further enhancements to reduce the disruption and delay so many residents are facing.

I believe we can further improve the situation and reduce the delays and disruptions on our roads by clamping down on bad practices by utility companies, improving planning and co-ordination of works, and ensuring effective information sharing. I would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss my concerns and proposals set out in this response.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Ben Spencer MP
Runnymede and Weybridge

Street works: fines and lane rental surplus funds' consultation Response from Dr Ben Spencer MP

Why does this issue need to be addressed?

Connectivity is vital for vibrant communities. Runnymede and Weybridge is a fantastic place to live, work and run a business, but one of the biggest challenges we face is the impact of disruption to our transport networks, affecting our ability to engage with others. With a growing population, pressure on services and infrastructure continues to grow, and is seen most clearly with the pressure and congestion on our roads.

Road works (carried out by the highways authority) and street works (conducted by utility companies) are necessary. Managing them effectively to minimise delay and disruption is essential. This is even more important in Runnymede and Weybridge where, due to our proximity to the UK's busiest motorways and major A roads, we often also experience additional traffic through our towns and villages from diversion routes. As highlighted above, this has resulted in 90% of respondents stating they have been directly affected by delays and disruptions on our roads.

While new measures and processes in recent years have helped, there are still far too many instances of poorly managed or co-ordinated works which cause unnecessary delays and disruption.

In 2020 I was pleased to support Surrey County Council in their successful bid to introduce a lane rental scheme to encourage utility companies to undertake works outside peak hours. At the time 42,000 road works were carried out on Surrey's roads in an average year. Yet despite being an early adopter of this scheme and its successful implementation, this has not delivered the scale of improvements needed.

I therefore fully support the introduction of further measures to address highways disruption. In particular I wish to see enforcement and penalties against utility companies causing delays or damage to our roads, and requirements for improved co-ordination and communication between companies and authorities, so works and journeys can be planned in advance.

Consultation proposals

- *"Requiring at least 50% of any surplus lane rental funds to be spent on repairing potholes".*

While I support the concept of additional funds from lane rental schemes and enforcement penalties being used for highways improvements, given the scale of the issues we face this will not be sufficient to make a material difference in outcomes.

As the consultation highlights, there were 2.2 million street and road works carried out in England in 2022 to 2023 costing the economy around £4 billion. Yet this economic impact is not evenly distributed across the country. Runnymede was recently ranked the most economically competitive borough in the country outside of London. Surrey is also one of the most economically successful areas of the UK, contributing more to the exchequer than it receives. While a great local success, this also means the impact of disruption is proportionately greater.

When combined with the high volumes of traffic, made worse by vehicles trying to avoid the expanded ULEZ zone, and greater wear and tear on our roads, street works cause a greater level of disruption and a have proportionately higher cost in terms of their economic impact.

Surrey County Council has been campaigning for years for this to be addressed, asking for the Government to review the current highways funding model. This allocated funds based

on miles of road within a local authority area, but fails to take into account usage.

This means Surrey would receive the same funding as Norfolk for 1000 miles of road, despite huge differences in traffic volumes and the impact this has on wear and tear and damage to our roads. This is not sustainable and needs to be addressed. When surveyed, this campaign was supported by 99% of local residents who are fed up with constant issues of potholes and small or temporary repairs. Reformed funding would enable more resurfacing and long term investment to improve our roads and I urge the Government to consider an urgent change to current highways funding.

- *“raising the level of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) that can be issued for 5 street works offences”*

Residents often tell me of their frustration over being stuck in traffic only to find the street works unmanned and repair works carried out to a poor standard. I would welcome further resource to ensure all works could be inspected, and stronger enforcement powers and penalties for utility companies that don't complete works on time and to a high standard. 77% of local residents surveyed also supported increasing financial penalties for unattended, overrunning works or poor repairs by utility companies.

However the enforcement system also needs to address broader considerations, such as when a lack of long term investment by utility companies is a cause of multiple, urgent works. Utility companies must be held to account for the disruption they cause. While urgent works will be required, in addition to higher penalties there also needs to be more scrutiny over whether more could have been done to prevent the emergency, and the resulting disruption.

For example, one stretch of major A road in my constituency has experienced 12 separate street works by the same utility company due to water leaks since September 2015. In less than ten years residents have faced 12 periods of disruption on this road by just one company, and the road structure has been dug up and damaged 12 times, weakening it and making potholes and future damage more likely.

I believe where the same issue reoccurs, there is a reasonable expectation that the utility company is aware of the risk of further disruption they be required to act to prevent further disruption. Failure to do so should be met with escalating financial penalties to incentivise investment in long term solutions.

- *“allowing overrun charges to apply at weekends and bank holidays”*

I fully support this proposal. Utility companies should manage projects effectively and minimise disruption caused every day of the week.

Additional improvements

In addition to the measures proposed, I would also urge the Government to make further improvements in the following areas:

- Planning and co-ordination of works

This consultation focuses on rules for street works carried out by utility companies. Yet it cannot be viewed in isolation, as it is the cumulative effect of street works, road works, and diversion routes that often causes the greatest disruption. Examples of this can be seen across the constituency, including most recently works carried out in Weybridge, Addlestone and New Haw, despite local diversion routes from major works on the A3, and the closure of the nearby A245 for 4 weeks. The presence of local street works during this period caused complete gridlock on numerous occasions, with short local journeys often taking over an

hour.

This is not an isolated incident. Improved co-ordination could have considered rescheduling non-essential works until after the major works were completed. Such considerations should be mandatory. This was the single greatest concern amongst residents responding to my survey, with 88% calling for greater co-ordination to minimise local disruption.

- Diversion routes

The impact of street works is magnified by the frequent diversion routes in place throughout the constituency particularly from the M25, M3 and A3 due to the volumes of traffic directed through our towns and villages. This situation will only get worse this year, with the first ever full weekend closure of the M25.

Our local roads are not designed to cope with these high volumes of traffic, nor the number of HGVs we will see. 4 in 5 residents state motorway diversions routes are the cause of significant disruption. We know from experience that the diversion routes set out by National Highways will become overwhelmed, and many motorists will look for alternative routes, travelling through highly populated residential areas.

This alone would cause huge disruption on our roads, but the addition of road and street works on an already stressed road network can lead to gridlock. In cases of major planned disruption, I would welcome serious consideration of changes to ensure no licenses for non-essential street works could be granted in the vicinity of diversion routes. This additional co-ordination and planning could have a material impact on reducing the disruption caused by diversion routes.

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There have been some real improvements in efforts to manage and minimise disruption from street works in recent years, most notably in the introduction of the Street Manager digital service which provides real-time data on live and planned works. This has transformed communications, enabling residents access to accurate data about their area. However further work is needed to bring meaningful change for residents.

By clamping down on bad practices by utility companies, ensuring sufficient funding for highways maintenance and repairs, improving planning and co-ordination of works, and ensuring effective information sharing I believe we can achieve this.