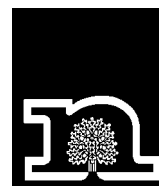


# Report

Nottinghamshire  
County Council



Meeting **COUNTY COUNCIL**

date **Thursday, 31 July 2003**

agenda item number

## **REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

**PERIOD: JUNE 2003 – JULY 2003**

### **1. Adoption of Policy for the Use of Interactive Road Signs**

The County Council has been testing interactive (vehicle-activated) signs on County Roads and has placed a moratorium on further installations of signs whilst their effectiveness is reviewed.

Cutting the number of deaths and serious injuries to children is a key target in the County Council's Strategic Plan. The Department for Transport has similarly set stringent targets. Speed is a significant factor in many road accidents and the use of the vehicle-activated signs in trials in Nottinghamshire and other counties, has shown that they are effective in reducing speeds.

Now that the effectiveness has been proved I have lifted the moratorium and approved a policy that sets clear criteria for installation. These criteria will ensure that the signs are only installed where most effective, and the authority avoids a proliferation of such signs, which would be counter-effective.

The formulation of a policy for their use is a requirement of the Road Safety Service Plan, and the new policy will give us an additional option when responding to network problems.

It will also provide for the use of temporary signs at sites, which do not fulfil the criteria for permanent signs or speed cameras.

## **2. Policy for Planned Highway Structural Maintenance in 2003/2004**

I have approved the Policy for Planned Highway Structural Maintenance of roads and footpaths, along with the appropriate condition assessment survey techniques.

The Best Value Performance Indicators put us in the bottom quartile of authorities for the condition of the principal 'A' road network. However, the condition of this type of road is improving year on year and the percentage of the network requiring close monitoring has reduced by a third over the last two years. By the end of 2003/4 a total of £25.6million will have been invested in the principal 'A' road network over the last three years. This will have gone a considerable way towards removing 80% of the backlog of work on these roads by 2005 which is one of the targets in the Strategic Plan. However, funding for structural maintenance via the LTP has been reduced and if this trend continues the target may not be met. The Government's target of removing the backlog on 'A' roads by 2010, however, should still be achieved at current funding levels.

On the non-principal road network there is still a backlog of repairs of £50.0m and in 2003/4 a countywide budget of only £3.8million is available. Clearly there needs to be a significant sustained increase in investment if the Government's target is to be met.

The policy for this financial year is to produce a programme of works that will give a road/footpath split in budget in the ratio 70/30, which represents an increase of approximately £350k in revenue budget for footpath repairs, compared to previous years. This is in addition to increases of £200k for the same purpose from the revenue budget agreed as part of the Budget for 2003/4. This re-prioritisation has been introduced to address increased Member and public concern and complaints over the condition of the footpaths.

### **3. Bridge Maintenance and Investment Strategy 2004/5 to 2009/10**

I have approved the bridge maintenance policy for the next five years as follows:

- a) Principal inspections for all bridges and culverts be undertaken at intervals not exceeding 10 years
- b) Present backlog of general bridge repairs be fully addressed within 10 years
- c) All concrete bridges with no or failed waterproofing be re-waterproofed within 6 years
- d) Balanced 6 year programme of parapet protection and replacement be undertaken, based on an individual risk assessment of each location
- e) Balanced programme of road over rail protection works be undertaken, recognising genuine safety concerns on the one hand but setting them in the context of other more serious road and rail safety issues on the other.

European legislation has required that since 1 January 1999 most structures must be capable of carrying European 40 tonne HGVs. The programme of bridge strengthening works to meet this requirement is now drawing to a close and will be completed in Greater Nottingham by 2004 and in North Nottinghamshire by 2005. Most of the 16 bridges left under strength have permanent structural weight limits in place and do not cause any undue inconvenience to the travelling public.

### **4. Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – Implications for the Highway Authority**

The Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled persons and the final phase of the Act (Part III) relating to service providers comes into force on 1 October 2004. This is the part of the Act that will impact on the County Council as a provider of highway infrastructure.

Advice from the Head of Legal Services suggests that the County Council as Highway Authority may not, in the strictest sense, be classed as a 'service provider' as the service is provided to the community as a whole, rather than to any one particular person. However, we are working on the assumption that all elements of the service need to adhere to the Act.

To comply with the requirements of the Act it is necessary to assess all areas of highway service provision and programme 'reasonable' measures to identify obstacles and remedy them. It would be unreasonable to expect all of the highway infrastructure to be fully accessible by October 2004 as the cost for corrective work to crossings, signs, bus stops etc would run into millions. It would also be impossible for the Council to focus all its resources on this issue to the detriment of other issues such as road safety and its statutory duty of care through highway maintenance.

On balance, therefore, I have concluded that all new build or highway improvement and maintenance schemes be designed to provide access for all highway users as far as is practicable. Furthermore plans would be put in place to ensure that pedestrian crossings and bus stops, etc are also compliant with the provisions of the legislation.

## **5. The New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA)**

The Department for Transport (DfT) is consulting on a revised Code of Practice for Co-ordination of Street Works and Works for Road Purposes and Related Matters. This code forms an essential part of the secondary legislation under NRSWA.

For some time the Government has expressed concern about the level of disruption that is caused to all road users from all types of works on the highway. This resulted in the introduction of penalty charges in April 2001 for Utilities who did not complete their works on the highway on time. There was also a pilot in some authorities where Utilities paid a lane rental charge. Despite these changes, there is a belief that disruption levels have not been significantly improved.

The Government is now drafting a Bill to revise the NRSWA to give local authorities additional powers. In the meantime, the revised Code of Practice makes changes that will help local authorities achieve more effective co-ordination. I have approved the Authority's response that welcomes the revised Code. We have made particular comments on changes to the designation of streets, safeguarding of new highway works, powers to control the timings of Utilities works, enhanced Street Works Register and the inclusion of the Authority's own highway works in the Noticing Procedures.

## **6. Capital & Revenue Final Accounts 2002/03**

I am pleased to report that through sound financial management in my portfolio an excellent out-turn has been achieved. Whilst there were some over/under-spending areas, overall my portfolio was slightly overspent on the revenue budget - £62,000, (0.1% on a budget of £52.6m), with a Capital Programme overspend of £1.3m (4.0% on a budget of £32.0m).

This has meant that despite many competing demands on the services, all the revenue and capital programmes have been completed as planned.

Councillor Terry Butler  
Cabinet Member for Environment