

Information Briefing

Report From:

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To:

Economy, Skills and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Summary:

M6 J6 / A38(M) Closures – Consultation and Communications

This briefing provides information on the current programme of works and closures affecting M6 Junction 6 and the A38(M) Aston Expressway, including associated consultation and communications activity.

Birmingham Connected

Birmingham Connected is the umbrella for all transport planning activity across the city. It is directly linked to the strategies and policies of the Birmingham Development Plan (BDP), which sets out our strategy for jobs and growth, meeting housing needs and sustainable progress. Investing in a radically improved integrated transport system will realise the city's potential to support sustainable economic growth, job creation and linking communities.

Delivering this vision means investment in our transport infrastructure. At present, Birmingham is experiencing an unprecedented level of activity on its transport network as a result of investment in infrastructure improvement combined with large-scale redevelopment. We can expect this level of activity to continue over at least the next five years. The sheer scale and range of works programmes makes impacts on some journeys inevitable. As highway authority, the Council has a responsibility to the travelling public to minimise disruption. Co-ordinating work programmes, collaborating with partner organisations and learning from what we have already done are essential factors in rising to this challenge.

Over the short term, there is a need to deliver communications and engagement that will help the city to carry on moving and working while a raft of major structural changes is delivered. Additionally, short term mode switches to mitigate temporary disruption carry the potential to act as catalysts for lasting transport behaviour change. Over the longer term to support the delivery of the Birmingham Connected Transport Strategy, there is a need to win the hearts and minds of Birmingham's travelling public and stakeholders, supporting a shift of preferred ways of travel away from single occupancy private cars to more sustainable, equitable modes.

It is imperative that communication on major projects that have highway impacts takes place at a strategic rather than individual project level to avoid it appearing uncoordinated and to ensure the inclusion of appropriate messaging regarding Birmingham Connected and the promotion of sustainable modes. As part of this work, the Council has established Birmingham Connected's webpages, email updates and social media as a useful source of relevant information. This has resulted in successful communications campaigns around developments such as Paradise Circus and major events such as Super September.

Highways England (HE) Works

The works currently taking place on M6 J6 and A38(M) are a continuation of the works commenced in 2015 and are part of an ongoing programme of essential maintenance. This is a proactive programme to protect the road for the next 20 years and seek to avoid the need for unplanned maintenance which could cause much greater disruption. The works were paused in September 2015 to accommodate a number of events followed by the Christmas retail period. They resumed in June 2016 are programmed to be completed by Christmas 2016. The programme has been designed to minimise disruption to the travelling public. Full road closures will take place

overnight and during weekends in the summer holidays when there is significantly less traffic. Diversions will be in place, but drivers are being asked to consider switching to public transport where possible.

HE describes this work in phases (NB Phase 1 refers to the work that took place before September 2015) as follows:

- Phase 2 – closures of the tidal lane on the A38(M); narrow lanes on the A38(M) out of city and 30mph speed limits in operation; closure of the on slip at Park Circus; and no access to M6 (J6 – northbound and southbound) from Salford Circus – this came into effect on Monday 27th June;
- Phase 3 – out of city carriageway on the A38(M) reduced to two lanes; and night-time closures into and out of city – this will come into effect on Friday 22nd July for six weeks;
- Phase 4 – Full closures of A38(M) and M6 J6 from 8pm Friday to 6am Monday on four out of the seven school summer holiday weekends (from Friday 22nd July to Monday 5th September) – as work is weather dependent the exact weekends are to be confirmed on a rolling weekly basis; and
- From Monday 5th September, restrictions will revert to Phase 2 operation as detailed above, until December according to the current programme.

A number of suggested alternative routes will be signed for the duration of the works and the Variable Message Signs (VMS) on the motorway network will be used to “warn and inform” in real time according to conditions. Access for “blue light emergencies” through the works will be retained at all times. Bus priority measure along diversion routes (e.g. Lichfield Road) will be retained to ensure efficient bus operation in the light of potential additional traffic flows.

HE Communications Strategy

As the scheme promoter, HE is leading on the communications planning and delivery for these works. Council officers have had significant input to the HE communications plan including providing information on target audiences, stakeholder contacts, messaging (particularly to ensure public transport, walking and cycling are included as alternatives) and communications channels. The Council is making full use of the channels at its disposal to disseminate information regarding these works as detailed further below. The approach recommended by officers builds on successful past and current campaigns delivered through Birmingham Connected and lessons learnt from the A38 tunnel closure schemes.

Measures outlined in the HE comms plan are as follows (information correct as of 13th July):

- Early / informal engagement with key stakeholders including emergency services, NEC, football clubs, Transport for West Midlands, bus and train companies, Chamber of Commerce and Business Improvement Districts (BID);
- An initial meeting with Retail BID took place to ensure city centre retailers were on board with the proposed approach, and this has influenced some of the messaging in the communications (the “Birmingham is open for business” message);
- Letters to MPs and Councillors;
- Letters and leaflets to local businesses and residents;
- Banners in key locations e.g. shopping centres, rail stations etc.;
- Leaflet to share with partner organisations to distribute through their own channels;
- Diversion maps;
- Information provided to event/venue websites including inserts to be forwarded to ticket buyers;
- Social media – this includes BCC’s own channels and those operated by partner organisations including BIDs and the Chamber; and
- Press release and subsequent coverage when the information was made public in June – plus further media briefings as required.

In terms of the weekend closures, an initial decision will be taken by 4pm every Thursday as to whether full closures will be in place over that weekend. This decision will be confirmed at noon on Friday. It will be necessary to communicate quickly once the decision has been made and as such a protocol for dissemination of information will be in place. Updating website information, media, social media and partner communication channels will be critical to delivering this. This protocol will also include responding to emergency situations in

order to quickly and efficiently communicate to emergency services and the travelling public should there be unforeseen issues or incidents with network impact.

Additional Birmingham City Council Communications

In addition to supporting the development of the communications strategy, the Council is utilising established channels at its disposal to inform the public and stakeholders about the works, and will continue to do so throughout. This includes:

- Information on the Birmingham Connected webpages;
- Regular information on Birmingham Connected twitter and corporate social media accounts as applicable;
- Inclusion in Birmingham Bulletins;
- Inclusion in Birmingham Connected e-briefing (which goes to around 1,000 key stakeholders and elected members, many of whom further disseminate via their own channels);
- A digital advertising campaign which includes the Pinpoint digital platform to send messages to people in the most impacted areas of the city; and
- A potential radio advertising campaign (subject to budget considerations) which would include short adverts supported by “presenter plugs” on Friday afternoons/evenings and Saturday mornings for the 7 week period covering potential weekend closures, jointly funded by the council and HE.

In addition to information about the works and potential traffic impacts, the Council’s communications messaging will heavily promote the use of sustainable modes as alternatives to the car for the duration of the works. This will include signposting to existing weekend/family ticketing offers available from TfWM and National Express. As well as providing appropriate mitigation during the works by transferring some trips to public transport, encouraging people to try alternative options is a step in a longer term transport behaviour change process.

Way Forward / Points for Discussion

There are a number of elements of the communications plan that will need to be further developed over the coming weeks. As the programme is dynamic, the plan will need to be under constant review in order to be responsive to any changes or issues as they occur. Lessons learnt from these works will continue to inform the planning and communications for other schemes as they come forward.

The committee is asked to consider:

- Endorsing the role of the council in coordinating activity across partners to ensure consistency in information and messaging across all communications channels;
- Supporting a multi-agency approach which has the flexibility to disseminate information to the travelling public accurately and swiftly;
- A recommendation to monitor the level of impact upon the travelling public taking all actions necessary to maintain the position that Birmingham is open for business; and
- A recommendation to conduct a review of the efficacy of the communications and engagement programme in September – following the weekend closures and in advance of the Christmas retail period.

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