

# CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT – 21 OCTOBER 2010

## ADDENDA

### 2. Questions from County Councillors

Councillor Jean Fooks

As the Cabinet Member for Transport knows, the recent gas board works at the junction of Banbury Road with Marston Ferry Road and Moreton Road caused huge delays to traffic on all four arms. This resulted in many people in cars, vans, lorries and buses being held up for very long periods, sometimes for over an hour, and contributed to a doubling of the number of Cherwell School pupils being late for school during a two-week period compared to two weeks before the work was done. Could he assure the people of Oxfordshire, many of whom were caught up in this congestion, that lessons have been learnt to avoid a repetition of such traffic chaos when future works at this and other similarly critical junctions are planned?

Reply from Councillor Rodney Rose, Cabinet Member for Transport

The Gas Board works at the junction of Banbury Road with Marston Ferry Road and Moreton Road had been known to the County Council for many months. It was discussed at the coordination meetings held by Oxfordshire County Council with representatives of all utilities companies and its programme and progress also monitored at separate meetings between County's Streetworks Team and Southern Gas Networks (SGN). SGN worked closely also with County's Traffic Signals team at the planning stage and even carried out a trial run of the traffic management for the works at this junction. This simulation exercise did not produce any unexpectedly high congestion and delay results.

The road users were advised of the forthcoming work by warning signs on site, the roadwork's notices and through web sites. There was information distributed by SGN to local residents fronting Banbury Road. Frequent travel advice was also broadcasted on Radio Oxford in their traffic bulletins.

Overall timing of the work was not easy. Bearing in mind the extent and location of the work County's Streetworks Team considered having it carried out during school holidays, however other works in Oxford (near Park Town and St. Giles as well as on Woodstock Road) were already planned for and around that period this summer meaning that it would not have been sensible to put this additional burden on the highway network. Furthermore, the extensive nature of the project

made it impossible to complete the work at all the sensitive junctions during non sensitive hours.

It is worth noting that while the County Council can apply the statutory powers to minimise disruption caused by utility works, the utility companies in turn also have statutory powers and duties allowing them to carry out their works.

The initial programme proposed by SGN indicated duration of 5 weeks. However, through close collaboration with the County and by working a 13 hour day 6 days a week SGN managed to complete the work in 4 weeks.

I am confident that County's Streetworks Team has worked very closely and effectively with the SGN and used all its powers to minimise the overall impact of this necessary work before and during the actual construction. It is worth noting that the same team managed to speed up other SGN work last year coordinating it with the County's environmental improvement project in Summertown and therefore minimising the overall disruption to all road users and local communities.

It will be seen from the above information that we have learnt from all past operations, and that the recent works along the Banbury Road benefited from the knowledge of all our staff. It is fantastic that the project was completed well ahead of schedule. The traffic problems would have been far worse had we not had this expertise. The Area Stewards now in place will have a big part to play in maintaining this efficiency in future. I will be looking at the plans for the coming works on the Woodstock Road on both desktop and in the field, but am happy this will be little more than a briefing exercise for me. Like yourself, I am determined that Oxford will remain a "World Class" City, but that you will agree with me that this also demands "World Class" utilities to the residents who live in the City. A project of this size and complexity can never be completed without some disruption to our daily lives.

Councillor David Turner

At recent Parish Council meetings in Waterstock and Tiddington I have been quizzed on the following:

Please advise

- (a) Why has the resurfacing work on the A40 at Wheatley taken so long to complete, given that on several days the highway has had restricted access causing long traffic queues and there were very few if any workers evident?

- (b) Whilst the new surface is much quieter and this is very welcome, the quality of the work is very poor with ridges between areas of the surface. Will remedial work be undertaken?
- (c) How are Oxfordshire County Council engaged in providing noise barriers on the M40 in Oxfordshire between junctions 5 & 8 in support of the M40 Chilterns Environmental Group and Wycombe District Council?

Reply from Councillor Rodney Rose, Cabinet Member for Transport

- (a) The original publicised works programme (8 weeks) has been exceeded by 4 weeks. Works included waterproofing of the bridge decks and with this operation there is always the risk of repairs to the concrete beneath being required. When concrete repairs become necessary a 7 day curing period is required before the waterproofing can be applied. Whilst some float in the overall programme was built in for the risk of this occurring, more repairs of this type occurred than anticipated. This accounts for approximately 2 weeks of the additional time it has taken to complete the works. Whilst the curing process was taking place the lane has to remain closed to traffic and at times, particularly with lane 2 (the central lane) there were not always other activities being carried out. Hence the minimal staff attendance on site.

In addition there have been difficulties with material supplies and also the availability of sub-contractors as a result of the original programme being extended. Our Term Contractor has advised that this accounts for a further 2 weeks delay.

There will be works carried out overnight on Thursday 21 October (9pm to 6am) at the A418 junction when the slip-road will be closed. Following that lining and signing works should be completed by the end of that week subject to sub-contractor availability and weather conditions. The road will then be opened up again until a date is agreed for a further daytime off-peak nearside lane closure for general tidying up of the verge areas.

- (b) The surfacing works in lane 1 (nearside lane) comprised planing out and replacement of a 40mm depth of surfacing material to remove rutting defects. A thin surfacing system of 25mm depth was then overlaid on top of this on lane 1 and also on top of the existing surface of lane 2 (the central lane). Due to the thin layer being applied the scope for ironing out existing features within the carriageway has been minimal, particularly with the transverse working joints. If the joints between the working areas exceed the tolerances for acceptance these will be identified on completion. Should remedial works be required

they would be carried out after the winter period with minimum lengths of 50 metres recommended.

- (c) We have in the past made financial contributions to Chilterns Environmental Group for the assessment of measures.

Councillor John Sanders

Item 6 – Bicester Residents Parking Scheme – Minor Amendments

"Can the Cabinet Member for Transport explain why he thinks the increased costs of the parking permits for residents in these 140 properties of between 100% and 165% (as and when civil enforcement is introduced) is justifiable?"

Reply from Councillor Rodney Rose, Cabinet Member for Transport

I regret that my answer is very similar to the one I gave to Councillor Sanders at Cabinet earlier this week on a similar issue. Due to the awful mess we are left in by the last Labour Government, every one of these schemes must "wash its own face". The only place I could take any subsidy from would be Highway Maintenance, and this I am not prepared to do.

The residents' parking scheme in Bicester covers a very small area and therefore there are no economies of scale as there are with larger schemes. Cherwell District Council has to bear the cost of administering and maintaining the issue of permits and, as and when Civil Parking Enforcement is introduced in the district, there will be a cost to enforcing the residents' parking bays. The reduced rate in place until Civil Parking Enforcement is introduced is in recognition of the fact that enforcement will be limited to the resources that the Community Support Officers may be able to provide.