



SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Cabinet Highways Committee Report

10

Report of: Executive Director, Place

Date: 11th November 2010

Subject: Traffic Network Blockages

Author of Report: Peter Bull - 0114 273 6174

Summary:

This report proposes measures to address the problems caused when large vehicles, particularly buses, break down or are involved in accidents in locations where it is difficult for other traffic to pass them. The Council will call a "Network Blockages Summit Meeting" of interested parties to determine the way forward, and will propose a combination of initiatives including:

- a review of operators' recovery arrangements;
 - pre-planned diversions and contingency arrangements implemented by Council staff and transport operators;
 - identification of "pinch points";
 - alterations to existing infrastructure;
 - revised guidelines for street design.
-

Reasons for Recommendations:

Blockages of the highway network when large vehicles breakdown or are involved in accidents inconvenience travellers and adversely affect the local economy.

As part of its network management duty the Council can make improvements to the management of the network, changes to existing infrastructure and alterations to the design of new infrastructure to reduce these negative effects.

Recommendations:

A Network Blockages Summit Meeting is called by the Council.

Council staff work with transport operators and other interested parties to identify pinch points and develop diversion plans, contingency arrangements and infrastructure changes to reduce the impact of breakdowns and collisions.

Any changes proposed as a result of recommendation 7.2 that cannot be funded from the existing Transport & Highways Revenue Budget be considered as part of the capital programme funded by the Local Transport Plan starting in April 2011.

Future infrastructure designs should include consideration of, and mitigation against, details which could lead to blockages of the highway by large vehicles.

Background Papers: N/A

Category of Report: OPEN

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
YES Cleared by: Liam Gilligan
Legal Implications
YES Cleared by: Julian Ward
Equality of Opportunity Implications
YES Cleared by: Ian Oldershaw
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
YES
Human rights Implications
NO
Environmental and Sustainability implications
YES
Economic impact
YES
Community safety implications
YES
Human resources implications
YES
Property implications
NO
Area(s) affected
ALL
Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Leader
Cllr Ian Auckland
Relevant Scrutiny Committee if decision called in
Culture Economy & Sustainability
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
NO
Press release
NO

1 SUMMARY

1.1 This report proposes measures to address the problems caused when large vehicles, particularly buses, break down or are involved in accidents in locations where it is difficult for other traffic to pass them. The Council will call a “Network Blockages Summit Meeting” of interested parties to determine the way forward, and will propose a combination of initiatives including:

- a review of operators’ recovery arrangements;
- pre-planned diversions and contingency arrangements implemented by Council staff and transport operators;
- identification of “pinch points”;
- alterations to existing infrastructure;
- revised guidelines for street design.

2 WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PEOPLE OF SHEFFIELD

2.1 The initiative will reduce the impact of incidents caused by breakdowns and collisions on the busiest and most important traffic routes in the City. This will reduce delays and congestion for residents and businesses in Sheffield. It will support the Corporate Plan priorities of “Reducing Congestion”, “Reducing Carbon footprint”, “Safer Roads”, “Streets to be proud of” and “A modern and efficient organisation”.

3 OUTCOME AND SUSTAINABILITY

3.1 The initiative will reduce delays to traffic and public transport passengers, and will reduce levels of congestion and carbon emissions and improve air quality. It will reduce costs for businesses moving people and goods in the city.

4 REPORT

4.1 In recent incidents in central Sheffield broken-down buses have caused disruption to road users and particularly to public transport passengers. As a result the Cabinet Member for Business, Transport and Skills, requested an investigation into measures to address such problems, in particular locations in the highway network where carriageways have been narrowed to improve the pedestrian environment, but the remaining width is insufficient for traffic to pass a broken-down vehicle.

4.2 The Government introduced the Traffic Management Act (TMA) in October 2004, with the intention of tackling road congestion by changing the way in which local traffic authorities carry out their duties. The Act gave new powers and imposed a duty to keep roads clear and traffic moving. The Act contains a specific duty on local traffic authorities to manage their road networks with a view to “... *securing the expeditious movement of traffic* ...” In relation to this ‘Network Management Duty’ the Act requires local traffic authorities to make, “... *such arrangements as they consider appropriate for planning and carrying out the action to be taken* ...”.

4.3 When a bus, or other large vehicle, breaks down or is involved in an accident, it is the responsibility of the operator to arrange recovery. Recovery of modern vehicles can be a complex operation requiring

special equipment. Almost all operators now make use of specialist recovery firms to carry out this work, usually after attempting to move the vehicle using their own engineering staff. The availability of this special equipment can be limited if it is already being used in a recovery operation elsewhere, so that on occasion recovery could take several hours. The Police do have powers to recover vehicles themselves in these circumstances, but they make use of the same recovery firms, and are subject to the same restrictions in availability.

- 4.4 When large vehicles break down in locations which cause congestion to the main highway network the Council's traffic control staff liaise with operators and the Police to ensure that recovery has been arranged, and where necessary use the traffic control system to help the recovery vehicle reach the location as quickly as possible. They also use the system to change signal timings to mitigate the effects of the obstruction and provide information to the public through variable message signs and traffic alerts, which are distributed using the internet, mobile telephones and by radio broadcasters. However, maintaining communications in these circumstances can be difficult, particularly when the road is not covered by a traffic camera. It is clear that improvements in management of breakdowns and collisions could be achieved.
- 4.5 Transport and Highways Service staff have begun to address the problem and have identified a number of "pinch points" where blockages could occur. Some alterations to infrastructure have been suggested, such as allowing turns at locations where they are normally prohibited, and the consequences of the required changes have been considered. Longer term measures such as changes to street design guidelines to prevent pinch points being built-in to new infrastructure have also been suggested. The alterations currently being built at Moorhead, for example, will be amended to allow temporary diversions when normal routes are blocked.
- 4.6 It is recognised that the best way to further address these issues and secure improvements to network management is to work in collaboration with all those who have interests in the movement of large vehicles in the City. It is proposed that the Cabinet Member for Business, Transport & Skills invite stakeholders to a "Network Blockages Summit Meeting" hosted by the Council. Invitations would be sent to public transport operators, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, South Yorkshire Police, the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry Transport Committee, local representatives of the road haulage and vehicle recovery industries, city centre businesses, the two Universities, the Motorists Forum and officers from relevant services within the Council.
- 4.7 The issues to be considered at the Summit will include:
 - a review of operators' recovery arrangements;
 - pre-planned diversions and contingency arrangements implemented by Council staff and transport operators;
 - identification of "pinch points";
 - review of traffic camera monitoring locations;
 - alterations to existing infrastructure;
 - revised guidelines for street design.

4.8 Some of the options to be considered will require people to implement temporary changes on street, such as removing bollards and opening up diversion signs. The Police are highly unlikely to be able to carry out the work, but it is essential that it is done as quickly as possible for the diversions to be effective. It is suggested that Council staff who are already out and about in the city, such as City Centre Ambassadors and Parking Services staff, could be trained to implement diversions. Discussions are in progress with South Yorkshire Police about the potential of training Council staff to direct traffic around blockages. Transport operators may also be able to carry out some of this work.

4.9 **Financial Implications**

Outline proposals for preparation of diversion plans and alterations to existing infrastructure can be prepared by Transport and Highways Service staff within the existing Revenue budget. However, the detailed design and implementation of any proposals will require more substantial funding. It is suggested that such schemes should be considered as part of the programme of works to be completed in the next financial year, funded from the next Local Transport Plan, which begins in April 2011.

4.10 **Equalities Implications**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and concludes that the proposal will be of benefit to all, regardless of age, race, disability, sex, religion, sexual orientation, etc. No negative impacts were identified.

5 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

5.1 The number of occasions on which major disruption is caused by breakdowns and collisions are few, but the impact can be significant. If no action is taken it would be possible to tolerate the effects because the impact on the local economy is also comparatively limited. However, most of the measures suggested in this report do not require major resources to achieve a worthwhile improvement in the way that the Council discharges its duties under the Traffic Management Act.

5.2 It would be possible for the Council to arrange for a heavy recovery vehicle to be available on standby close to the city centre, so that large vehicles could be moved with only a small delay. However, the cost of such provision would be very high – the recovery arrangements during a critical period of the recent road works on Furnival Gate cost approximately £9,000 per week. The measures suggested in this report would cost considerably less, and should be evaluated before such a proposal is considered.

6 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Blockages of the highway network when large vehicles breakdown or are involved in accidents inconvenience travellers and adversely affect the local economy.

6.2 As part of its network management duty the Council can make improvements to the management of the network, changes to existing infrastructure and alterations to the design of new infrastructure to reduce these negative effects.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 A Network Blockages Summit Meeting is called by the Council.
- 7.2 Council staff work with transport operators and other interested parties to identify pinch points and develop diversion plans, contingency arrangements and infrastructure changes to reduce the impact of breakdowns and collisions.
- 7.3 Any changes proposed as a result of recommendation 7.2 that cannot be funded from the existing Transport & Highways Revenue Budget be considered as part of the capital programme funded by the Local Transport Plan starting in April 2011.
- 7.4 Future infrastructure designs should include consideration of, and mitigation against, details which could lead to blockages of the highway by large vehicles.

Simon Green
Executive Director, Place

21st October 2010