

INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT SELECT COMMITTEE
16 September 2020

5. Public Question Time.

No questions received.

6. Local Member Issues / Member Questions

Question 1 from Cllr Mick Castle

In 2014 David Cameron pledged £300 million for the A47 but as yet nothing has been delivered by Highways England. In my Division the Vauxhall Roundabout scheme has been delayed until after the opening of the new 3rd River Crossing even though the bridge has no bearing on the flow of traffic in and out of Yarmouth. Precious little had been done by way of modelling the Vauxhall Roundabout before that announcement.

Does the Chairman agree with me that the new Vauxhall Roundabout must be designed to accommodate the extra carriageway for the dualling of the A47 Acle Straight and give appropriate access arrangements for the Vauxhall Holiday Park?

Response by the Chairman:

The county council has been working closely with Highways England to ensure delivery of an improvement at Vauxhall Roundabout. Highways England commissioned the county council to carry out study work using the Great Yarmouth traffic models. This identified that, due to the impact of the Third River Crossing, the original Highways England scheme at Vauxhall roundabout was no longer suitable, so a different improvement scheme is required.

The county council continued to work collaboratively with Highways England and, in the course of the last few days has reached agreement that we (Norfolk County Council) will develop the most appropriate scheme, building on our previous work. To this end Highways England and Norfolk County Council are now in discussion regarding the various stages of this work which will be carried out over the next 18 months. The first stage, which is a report documenting the problems at Vauxhall, is now underway. The scheme development work will of necessity ensure the improvement at Vauxhall is compatible with a dualled Acle Straight as this is a key priority for the local authorities and the A47 Alliance.

Question 2 from Cllr Mick Castle

I was elected to the County Council in a By-Election in September 1988 and over those 32 years the dualling of the A47 Acle Straight has been a key priority for this Council. Highways England have studiously obstructed any progress on this - suggesting an impractical widening scheme,

alternative signage and "cats eyes" and speed limits etc - and has wasted several years on investigations into some rare species of snail as a delaying tactic.

Does the Chairman agree with me that the County Council should press ahead with its own Desk Top Study to identify the optimum alignments for the new carriageway and help force the hand of the Highways Agency?

Response:

This is the responsibility of Highways England. It is a piece of work that HE will need to do regardless, at an appropriate time if and when Acle Straight makes it onto government's trunk road programme. I do not think that such an exercise would force Highways England's hand since it is a matter for government to decide which schemes are included on the trunk road programme. Norfolk County Council's staff team are pushing the economic and community case for improvements via the A47 Alliance.

Local Member Issue from Cllr Barry Stone.

Following on from the last Infrastructure and Development Select Committee meeting regarding the item relating to the review of highways contractor's performance it has been reported to me that several complaints had been made about Norse.

Specifically:

1. Contractors failing to remove 10 mph warning signs left after surface dressing had been completed, often for months on end;
2. Failure to indicate where 'Road Ahead Closed' signs refer to, often miles ahead leading to uncertainty for motorists as to whether they can partially travel down the road or not. A specific example has been from the roundabout at Ditchingham on the A143 indicating that the road to Norwich is closed ahead. Having travelled up to the Hempnall turnoff with no closure motorists are left wondering where it is actually closed;
3. Continued failure to start programmed repairs on time. The footpath repairs at Ellingham/Broome are a specific example.

It would appear that a more robust weekly review should be undertaken looking at a table of jobs timetabled with projected start and finish dates and reason why these have not been started or completed on time if relevant.

Response:

1. Officers are aware of the issue concerning the failure to remove temporary warning signs following "spray injection patching" at some locations. Following site inspections, it was confirmed that removal of the temporary plastic signs at some locations had been missed. This matter has been raised with Norse Highways to ensure that the subcontractors improve their performance. In addition, this matter has been raised with the Highways Area teams who will closely monitor performance..

Tarmac undertake surface dressing work on a much larger scale within the county and also erect temporary warning signs. These are more typically steel signs mounted in frames. Tarmac's performance is monitored throughout the surface dressing season and temporary

warning signs are required to be removed before the site is handed back to the Council 14 days after completion.

2. Diversion signs are erected in accordance with the Traffic Sign Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD). The diversion sign layout usually includes advance warning to drivers indicating where the point of closure is. With regard to the recent road closure relating to the Poringland resurfacing scheme, advance warning signs were positioned at Ditchingham Roundabout A143 (and at other locations) to advise motorists they cannot access Norwich on B1332 through Poringland.
3. Norse Highway's service delivery and performance is monitored and managed at a series of meetings, including weekly operational programme meetings, monthly governance meetings, and quarterly management board meetings.

Typically, over 30,000 routine maintenance works orders are issued each year. In this financial year, Norse have completed 88.6% of general highway repairs on time, against a target of 85%.

Norse are aware of the footpath works at Ellingham and Broome. Cutting work was completed on Ellingham BR5 & Broome BR15 on 11th September 2020. The new steel steps for Ellingham FP3 are currently being manufactured and will be installed as soon as they are delivered. It is acknowledged that this work has been outstanding for quite some time and changes are being made to the weekly meetings to ensure these types of work are monitored more closely in future.