

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM MOBILITY AND ACCESS COMMITTEE SCOTLAND

Given the remit of MACS (Mobility and Access Committee Scotland), our submission on our views on roads maintenance is taken from an accessibility perspective.

Access around or through roadworks

For many disabled people, roadworks in or around their residences can be a considerable barrier to routes to the local shops, leisure facilities or other amenities and can lead to isolation for the duration of the roadworks. A poll (not a representative sample) by Disability Equality Scotland in 2018 found that 95% of disabled people had encountered problems with roadworks.¹

This is further exacerbated when the guidance in the Redbook has not been followed and the roadworks become little more than a barrier to the door-to-door journey.

On the face of it this may not seem like a big issue but for disabled people it is extremely worrying, frustrating and could lead to a quick and dramatic reduction in a person's quality of life, because of the barriers that have appeared, often out of the blue. This is, therefore, a very serious issue that must be rectified sooner rather than later.

In addressing this problem it is important that any and all potential solutions are found in coproduction with disabled people and Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) in order to create a workable site for the highway workers, while at the same time removing the roadwork barriers for disabled people.

The Redbook (Safety at Street Works and Road Works)

At present failure to comply with the Redbook it's not a criminal offence in Scotland. However, MACS is pleased to see that there is an intention within the new Transport (Scotland) Bill to bring the Redbook into line with England and Wales, where failure to follow the Redbook is a criminal offence.

The Redbook details how access must be created around or through roadworks and therefore reduces the risk of isolation for disabled people.

A weak link at present is inspection. Very few roadworks are inspected while they are taking place, and this means that these problems are rarely reported, and that they keep on happening. We understand that councils can only charge £36 for inspections of roadworks. The full cost to a council - with the record-keeping, site visit, communications with utility company, checking, invoicing, etc - must be much more than this. Unless inspection authorities can recover the full costs of inspecting roadworks while they are taking place, they don't have an incentive to enforce standards.

¹ <http://yoursayondisability.scot/weekly-poll-results-roadwork/>

We welcome the new inspection powers for the Roadworks Commissioner; but the Commissioner seems to have no power to recover the costs of inspections at all. This disincentivises inspection of roadworks by the Commissioner, even more than councils. While there is a burden of cost for inspections on the regulatory bodies - council or Commissioner - we see little prospect of the situation improving.

We also believe that it should be easier for the public to report problems with roadworks - not only to utility companies and roads authorities but also to the Scottish Roadworks Commissioner.

Signs and Wayfinding

While MACS welcomes bringing the Redbook into line with England and Wales we, nevertheless, still have concerns with regard to signs and wayfinding around or through roadworks that direct disabled people through the most accessible route.

More often than not there are no signs or wayfinding at roadworks that show a person the most accessible route around or through the roadworks. If we are serious about removing barriers and reducing isolation for people with disabilities it is imperative that signs must show the accessible route around or through roadworks.

Not everyone is aware of what the colours of individual signs actually mean, for instance that yellow signs of an indication of danger. It would be a prudent course of action to carry out an education process with the public not only on the colours of signs but on who is responsible for roadworks and how and where reporting procedures can be carried out.

It has recently come to our notice that the colours of some of the temporary adaptations at some roadworks are fluorescent. Fluorescent colours are inflammatory to some disabilities and people with these disabilities will avoid fluorescent inflammatory colours at any and all costs.

MACS has recently tried to bring the colour of temporary adaptations at roadworks to the attention of RAUCS (Road Authorities and Utility Companies Scotland) when we were informed that this was an issue for HSE (Health and Safety Executive). After trying a number of times to meet with the HSE and each time being refused we have had to abandon this approach at present.

Reinstatements

It is imperative that reinstatements are inspected a little while after they have been completed, including emergency roadworks. If the reinstatement is sitting proud of the original surface or has sunk in anyway it becomes a dangerous trip hazard for disabled people.

As an example, the Roads Infrastructure and Active Travel WorkStream Lead was in Edinburgh airport a few weeks ago and while travelling in his wheelchair on part of the road around the car parking area he failed to notice that a utility reinstatement had sunk after completion. The front casters on his wheelchair caught on the edge of the reinstatement and catapulted him out of his wheelchair, face first, into the road in front of traffic. Fortunately, some drivers stopped to give him assistance but this left

him cut, bruised and badly shaken up with a concussion as he had been knocked unconscious when his head hit the road.

This is only one true example of what can happen sometime after a reinstatement has been completed and highlights the need for regular inspections of all reinstatements at least 6 to 8 weeks after completion.

Potential for upgrading during roadworks

To upgrade all streetscapes, paths and pavements so that everywhere is accessible for disabled people would have extortionate cost implications for both local and central government. However, MACS believes that one of the most economical and fairest methods of creating a more accessible environment is to do so through planned maintenance.

We must then ask the question of why streets, paths and pavements are not being made more accessible during road maintenance? This would be a much more economic method of not only creating a more accessible environments but indeed speeding up the process.

However, this would mean more cooperation between Road authorities and utility companies to work out agreements by where better access could be created during road maintenance and roadworks as well as planned maintenance.

Training

MACS believes that all highway workers should receive training on accessibility and disability awareness, including the ticket holder (the person responsible for the roadworks). However, it is important that all workers receive such training because the same ticket holder may be responsible for a number of sites and may never actually be onsite at a particular set of roadworks.

We believe that part of the solutions to accessibility at roadworks must be two pronged in:

- A. Training as detailed above.
- B. More frequent regular inspections where accessibility for disabled people must take priority after any safety issues.

Notifications to the Public

A more thorough and robust notification system to members of the public as to where and when roadworks are going to be carried out should be looked into.

While we acknowledge that there is a grace system of seven days either side of the start and finish date of any roadworks on the SRWR (Scottish Road Works Register) and also some grace on the notification when workers are actually on site.

With the technology we currently have available MACS believe that the notification period could be tightened up considerably so that people could be notified when the roadworks have been planned, excluding emergency roadworks, and when work has actually started, including emergency roadwoarks.

Most disabled people can't simply carry out an activity without carefully planning that activity first, therefore, it is very important that barriers such as roadworks can be identified sooner rather than later to reduce isolation and enable disabled people to plan their life activities.