

# Confirmed friends

A London borough is using the all-in-one Confirm Streetworks infrastructure asset management and maintenance module to keep its traffic on the move.

**Dominic McNeillis** has the story

The management of traffic on the roads and streets in our towns and cities is a vital, yet complex undertaking. Highway authorities have to constantly juggle the demands of drivers, pedestrians, utility companies and event organisers to ensure that traffic keeps moving.

Nothing is more frustrating to the average driver than poorly-planned road works causing unnecessary disruption, for instance, turning what is normally a 15-minute journey to work into an hour of stopping and starting, resulting in lateness, lost man hours, angry bosses and unhappy employees.

Local authorities place a great emphasis on the management of their roads because highly-visible traffic events caused by congestion and works can reflect badly on the way they run their services and communities in general, negatively impacting on citizen satisfaction. And, since 2004, road management has been formalised and regulated by the Traffic Management Act (TMA).

The TMA's main objective, of course, is to reduce congestion and disruption on the road network. It stipulates more effective co-ordination by highway authorities of street works – whether these are authority road works, utility street works or miscellaneous activities – and any operation that may affect the highway network, including refuse collection, deliveries, skip placement, school transport, and events such as carnivals and sporting events.

In particular, the Network Management Duty part of the Act, which came into power in 2005, is a statutory duty placed on all local authorities to improve the flow of traffic on their own network, and on the networks of neighbouring authorities. This is done by co-ordinating and managing road and street works effectively, the manage-

ment of incidents, event planning, and the control of parking.

These duties must be carried out by working with all partners and stakeholders, involving consultation and views from the general public – and managing this complexity of relationships is a fundamental challenge for highway authorities.

To address this challenge and promote co-ordination between all parties, works promoters such as utility companies have to provide timely and accurate information about the street works they intend to undertake. In order to achieve this, authorities need a system which lets them see an up-to-date view of all current and planned works in a format that is easy to access, interpret and share, as well as allowing the sending and receiving of notices to comply with Electronic Transfer of Notices (EToN) standards and Section 74 legislation.

In turn, utility companies and their contractors must have a system that manages the notification initiation process – providing alerts to liability dates as well as minimising errors and ensuring accurate monitoring of workflow.

Confirm Streetworks – a module of Confirm, Pitney Bowes Business Insight's infrastructure asset management and maintenance solution – is one system which has been developed specifically to meet all of these needs. Hammersmith and Fulham LBC is using Confirm to manage the permit issue process between itself and utilities applying for works permission.

Ian Hawthorn, head of network management and enforcement in the highways and engineering division, explains: 'Any utility which wants to apply to us has to use the EToN 5 format, sending a notice to us for approval via our FTP server. The Confirm system is connected with the FTP server and receives the data, regardless of



## street works

the system used to initiate the notice. We then assess the notice against various criteria, including location and timing, and either ask for additional conditions to be added or grant a permit if the right details are present.

'The most important feature of the Confirm system is that it provides an electronic record of what works are going to take place, which makes it easier to cross-reference and analyse this information. Previously, these types of requests were handled by fax, but when we're getting something like 40,000 notices a year, it's a difficult and time-consuming process trying to record and track them all via a paper-based system.

'Confirm improves the way we work because we're able to log, share and exchange data much more quickly. This makes it easier to demonstrate compliance with the TMA, because of the electronic audit trail which is produced, and also reduces the likelihood of any dispute between the borough and utility about when or where works are carried out,' he says.

'Data quality is sometimes an issue, in that what's been requested is not what's actually happening on-site, but having an electronic works record makes this easier to iron out.'

As a web-based solution, Confirm has made it easier for Hammersmith and Fulham to migrate over to the new London Permit Scheme, the latest part of the TMA, introduced in January, which replaces the former noticing system established under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. The scheme gives authorities greater powers to regulate and monitor works on the highway and strengthens formal permitting arrangements. Hammersmith and Fulham is working with Confirm to develop and enhance the current permit system.

The borough also uses Confirm to log the results of street works inspections. 'It's clearly very important that we physically check how road works are actually being carried out, and if we spot any defects, we can also log these in Confirm, which again strengthens the audit trail against each job,' explains Mr Hawthorn. 'This might be anything from an inspection conducted while the works are ongoing, which finds that pedestrian barriers are missing, or non-compliant with the safety code of practice, to an inspection conducted within two years of the works being completed which finds that a surface repair has subsided and the utility organisation is liable to rectify this.

'Having all this information in one electronic system makes it easier to alert utilities to defects in the context of specific jobs and the original conditions that were stipulated on them.'

Confirm has helped demonstrate compliance with the TMA, particularly in terms of managing and co-ordinating the various factors which can affect the road network in Hammersmith and Fulham. 'As a London borough, the roads in Hammersmith and Fulham are always busy, with good traffic flow vital from both an economic and environmental perspective,' he says.

'So obviously, minimising the impact of street



works is very important to us. Confirm, alongside other systems such as LondonWorks and our own internal systems, enables us to co-ordinate works, so the same bit of road isn't being continually dug up by different companies.

However, keeping the traffic flowing isn't just about works. For instance, we have three football clubs within the borough, so ensuring that roads are congestion-free on match days is important. Similarly, we have other high-profile sporting events throughout the year, such as the Boat Race, the Horse of the Year Show and the Queen's Cup tennis tournament, all of which create traffic issues which need to be managed. We also had to account for a lot of replacement buses on the roads recently when Transport for London closed the Piccadilly line on the Tube.

'We must have contingency plans in place to deal with events such as this, because a gridlock situation just isn't acceptable. And while the Department for Transport (DfT) hasn't yet penalised an authority for being in contravention of the TMA, that potential sanction is always there in the background.

'The DfT has the power to issue an intervention notice or order if it feels a network isn't being run properly, and can replace a local highway authority with a government team – with the council forced to foot a bill, which could run into millions. Anybody can make a complaint to the DfT, so this clearly makes us very accountable.

'That's the greatest challenge that the TMA

presents – the fact that we have to manage the demands and expectations of so many different stakeholders on a network which is alive and kicking 24 hours a day, seven days a week,' Mr Hawthorn adds.

Looking ahead, Hammersmith and Fulham is hoping to expand its use of Confirm in order to further improve forward planning and make location-based mapping information a more integral part of the process.

'Confirm can enable us to interact with the mapping function provided by Transport for London's central register, where we could add our works to its map, visually establish areas of interest by circling them, and automatically generate and receive e-mail alerts about upcoming works and events.

'Updating information via an intuitive map-based interface would help us to improve forward planning and better manage the impact of every notice and request.

'Text-based information is fine, but we increasingly need more than that. Visualising works and events as location-based data on an interactive map could really improve the speed and quality of decision-making about scheduling and co-ordinating works, and help us to ensure even better compliance with the TMA.'

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