

Vehicle Removal Trial Update

Background

Parked vehicles are a significant risk to capital maintenance programme delivery in Essex. Delays whilst on site or the need to return to site to finish works results in additional delivery costs in the region of £160k per annum along with associated quality and negative perception issues.

To resolve this an extended trial for the removal obstructive vehicles from highways works sites was agreed in January 2018 to run throughout the 2018/19 resurfacing programme.

Implementation Summary

To enable the policy to be delivered flexibly, all Temporary TRO's were prearranged as Clearways as standard.

To ensure the trial was conducted in a controlled manner with as few changing variables as possible, it was limited to use for the Machine Surfacing programme only. This is also the programme with the highest delivery risk exposure and therefore stood to benefit the most.

Of the 172 total machine surfacing sites, tow away signage was implemented on 98 identified high risk sites, mainly in urban areas. This programme was shared with the vehicle removal contractor on a weekly basis to ensure tow away vehicles would be on standby if needed.

Trial Results

Of these sites a total of 20 call outs were made, some proactively due to known issues or high risk to the programme, such as Maldon High Street and Baddow Road.

As a result 16 vehicles were moved across 8 sites. A maximum of 4 vehicles were moved on a single occasion and at one site a known abandoned vehicle was moved in close liaison with Essex Police. On some occasions the presence of the vehicle lifter led to compliance.

The total net additional cost of these calls outs to ECC was £9.095.

No customer complaints nor any negative media or social media feedback relating to this trial have been received during the trial period.

As previously agreed, all issued tickets were cancelled and no payments made.

It is estimated that the implementation of this trial saved the authority in excess of £53k in avoided crew shifts for the 8 sites. This figure does not account for the additional compliance on sites where just signage was used however so it can be assumed that the benefits exceed this figure by at least a factor of two.

Observed Issues

On a couple of occasions the correct signage was not placed on site by the TM contractor, fortunately vehicles were not required to be moved on these sites. Feedback has been given to this contractor to ensure this does not happen in future.

On two occasions the removal contractor (D&G) were unable to attend call outs. There is a need for improved communication between RJ and D&G to ensure vehicle availability is maintained. A revised call out framework is to be established which builds on operational lessons learnt from the trial.

There was a lack of consistency of out of hours call centre sending out notification e-mail to all parties due to the low level of call outs. Documentation and training has been adjusted to resolve this.

Tickets were found to be not being passed to NEPP/SEPP by Ringway Jacobs Agents due to a misunderstanding of the process. Site agents will have refresher training ahead of formal adoption of the process.

Recommendations

The vehicle removal trial has successfully demonstrated the process for discouraging and if needed removing vehicles from site and delivered savings to ECC in excess of £44k per annum (after cost).

By trialling this process other important non-cashable savings have been realised such as minimalizing the disruption of works to residents, reduction in duplication of work caused by re-scheduling works as well as reduced opportunity for road worker abuse.

It is therefore recommended that the trial is formally adopted as ECC policy and extended for use across all works programmes as required.

All issued penalty charge notices should be required for full payment in future, there should remain the ability for the Essex Highways staff to make discretionary decisions as appropriate where situations are not clear cut.

There is unfortunately no legislative ability for ECC to adjust the set fee to get anywhere close to covering the cost of the call out. However the reduction in delivery risk has been demonstrated to more than cover the additional cost of call outs.