

Reviewed and Updated: January 2021

INTRODUCTION

At various stages in the asset management and highway maintenance process, effective communication with key stakeholders and customers is essential. This strategy aims to raise awareness and understanding of the Council's approach to highway maintenance. This includes the work that goes into maintaining and improving the county's roads, footways, structures and street lighting, ensuring that all communications are timely, positive, informative and accessible. Information is communicated using various channels including online, printed media and through embracing a range of digital solutions.

Highway stakeholders have been identified and a variety of communication options and channels are used to inform them about the services provided. The strategy details how our stakeholders are engaged with about the Council's highways assets on key areas of interest in relation to their activities, to ensure that they are aware of, and most importantly, satisfied with, the relevant work taking place to maintain and improve the highways network, which includes our:

- Annual Surface Dressing Programme
- Design and Build Surfacing Schemes
- Winter Maintenance Programme
- Divisional Maintenance Programmes
- Major Schemes and Roadworks
- Flood Alleviation Schemes
- Public Realm Schemes
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys

The aim of this Strategy is to also outline how we engage with people about the performance and condition of Worcestershire County Council's highways assets to ensure that they are aware and informed, where reasonably practicable, of the continual work that takes place to maintain and improve the network. Engagement raises public & stakeholder awareness of the challenges and issues that the Council faces as highway authority and explains the way services have to be prioritised in order to provide a service which meets our needs but also helps to manage customer & stakeholder expectations. Appropriate engagement also helps to ensure that programmes of works are informed and if necessary adjusted where key issues are identified from this engagement.

1.1 Highway Asset Management Overview

Worcestershire County Council recognises that ongoing improvements to the highway network is one of the highest priorities for residents in the county. This knowledge is driven by regular annual Residents Surveys (WCC viewpoint), public focus groups and the national survey results through the annual National Highways and Transportation (NHT) survey.

Worcestershire County Council has put in place an effective asset management framework and approach for managing the county's highway asset, (3,000 mile of highway network). This takes account of the ongoing impacts from wear and tear, ageing, traffic and severe weather events, as much as is reasonably practicable. Alongside the management of the highway network, there is the essential requirement to ensure the County Council has effective communication and engagement channels in place.

1.2 Highways asset management in Worcestershire

Highway maintenance and safety is of fundamental importance to the achievement of the integrated transport agenda. Worcestershire County Council's Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) in recent years has resulted in a marked improvement in the quality and standard of the county's lighting stock, drainage, carriageway, roadside footways and divorced footways.

Asset management is a structured approach to roads maintenance. It means that maintenance and improvements are mainly carried out as part of a planned programme of works. This way of working allows us to effectively invest in our network to maintain it for current and future road users.

Structural maintenance is prioritised to maximise the benefit of investment over many years. We regularly carry out various methods of inspection and reactive repairs to defects, review our procedures and frequently monitor the condition of our network through a range of cyclical and reactive inspections. We are also responsible for the maintenance of grass verge and trees by our roads. For the purpose of this communications strategy, the focus is on the County's most significant highway assets, which include:

- Adopted roads and carriageways (A's, B's, C's and unclassified)
- Traffic management and network control
- Highways maintenance
- Improvement schemes
- Streetlighting
- Key projects and areas of activity that matter to residents
- Severe weather and winter related activities

1.3 Highway Asset Management responsibilities

Highway maintenance teams' main duties include:

- regular highway inspections
- planned maintenance schemes
- reactive maintenance work
- winter maintenance activities
- Severe weather activities such as snow and flooding events

As with many other local authorities, Worcestershire County Council faces significant financial pressures. However, road users continue to have an expectation that journeys should be reliable, and with all residents using the network, it means that people's satisfaction with it, is linked to the council's reputation. The top 5 cited levels of public dissatisfaction in Worcestershire are:

1. potholes
2. road signs
3. road markings
4. poor quality repair
5. poor road surfaces

Therefore, it is important to ensure that elected Members, customers, staff, partners and partner organisations value and feel engaged in the work that we do to maintain and improve the network and are aware of the strong level of investment that the County Council continues to make in the highways network.

2. Aim

In accordance with Highways Asset Management Guidance, Worcestershire County Council:

- Communicates its approach on highway infrastructure asset management.
- Undertakes annual customer satisfaction surveys through the NHT survey and its own View Point survey to identify service improvements.
- Has a mechanism in place to gather customer feedback on its highway maintenance service and if so, how does it use this information.
- Ensures that customers are kept informed about their highway maintenance service via various channels of communication.

The aim of the Communication Strategy is to support the objectives delivered through the Transport Asset Management Plan with appropriate messages using relevant communication channels to ensure the public are effectively informed in relation to highways asset management activity.

This document will be reviewed every year to ensure lessons are learnt and that effective mechanisms are in place to communicate service standards and outcomes are established to manage customer expectations.

3. OBJECTIVES

- To gain political commitment and senior officer support for effective and efficient asset management.
- To inform residents how we spend their money wisely on maintaining and improving the highways network, using appropriate highways methodologies and treatments (such as surfacing materials and processes used in the surface dressing programme etc).
- To engage and listen to resident concerns about the network and provide regular updates about our service delivery in highways.
- To demonstrate the positive work being carried out to maintain and improve the county's network.
- To communicate with local Members, residents, businesses, partners, community groups such as Parish Councils and other organisations.

4. Stakeholders

Engaging with a variety of stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations provides the information needed to determine and help shape the service that we provide.

The highway network is often of significant interest to the public and the media. This interest is likely to continue with robust public expectations of how the network should function. In addition, weather conditions and resulting impacts to the highway network often provide the focus for national and local media coverage.

We will seek to engage and inform a wide variety of stakeholders within Worcestershire, by specific and appropriate channels, on key topics of interest and relevance to them, including but not restricted to:

4.1 Internal

- Worcestershire County Council staff
- All Highways and Transportation staff
- Elected Members
- Contractor staff
- Highways & Transport Control Centre staff

4.2 External

- Residents
- District, Town and Parish Council staff
- Environment Agency

- Highways England
- Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP)
- Members of Parliament in Worcestershire
- Department for Transport
- Local road users

- Local communities and community groups
- Local businesses
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance and Health service)
- People travelling through the county
- Appointed Highway contractors e.g. Ringway, Jacobs and Griffiths
- Utilities
- Interest groups such as freight associations, pedestrian groups, cycling and
- motoring groups, disability and mobility groups and motoring groups
- Neighbouring highway authorities
- Organisations such as Midland Highways Alliance Plus

5. KEY MESSAGES

5.1 High Level Messages

Effective asset management will deliver an efficient and effective approach to the management of highway infrastructure assets through longer term planning, ensuring that outcomes are defined and achievable for available budgets. Communicating this with stakeholders where relevant in a focussed and specific approach is key in aiding greater understanding of the contribution highway infrastructure assets make to economic growth, improvements to health and wellbeing and the needs of local communities. The following information will be communicated to stakeholders via appropriate channels;

- Assets managed by Worcestershire County Council
- Condition of assets
- Highway maintenance work
- Budgets allocated for various highways & transport activities & delivery
- Performance management measures (e.g. Balanced Scorecard results)

In addition to the above, strategic, operational and tactical messages will be communicated as follows:

Strategic Messages

Clear and accurate information will be made available to ensure key stakeholders understand how the highway maintenance service contributes to the Council's corporate objectives, through appropriate channels, by:

- Remaining committed and responsive to improving our roads and footways, recognising that they are a high priority for the residents and businesses in

Worcestershire. We will strive for top quartile performance in the quality of our roads and footways, understanding their importance in supporting the Open for Business and Health, Environment and Well-Being corporate objectives.

The key strategic messages need to demonstrate how the Council will:

- **Deliver its services in the future** - Our focus will be on achieving a safe, serviceable and sustainable network.
- **Defines Levels of Service** – to successfully manage the highway assets which balance appropriate user and stakeholder needs and expectations for each asset against the council's available resources.
- **Employs Lifecycle Planning** – to make the right investment at the right time to ensure that the asset delivers the required level of service over its full expected life efficiently.
- **Produces Forward Works Programmes** - to ensure that maintenance and improvements to our roads, footways, structures and streetlights are carried out in a planned and coordinated way.
- **Controls contractors working on our network** - Utility companies must make repairs to their pipes and cables, and these are often under our roads and pavements. A permit scheme is in place giving us more control over when these works take place.
- **Engagement on potential changes to the highway** is an important part of communication with customers to ensure service users' needs are where appropriate reflected in changes made to the highway network. Engagement is undertaken with key stakeholders on a wide range of schemes, from small maintenance works outside people's homes, through to Public Realm and other major schemes.

Operational Messages

Clear and accurate information about current activities and feedback;

- **Programmes of work** - Local authority elected members play a fundamental part in our work with and through the residents they represent. All WCC members have been provided access with support to roadworks.org. This enables the members to view & interrogate both WCC and other third parties work within their Division and across the County, up to three months or more ahead of their scheduled start date. This advance in the use of technology, ensure members can stay fully updated in works within their area. In addition, they are sent via their local County Highways Liaison Engineer, a fortnightly programme, updated every week, showing WCC specific works across the County.
- **Disruption and impacts on the highway** - Communication with statutory undertakers is also crucial to effectively managing the highway network. Works on the highway are coordinated through our Street works team in order to minimise disruption on the highway in line with network management requirements of the Traffic Management Act 2004. Forward works programmes are produced and shared between Worcestershire County Council and statutory undertakers. Regular Highway Authority & Utilities Committee (HAUC) meetings are held to discuss any clashes and how best to coordinate any proposed work and for developing future works programmes.

- **Customer feedback** (external survey) The annual National Highways and Transportation (NHT) survey is carried out to determine resident's views on highways maintenance and satisfaction with maintenance activities and benchmark the results nationally with other authorities. WCC also completes its own viewpoint survey. In addition, where WCC works are taking place, residents and businesses who will be directly affected by those works are communicated with in advance of any works, with details of the works and contact details, should the customer wish to speak with the works organiser.

Specific Messages

Clear and accurate information about particular plans or where specific feedback is requested.

- Worcestershire County Council has a responsibility for the highway network in terms of keeping the routes available for the passage of the travelling public. It undertakes this duty in its role as the Highway Authority.
- Our focus is achieving a serviceable and sustainable network comprising the county's assets which includes; carriageways, roadside footways and divorced footways, structures, lighting stock and drainage assets. In addition, we carry out routine grass cutting and maintain the verges, including trees near our carriageways and footways.
- Highways are one of our most valuable assets. They are vital to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. They provide access for business and communities, as well as contribute to the area's local character and people's quality of life. An efficient and well-maintained Highways network supports the key priorities of our Corporate Plan called 'Shaping Worcestershire's Future 2017 to 2022 as outlined in our Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy:
 - Championing Open for Business
 - Protecting Children and Families
 - Protecting the Environment
 - Promoting Health and Wellbeing
- We invest in highways improvement and infrastructure projects to ensure the county's highway network is well maintained & continues to evolve supporting the council's priorities in being "Open for business."
- Utility companies must make repairs to their infrastructure, pipes and cables and these are often under our roads and pavements. Our permit scheme allows us to have more control over when these works take place. It also allows us to, within reason, ensure that any repairs made to Worcestershire's roads meet required standards and mitigate where reasonably practicable, disruption to road users.
- The County Council, has put in place a cost effective and efficient system for the management of defects (e.g. potholes) which includes high quality repairs often followed by more permanent treatments to maintain the highway asset, where required.
- By using preventative treatments and early interventions, we aim to maximise the life of our roads, footways and structures by using a long-term life cycle approach to managing our assets.
- We work hard to ensure that maintenance and improvements to our roads, pavements, structures and streetlights are carried out as part of a carefully planned

annual programme of works. For example, gritting and winter maintenance to keep our roads safe, surface dressing in the summer months & other surfacing works all year round to maintain them.

- Asset management promotes a more business-like way to highway maintenance. It makes better use of systems, processes and finite resources to deliver efficient and effective highway maintenance. It takes a long-term view of how highways may be managed, focusing on outcomes by ensuring that funds are spent on activities that reduce the quantity of short-term repairs. This makes the best use of public money minimising waste, increasing effective and efficient whole life planning and works on the ground.

6. CHANNELS

Where practicable, communications should be timely, accurate, informative and accessible using tailored communications tools need that are appropriate to inform the different target audiences observing our key principles:

- The Council's Communication Team will be the main / first point of contact between the media and the Council
- We will be proactive and encourage promotion of our services through media, and other facilities (where appropriate)
- Employees will be encouraged to take part in two-way communication with relevant key stakeholders when forming decisions which affect them
- Use of social media will be used where appropriate and in accordance with the Councils existing Social Media Policy. Incidents on the highway that affect journey routes and times will be informed via Twitter.
 - We will ensure that the information we supply will be clear to users and the content will be identified as coming from and for the purposes of the Council.
 - We will safeguard children, young people, and vulnerable adults, by ensuring appropriate permission has been obtained prior to using any photographs, video clips, or comments including children, young people, and vulnerable adults – to comply with the Councils safeguarding principles.
 - Employees will be made aware that by uploading comments to social media sites; it is likely that they are agreeing to be bound by its terms. This can affect rights to material and make the Council liable to the site.

[See Appendix A for Highways Communication Checklist.](#)

6.1 Local media

- Press releases and media relations - Regular press releases will be written and published. These are essential to keep a consistent flow engaging and accurate information and stories in the media, including relevant specialist publications, and ensure that all audiences are kept up to date. These releases will also be turned into content for the Council's social media channels where appropriate.

- Media briefings - The media (radio and local TV) are briefed and kept up to date on key schemes. This will aim to focus on promoting a co-operative relationship that fosters understanding between the media and the council.
- TV and radio interviews – Regular contact should be made with television and radio journalists to arrange interviews, features and debates.

6.2 Digital media

Worcestershire County Council currently uses the following digital media channels:

Social media - We use two Twitter accounts (@WorcsTravel and @Ringway_Worcs) to be proactive on a daily basis, as necessary, with updates and news about our highways network. An automated Twitter feed from our Geographic Information System is being developed to provide travel alerts and information about road and school closures.

We also use the Council's corporate social media platforms to support key messages and stories we have published through releases. The combined number of followers across the 5 key platforms cover almost 70,000 users so, this is a core way to reach our residents.

Worcestershire Council website – the website allows the public to report highway defects and issues with the roads such as potholes, streetlights, public rights of right, spillages, overgrown shrubbery, gritting and so forth. It has a specific section called Travel and Roads with a landing page called 'Keeping you informed' and includes a range of information about highway activities such as our winter maintenance programme. The website has a specific web page relating to highways asset management & a wide variety of information on key strategies, plans and policies in relation to highways and transport, which is easily accessible via the main website page.

Roadworks.org is an interactive map & resource, which is used to inform the public & key stakeholders (including, Local Members, Town and Parish Councils, emergency services and other first responders) of roadworks across the county and this is an important channel for us, promoted nationally.

6.3 Face to face (virtual during COVID-19 period) and telephone

This is not restricted to but includes:

- Elected Members' briefing sessions – keeping local members & members generally up to date is key to managing people's expectations, including infrastructure schemes and traffic management issues around the network. Our County Highways Liaison Engineers play a pivotal role in informing and consulting with Members about works taking place in their Division. In addition, the following takes place: Cabinet & Full Council, which often has highways & transportation items, CMR annual report to Council, CMR quarterly briefing meetings with cross party representation, Member Scrutiny Panels which are open to the public, the Corporate

Strategy Planning Process & budgetary process, which includes an engagement session with Town and Parish Councils and other key stakeholders.

- County wide annual resident roadshows to inform & seek the views of residents, where Covid allows.
- Focus groups, where appropriate, drawn from members of the public across the county.
- Internal staff roadshows from the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive. In addition, E&I Directorate Leadership Team roadshow sessions with Managers and with staff are also a regular feature.
- Meetings with external groups, organisations and individuals – to communicate, inform and engage, where appropriate. These include a WCC/District Council Streetscene Officer Group, for Streetworks the HAUC quarterly review meetings, which involve a wide range of statutory undertakers and other third parties, a range of emergency planning and strategic and tactical group meetings/communications with all key partners and stakeholders to ensure effective communications are in place regarding key works & preparedness for severe weather events etc. Regular meetings are also held at a strategic level with Worcestershire MPs and other key senior level roles, to ensure they are engaged with over key highways and transportation matters.
- Parish and Town Council Makeovers – throughout the year we carry out a number of makeovers to enhance local community areas. These are carried out in partnership with Ringway, focused on small scale improvements around Divisional Member and community issues. This is an important channel for communication to local residents and communities in conjunction with our elected Members.

6.4 Marketing materials

- Marketing and design – Worcestershire County Council display signs for major carriageway schemes and for when roadworks have been completed, thanking the public for their patience.
- We also use marketing materials which include posters and signage informing people before, during and after larger schemes have been completed.
- Door drops –issuing letters and leaflets to households which are directly affected by roadworks, on a wide variety of works including surfacing and footways.
- The National Highways and Transport Public Opinion Survey (NHTsurvey) complements our annual Worcestershire ViewPoint surveys to residents in the county.

7. Timescales and Review

This communications strategy will be reviewed every twelve months.

8. Evaluation and Lessons Learnt

Evaluation of this work would be carried out on an ongoing basis to ensure that communications are delivering the aims and objectives in this strategy. This will include the regular monitoring of media coverage and feedback from residents and partners from the NHT and ViewPoint surveys. Ongoing evaluation will form lessons learnt that will be translated into recommendations and actions.

9. Monitors and Measures

The effectiveness of the Communication Strategy will be reviewed in the form of the Highway Communication Plan and 'Quarterly updates' at the Directorate Leadership Team meetings which cover corporate issues such as Corporate Comms. The following measures will also be evaluated:

- Monitoring the levels of public satisfaction with highways condition and maintenance via the National Highways and Transport Public Opinion Survey and Worcestershire ViewPoint survey. To enable the County Council to understand and manage as much as reasonably practicable, impacts on the highways network and how this affects public satisfaction.
- Number of retweets, likes and comments on social media, including our Facebook page.
- Increased number of followers on our Twitter feeds.
- Participation and engagement with council projects, initiatives and consultation processes.
- Amount and nature of local media coverage throughout the county.
- Comments, compliments and complaints raised about highways.
- Number of visits to our website.
- Number of Public Enquiries (PEMS) to the Highways and Transport Control Centre and time taken to respond to requests.
- Staff survey

Appendix A – Communication Checklist, Major/medium schemes

Before Works Start	During the Works	When Work is Completed
Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking to residents/local businesses Letters to residents and local businesses/shops Inform schools and bus operators Advance Signage Use Roadside Signs with dates and information 	Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road Signage to let the community & road users know about the works If progress of works changes update all key community engagement stakeholders Advertise in local press where appropriate 	Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure local businesses and residents are aware of the work being completed and any roads re-opening Ensure all road signage is removed
Stakeholder Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to the Parish Council Inform Cabinet Member and local councillors 	Stakeholder Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep cabinet member and local councillors informed of progress/delays. 	Stakeholder Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform CMR and local councillors when the work is complete.
Media Relations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press release to inform local press and radio stations. 	Media Relations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep media and local radio stations updated with progress/delays. 	Media Relations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform the local press when the work is completed.
E-Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update WCC Website Social Media Messages Add to Roadworks.Org 	E-Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any updates/photos on WCC website. On-going social media messages. Update Roadworks.Org 	E-Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update WCC Website Social Media Message Update Roadworks.Org
Internal Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TMA Notice on EXOR Inform Highways and Transport Control Centre (HTCC) 	Internal Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update roadworks layer on GIS and Roadworks.org with any changes to works Keep HTCC updated on progress/ changes 	Internal Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform HTCC works are complete