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Dartford Crossing Improvements on Track

If you are a regular user of the Dartford Crossing you will have noticed some big changes taking place recently with the construction of five brand new gantries.

These are part of our preparations for the introduction of Dart Charge in October 2014 – the new remote payment system that will reduce congestion and ease traffic flow at the crossing.

Four of the new gantries (two ahead of the tunnel entrances and two on the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge) will hold the equipment needed to identify vehicle number plates or the electronic tags fitted within a vehicle. This enables our back office operation to match up those payments made remotely, with the vehicles using the Crossing.

Changing the way we collect the charge will remove the need for drivers to stop at a barrier, helping to speed up journeys for everyone. The other gantry (on the bridge) will hold new signage.

To install these gantries lane restrictions and carriageway closures were only used at night, when traffic flow was at its lowest. We coordinated this with other planned works on the crossing to make full use of every road closure and reducing overall disruption to the travelling public.

Advance construction work will continue over the coming weeks with changes to the roundabout at junction 1A (the last exit before the Crossing going northbound) and Kent marshalling area – the holding area where vehicles with abnormal or dangerous loads are checked before crossing. Once the new payment arrangements are in place in October, we will start the work to remove the booths and introduce a new road layout. Both of which are due to be complete by Spring 2015.

Dart Charge will enable people to pay either in advance or by midnight on the day after crossing. There will be several ways to pay. Setting up a pre-pay account will save up to one-third on every crossing. Alternatively, payment can be made online, or at selected retail outlets or by phone.

No one needs to do anything yet about the changes. Existing Dart-Tag holders will be contacted from September about moving their accounts over to the new arrangements, so please make sure your contact details are up to date. Everyone can subscribe at www.gov.uk/highways/dartford to receive updates about the introduction of Dart Charge and opening an account.

Also more information is available on Facebook & Twitter: www.facebook.com/dartcharge - www.twitter.com/@DartCharge
Roads Reform: Change to a government-owned company

Roads Reform is developing a pace.

Our November edition told you about the launch of a public consultation on steps to secure long-term benefits from the Government’s investment boost for strategic roads and to transform the delivery of the strategic road network. Since then the Government has confirmed its decision to proceed with the roads reform agenda. In changing the way the strategic road network is managed and operated, Government intends to establish a new long-term Road Investment Strategy (RIS), transform the Highways Agency into a Government-owned strategic highways company, put in place a robust system of governance for this company and set up an independent watchdog and monitor – all underpinned by legislation.

The legislation for these reforms was introduced as part of an Infrastructure Bill in the Queen’s speech in June. The Bill is progressing through the parliamentary process, and we expect it to achieve Royal Assent by early 2015.

The main aims of the changes are to:
- give the new strategic highway company the freedom to manage the day-to-day operation of the England’s strategic roads while remaining fully accountable for the state of the network
- provide greater certainty and flexibility of funding, and stability over delivery requirements, allowing the company and the supply chain to plan ahead and deliver more efficiently
- improve accountability and transparency for road users and the wider public about what the new company is delivering and how it is performing

Government plans to set up two new bodies to hold the company to account are progressing. One will protect the interests of motorists and road users, and the other will oversee the roads network in terms of costs and performance. These bodies are being created with two expert transport bodies, Passenger Focus and the Office of Rail Regulation, and will provide transparent reports on roads issues.

To help explain the changes a suite of documents has been published providing more detailed information about the governance arrangements for the new company. Transforming our strategic roads: a summary, gives an introduction to roads reform summarising the reasons for change, what this involves, how the new regime will work, and the benefits the change will deliver for road users and the nation as a whole. This and other supporting documents can be viewed via the roads reform page on www.gov.uk.
M1 Roadworks Junctions 28 to 31

Work is nearing completion on a scheme to upgrade the central reserve on a 21 mile stretch of the M1 between Junction 28 and 31 in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire.

The works, being undertaken by Costain, involve replacing the central reserve drainage and barrier to improve safety and to prepare for the planned smart motorway scheme. The scheme is part of an ‘accelerated delivery’ initiative. In practice it involves day and night working and the use of time saving off-site manufacture. Part of the accelerated approach involves constructing the full length of the project at once which means that all 21 miles will be under roadworks at the same time.

Costain project manager Richard Stuart explains the reasoning behind this. “By increasing the length of the roadworks we are able to progress multiple work fronts in parallel and reduce the overall programme by 8 months, which will ultimately benefit road users,” he says. “We are working around the clock to deliver the scheme as quickly as possible.”

Keeping traffic moving is one of the Agency’s key objectives. Costain have a state of the art CCTV control centre providing continual traffic monitoring and several dedicated recovery crews positioned at strategic locations along the scheme. “We have been getting to broken-down vehicles in an average of 11 minutes,” says Stuart. “We have also set up an innovative journey time information system to inform road users about how long it takes to travel through the works.”

As with all work next to live carriageways, there are risks to those working on site and ensuring their safety is vital.

“There have already been a number of incidents where vehicles have entered the works or hit the barriers so obviously we are very concerned that our road workers are safe”, says Stuart. Costain and the Agency have agreed to operate the running lanes at greater than the minimum width allowed for narrow lanes. “The aim was to balance the use of road space between running traffic and the site works to provide a safe environment for road users and road workers alike,” explains Stuart. “We have also made a point of asking drivers to consider the safety of workers and drive carefully taking extra vigilance when they are passing through our site.”

Central Reserve works started on site in September 2013 and are due for completion this month.
National ‘Women in Engineering’ Day

Key players from the civil engineering industry got their heads together for a National ‘Women in Engineering’ Day.

The Highways Agency invited first tier suppliers from up and down the country to the Thinktank Science Museum in Birmingham on 23 June to focus on the issues of recruitment, retention and progression of female talent within the sector.

Intelligence gathered by the Agency suggests that more needs to be done to counter the stereotype of an ‘engineer’ and make jobs in the industry more appealing to women. The aim of the event was to generate genuine debate about whether we are doing enough to create significant and lasting change to gender balance across the sector.

Suppliers had the opportunity to share experiences and highlight sector-wide initiatives that related companies can engage with to make progress.

Under the spotlight: Deborah Makinde, shares her experiences below

“I currently work for the Highways Agency, as a service delivery manager managing highways projects in the Midlands. Studying engineering has helped me gain an understanding of the projects I manage and gives me the opportunity to influence, check and challenge certain decisions made on the projects from the contractors designing and constructing roads. My next goal is to become a chartered engineer by 2016. I find this challenging as I am not on a graduate scheme and so I have to be fully motivated. My advice for women considering a career in engineering is - you can do anything you put your mind to. Just ask yourself - do you want it? If it’s yes, find a mentor and plan your route to get it.”

For more information, or to get involved email: womenintransport@yahoo.co.uk

National Women in Engineering Day was introduced by the Women’s Engineering Society (WES) to celebrate its 95th anniversary.

Graham Dalton, Highways Agency Chief Executive, said:

“Employing and retaining capable people to deliver our expanding programme of work is one of the challenges that we need to rise to as an industry – attracting, retaining and developing more women is part of the solution.”

The day provided an opportunity to share experiences and best practice to make progress.
Vehicle tax changes

From 1 October 2014 the paper tax disc will no longer be issued and required to be displayed on a vehicle windscreen.

DVLA holds a digital record of taxed and untaxed vehicles and a paper disc is therefore no longer necessary as proof that vehicle tax has been paid.

To drive or keep a vehicle on the road it will still need to be taxed, and DVLA will still send you a renewal reminder when your vehicle’s tax is about to expire. This applies to all vehicle types including those that are exempt from payment of tax.

When you buy a vehicle, the tax will no longer be transferred. You will need to pay new tax before you can use the vehicle.

You can tax the vehicle online or by phone - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week using the New Keeper Supplement (V5C/2) part of the vehicle registration certificate (V5C).

Our reputation – share your views

As the Highways Agency prepares for the future, we are really interested in perceptions of us today. We are therefore conducting research into what people think and feel about the Agency and would value your views.

Please take the chance to have your say using our quick and simple online survey. It only takes 10 minutes to complete and covers the issues that really matter, ranging from our overall performance to our environmental impact.

If you work for one of the Agency’s suppliers or contractors please click here to take the survey, otherwise, you can click here to share your views. All responses are anonymous and confidential. Please don't miss this opportunity to help us listen to you.
When you buy a ‘new’ vehicle from a dealer, the vehicle will be automatically taxed by the dealer when registered with DVLA. If you sell a vehicle after 1 October, when you notify DVLA, you will automatically get a refund for any full calendar months left on the vehicle’s tax. For further information on the change visit:

www.gov.uk/dvla/nomoretaxdisc
Please ensure you always use the official GOV.UK website

Highways Agency and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency joint on-road working pilot

The Highways Agency’s Incident Prevention Team is working with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) to develop a joint on-road working pilot.

The aim of the pilot is to assess if joint on-road working can enhance DVSA’s existing vehicle stopping capabilities, and increase utilisation of our own on-road staff – traffic officers.

Our traffic officers will be trained in stopping officer duties but will only be supplementing (not replacing) DVSA current stopping capabilities.

The pilot will take place at the Doxey check site (M6 J13) from 1 September 2014 for a four month period. The pilot will involve one of our vehicles and three Agency traffic officers. It is agreed that during the pilot the Agency’s priority will remain incident management. Monitoring will determine the realistic availability of our traffic officers in the event that the pilot is extended or rolled out.

The Agency and DVSA will be jointly sending out information so that drivers and operators are aware of the role of our traffic officers during the pilot.