

Customer Feedback Report: Quarter 2 (July – September) 2009-10



HEADLINES

What customers are telling us they like:

- Courteous and helpful road workers
- The provision of driver safety packs
- Friendly and helpful support from Traffic Officers
- Prompt and efficient completion of roadworks

What customers are telling us they dislike:

- Not being kept informed of developments during major incidents
- Becoming trapped in traffic for very long periods during major incidents
- Overgrown vegetation, including trees and bushes
- Missing and misleading information on road signs

Responding to feedback:

- In response to concerns about 'rat-running' through local villages we provided mobile VMS units to advise motorists about queue lengths and congestion times. One sign reads '*End of queue 1.5 miles*' which has cut down the number of cars and caravans turning off the trunk road and using local back roads as a rat run.
- In response to a query about ragwort we provided advice about the Agency's legal position, the natural history of ragwort, the treatment regime we adopt and the reasons we use this regime rather than others. The response included a link to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)'s [Code of practice on how to prevent the spread of ragwort](#). More information about ragwort is on [DEFRA's website](#) and the Agency's [website](#)
- In response to feedback about litter in the vicinity of specific Motorway Service Areas and fast food outlets on other roads we :
 - increased the number of black/yellow message signs at hot spots giving messages warning about the danger faced by litter pickers and "Take your litter home."
 - reviewed with Clean Kent the best ways of tackling the problem at source; and increased dialogue with local authorities to improve litter picking on local roads.

Purpose of the Report

The Highways Agency's commitment to putting customers at the heart of the business is set out in our Corporate Plan "Customers First". We are delivering a better service to customers, by understanding and responding to their needs. Our Customer Promise sets out the main elements of our services and includes the statement

- **"We will ask for your views and act on feedback"**.

The Agency has developed a network of Customer Beacons who represent businesses across the organisation, and this network plays an essential part in the delivery of the Agency's commitment and the Customer Promise statement. The Customer Beacons use feedback received from a variety of sources in order to help their teams improve the way they deliver services to customers. They identify and share best practice across the Agency and help their teams use feedback when evaluating and planning services.

This report summarises the Customer Beacon reports for Quarter 2 (July – September) 2009. It describes key matters of concern to customers, whilst identifying trends, best practice, lessons learned and interesting points.

Customer Issues

The following issues raised by customers, have been considered and resolved:

- Customers complained about faulty signs set by MIDAS. We investigated each complaint and, in all but one case, MIDAS was found to be functioning correctly. We explained to them how MIDAS works and repaired the faulty sign.
- Customers contacted the Agency to raise issues about diversion signs:
 - Customers, who were diverted in connection with motorway resurfacing, complained that they were misled by signs that were inadvertently left on site from an earlier project. We apologised and removed the misleading signs.
 - Some customers are becoming confused by diversion signs that are being placed on the network as they are travelling. A customer complained that there were no signs at a roundabout until they reached the start of the slip road. Customers were stopping on the roundabout in confusion. We contacted the customer to confirm the closure and the diversion route.
- Following complaints about the lack of warning signs/information following a road closure, we explained that this was due to traffic accidents and that we did not have time to install all the signs in time.
- A customer complained about the lack of 50mph signs through roadworks on M1. We inspected the traffic management (including speed limits), which we do every two hours, and replaced missing signs.

- Several customers complained about poor traffic management at what they thought were roadworks. We explained that two closures related to incidents that were managed by the police in which a judgement had to be made to manage traffic safely in the absence of signing. There was insufficient time to put this in place.
- Customers requested the removal of hatched road markings (which reduced the carriageway to a single lane) on a section of trunk road. The hatching had already been re-instated following a post scheme audit, where visibility issues had not been fully addressed by the original design audit. We explained the need for the hatched markings to them.
- A customer advised that water running under the slip road at Watford Gap Services was breaking up the road surface. A new drainage ditch had previously been dug in order to channel the water into the existing motorway drainage system and the road had been resurfaced. We wanted to ensure the water was not contaminated and called in the Environment Agency to help identify the source of the water. Anglian Water has since tested the water for chlorine. If the test results show that this is the case, then the water will have come from a mains pipe and the water company will be responsible for remedial work.
- A parish council reported a dangerous road surface at three sites. Issues included carriageway rutting, apparently caused by the pliable surface being ploughed up towards the kerbside by HGV's. This was considered hazardous to cyclists so we carried out emergency repairs.
- A customer complained about motorists being trapped in traffic whilst an incident was cleared. We explained the process involved, the need for investigation (as a crime scene) and the attempts to save people trapped in their vehicle or suffering life threatening injuries. We also advised customers of what the Agency and police did to minimise congestion at closures, such as advance diversions and providing welfare to trapped road users. The logistical difficulties were highlighted and we explained that the Agency and police acted lawfully.
- A complaint was received about nuisance lighting from a nearby depot. We immediately altered the direction of two of the lights and issued reminders to staff to turn off lights when not in use. We also used the feedback to review depot lighting, thus ensuring that the lights are sustainable and reflect local needs.
- In response to complaints about a coned off carriageway without visible workers, we are putting up information boards where there are large coned areas and night time works.
- In response to a complaint, about an empty house with an untidy garden and another about land where vegetation encroached into a neighbour's garden, both of which we owned, we tidied up both sites.

- Customers were concerned about the withdrawal of the assisted crossing provided for them at Dartford. In recent years the Dartford Crossing traffic officers had supported drivers who were either unwell and/or unable to drive over the elevated QEII Bridge or through the tunnels. We handed letters to all customers who requested the service during July advising them why we had withdrawn the service. We had taken this decision based on the advice of the police and DVLA. Motorists using the network must be fit to drive and able to choose their routes wisely. No such facility exists at other crossings and alternative routes are available.
- A customer complained about the 'pinch points' to the west of a roundabout where the layout changes from dual to single carriageway. We advised that we are investigating a design for a 'merge in turn' system which, if trials on other parts of the network are successful, will be rolled out to include this site.
- Customers called the Highways Agency Information Line (HAIL) to see if their e-mails had been received as they had not had a response. HAIL now tells customers that their query has been sent to a specialist team to deal with and that they will receive a response within 15 working days.
- Traffic Officers advised that local Motorway Service Areas (MSAs) would welcome some form of customer education from the Agency. A *Respect our Road Workers* event was held at a service station in Cumbria. Fifty questionnaires were completed and evaluation graphs were produced as a result. Following this event the MSA Manager asked the Agency to stage three more events, one of which will be about winter driving.
- A large unauthorised 'spoof' location sign appeared on a motorway verge. This was in the style of the famous 'Hollywood' sign, but re-lettered to reflect a local area. A photograph of the sign in the local newspaper generated an article, also correspondence both in support of the sign and against it. The subsequent removal of this sign (for safety reasons) generated negative media coverage. We therefore took the opportunity to explain to Granada TV about the safety implications of this distraction, in an area which is already notorious for incidents. We also responded to a local newspaper.
- In anticipation of a motorway bridge closure, which would cause lengthy diversions and delays, we advised customers about the closure, what was being done to remedy it and the scheduled re-opening date. One customer whose wedding reception was liable for disruption due to the closure was particularly grateful.

Compliments

- From the organisers of a midnight charity walk, for providing cones and helping to organise the event
- For helping a local council during a major incident, when an HGV hit a footbridge leaving it in a dangerous condition. We provided expert advice about replacing

the bridge on its bearings. The council recognised the value of stakeholders working together to ensure network safety.

- For an experimental trunk road surface which involved cutting grooves into the existing concrete carriageway. This will prolong the life of the surface (as opposed to laying asphalt); also reduced noise for local residents.
- From a coach company whose coach suffered a blow-out on the M4. Traffic Officers arrived on site very quickly and soon removed debris from the carriageway. The Traffic Officers were very friendly and helpful to the driver and passengers and remained on scene to help while the tyre was changed.
- From Slough Borough Council following a major incident, when an HGV hit the footbridge at Junction 5 of the M4, leaving it in a dangerous condition. A bridge engineer who was working close by, provided the expert advice to assist in replacing the bridge on its bearings. Slough's Principal Engineer commented that 'this was a typical example of how various stakeholders and partners can work together to achieve our common objective to ensure networks are operating effectively.'
- For Traffic Officers, particularly their rolling block procedures and attending to broken down vehicles.
- For Traffic Officers "Going the extra mile" when customer broke down on the M11, first pulling her car onto the grass verge and then persistently trying to contact the AA, who took 3 hours to arrive, to get them to respond urgently. They also provided the customer with a contact number to ring if she felt at all uneasy when they had to return to their base.
- For Traffic Officers for guiding a distressed customer back off the motorway network when she had accidentally joined the M1 after taking a wrong turn.
- From Leicestershire Police and the Country Land and Business Association Game Fair for our contingency and events planner: Game Fair organisers praised our assistance at the event and Police praised the organisation and involvement with the traffic plan.
- For the good customer service provided by HAIL.
- For the response given to a customer regarding congestion and delays. The customer was particularly appreciative of how specific the reply was to their particular circumstances.
- For keeping customers informed during the extended closure of an exit slip road bridge from the M56.
- For the clarity of information in a letter drop and for working at night and off peak periods when carrying out a major resurfacing contract so as to avoid congestion on a busy trunk road.

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- For the communication and help throughout the M6 Jct 42-41 contract.
 - For the works at Allerdene Railway Bridge on the A1 Gateshead Western Bypass. A Radio Newcastle presenter said on air that 'If there are annals of roadwork history this one would have to go down as textbook'.
 - For the considerate way work was carried out on the M5 J25-26 Motorway Bridge works.
 - For the progress of works at Mere on the A303. A customer said that the arrangements for the future full closure was "a monumental achievement".
 - From an MP and his constituents for the re-surfacing of the A1(M) in the vicinity of Welwyn Garden City.
 - For the efficient resurfacing on the M1 between Watford and London (J5-J1) – good progress with minimum disruption.
 - For completing the works to a high standard on the A40. Operatives were extremely polite and professional.
 - From Devon and Cornwall Police regarding Incident Support Units and the level of assistance they are providing to the emergency services.
 - For Agency educational materials given to a Road Safety Playday which was organised by one of our Stakeholders and a local playgroup in Cumbria.
 - From a Parish Councillor for the installation and planning of a crossing on the A303 at Winterbourne Stoke. He had received many comments on the professional way the crossing was installed and the helpful and considerate way the residents were treated.
 - For changing the road layout on the M4 Junction 8/9 slip road which previously was considered a death trap.
 - From the motorcycle community for the attendance of the Agency together with Sussex Safer Roads Partnership at the Brighton Burn. Customers pleased with the Biker Safety Packs and Great Roads Great Rides2 DVDs and journey planning advice. The community felt that positive safety messages were being given out. Customers and safety partners have also appreciated "Shiny Side Up Signs" in Kent and Sussex carrying reminders to the "Think Bike" campaign.
 - From Thrussington Parish Council for installing speed cameras on the A46 at Thrussington/Seagrave Crossroads. There had been a campaign for several years for some sort of traffic calming measures at the busy junction.
 - From various police forces regarding assistance from Incident Support Units following incidents and flooding.

- From Northumberland Estates – a large local landowner – for the informative response to a complaint about ragwort on the verges of the A1.
- On the vast improvement that has been made on the A34 with regards to litter; it is much cleaner.
- For an experimental road surface on the A12 in Essex. The new surface involved cutting grooves into the existing concrete carriageway, resulting in a longer life for the road (as opposed to laying asphalt) and a noticeable reduction in noise for local residents. As a result the technique is being rolled out to other locations in the region.
- For cutting obstructing foliage on the field side of the cycle track from Felton Butler to Montford Bridge. It really did make a difference to the journey which had been previously very difficult.

Send us your feedback

We hope that this report will help to show you how important customer feedback is to the Highways Agency. Should you wish to let us know what you think about any aspect of our work, good or bad, please get in touch.

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Customer Champion Team
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