

Raising the safety agenda



Dr Ryan Wood, technical manager for Colas, outlines why safety must be the industry's number one priority

Over the next few weeks the road industry's leading professional body, the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) will be carrying out a survey in association with Colas looking at the future of the UK's highways and the perceptions and attitudes of our industry peers.

One of the most important questions to my mind is the one focused on road worker safety. We are trying to find out what is the biggest challenge to road worker safety within our industry. The answers will give us a steer on what the sector thinks and I anticipate that some very interesting responses will emerge.

As a contractor myself I know that it is a contractor's first duty to protect its workforce. But I also understand that with 35.6 million vehicles on the road and with our roadworks vying for space with drivers, we need to unite with our customers and the public to keep everyone on the network safe.

This was recognised at last October's first road worker safety summit, which was well reported in *Highways Magazine*.

The result of that was the creation of a taskforce including Highways England, ADEPT - the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport, the Highways Term Maintenance Association (HTMA) and the Road Workers Safety Forum (RoWSaF), which was charged with addressing challenges including the sharing of best practice and relations with road users.

Sharing best practice

Innovation and information are going to be crucial in the campaign to improve road worker safety and a fundamental conclusion from the summit was

the enabling of collaboration and engagement between Highways England and local authorities.

This is excellent news because Highways England has been leading the charge on safety - over the next five years annual spend will increase significantly from around £1.5 billion to £4bn. But no one wants the potential quadrupling of the budget to lead to a quadrupling in safety incidents.

Highways England has been actively urging its contractors to develop and share best practice on safety which is something we at Colas have enthusiastically supported.



A portable traffic management access gate

Over the last few months we have rolled out a new portable traffic management access gate that can be operated at a distance by site teams so they are at less risk of abuse or physical injury from motorists trying to drive through a road closure point whilst minimising the plant person interface with vehicles entering work sites.

We have, through something called Project Yellow, upgraded the alert system for impact protection vehicles (IPV) by using thermal imaging cameras as part of a system to warn operatives if a vehicle is looking likely to impact the IPV - and they do; between 2006 to 2011

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Dr Ryan Wood

TRL (Transport Research Laboratory) reported 149 collisions with IPVs on the English strategic network alone.

And we have developed a system of active traffic management using much better signage and bluetooth technology to help guide drivers through traffic diversions which take them off major routes and onto unfamiliar local roads with the added benefit of reducing stress by giving them live diversion journey times.

Through such technology, good information has proved the key to creating calmer driver behaviour through roadworks on our motorways and A-roads.

Transferring safety systems to local roads

These innovations and others like them, trialed and developed on the strategic network now need to be rolled out onto local authority roads far more than they currently have been or we risk creating a class divide in road worker safety.

Equally, arguments need to be made as to why complete closures and diversions for many works activities are not pursued, particularly from the agenda of improving road worker safety. Furthermore if managed correctly with our customers and through improved engagement with the public any impact on customer satisfaction and inconvenience can usually be mitigated.

With Highways England setting the standards and working with the industry to bear the development costs of new road worker safety techniques, it is up to all of us to make sure they are now explained and employed on our local networks.

After all none of us who want to continue to be regarded as quality contractors, can risk the damage to our reputation caused by local road worker safety incidents, especially when our big national client is demanding zero harm. 🚫

