

— OFFICE OF THE —
SCOTTISH ROAD WORKS COMMISSIONER

Road Works co-ordination in Greenock, March 2025
Investigation Report

1 July 2025

Introduction

On 3 March 2025, as a consequence of concurrent works carried out by a number of organisations, extensive delays to road users in Greenock were experienced. These delays were widely reported in the media and were the subject of political interest.

As Scottish Road Works Commissioner, I decided to undertake a review of the circumstances which led to these works taking place concurrently, including the planning stages and the responses of both the Road Works Authorities, Inverclyde Council and Transport Scotland, as well as those of the statutory undertakers involved.

My main aim was to establish if there had been any breach of statutory duties with a secondary aim to identify any learning that could be applied to future works.

I collected evidence from Inverclyde Council, Transport Scotland, Scottish Power Energy Networks and Scottish Water, following up with discussion with relevant parties.

This report provides a summary of my findings.

NB. A similar report following an incident involving SGN and Transport Scotland on the A9 in October 2023 was published in February 2024.

Legislative Background

Road works activity is mainly governed by the requirements of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA). These requirements place duties on Road Works Authorities to co-ordinate works and on 'undertakers' to co-operate with Road Works Authorities to achieve effective co-ordination.

In the case of the A78, Transport Scotland is the Road Works Authority, acting on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Transport Scotland contracts the day-to-day operation of the trunk road network to area Operating Companies – in the case of the A78, this is Amey. However, Transport Scotland retains responsibility for its duties as Road Works Authority.

Inverclyde Council is Road Works Authority for all of the other roads affected.

Scottish Power Energy Networks is a Distribution Network Operator and has statutory powers granted under the Electricity Act 1989 to place apparatus (e.g. cables) in roads and to maintain such apparatus.

Scottish Water has similar powers under the Water (Scotland) Act 1980.

In exercising these powers, both become an 'undertaker' in terms of the NRSWA and have to comply with various requirements in that act. Whilst both employ contractors to plan and undertake works, they retain the responsibility for their duties as undertakers under NRSWA.

The specific duties of relevance to this investigation are contained within Sections 118 and 119 of NRSWA and are as follows:

118 General duty of road works authority to co-ordinate works

(1) A road works authority shall use their best endeavours to co-ordinate the execution of works of all kinds (including works for road purposes) in the roads for which they are responsible—

(a) in the interests of safety,

(b) to minimise the inconvenience to persons using the road (having regard, in particular, to the needs of people with a disability), and

(c) to protect the structure of the road and the integrity of apparatus in it.

(2) That duty extends to co-ordination with other road works authorities where works in a road for which one authority are responsible affect roads for which other authorities are responsible.

(2A) In discharging their duty under this section, a road works authority shall have regard to all information in the SRWR which relates to the functions of the authority.

(2B) A road works authority shall, so as to maximise the utility of that information for the purposes of subsection (2A)—

(a) assist the Commissioner in complying with the duty imposed by subsection (1) of section 112A (as read with subsection (2) of that section), and

(b) keep that information under surveillance.

(3) The Secretary of State shall issue or approve for the purposes of this section codes of practice giving practical guidance as to the matters mentioned above; and in discharging their general duty of co-ordination and the specific duties imposed by subsections (2) to (2B) a road works authority shall have regard to any such code of practice.

(3A) In discharging all the duties referred to in subsection (3), a road works authority shall have regard also to such guidance as is contained in the practice referred to in section 17(4)(b) of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005.

(4) If it appears to the Commissioner that a road works authority are not properly discharging their general duty of co-ordination, he may direct the authority to supply him with such information as he considers necessary to enable him to decide whether that is the case and if so what action to take. The direction shall specify the information to be provided and the period within which it is to be provided.

(5) If after the end of that period (whether or not the direction has been complied with) it appears to the Commissioner] that the authority are not properly discharging their general duty of co-ordination, he may direct the authority to take such steps as he considers appropriate for the purpose of discharging that duty. The direction shall specify the steps to be taken and the period within which they are to be taken, and may include a requirement to make a report or periodic reports to the Commissioner as to what steps have been taken and the results of taking them.

(6) A direction under this section may be varied or revoked by a further direction.

119 General duty of undertakers to co-operate

(1) An undertaker shall as regards the execution of road works use his best endeavours to co-operate with the road works authority and with other undertakers—

(a) in the interests of safety,

(b) to minimise the inconvenience to persons using the road (having regard, in particular, to the needs of people with a disability), and

(c) to protect the structure of the road and the integrity of apparatus in it.

(1A) In discharging the duty under this section, an undertaker shall have regard to all information in the SRWR about matters which might affect, or be affected by, works being or proposed to be carried out by the undertaker.

(1B) An undertaker shall, so as to maximise the utility of that information for the purposes of subsection (1A)—

(a) assist the Commissioner in complying with the duty imposed by subsection (1) of section 112A (as read with subsection (2) of that section), and

(b) keep that information under surveillance.

(1C) In subsections (1A) and (1B), “undertaker” does not include a person having permission under section 109 to execute road works.]

(2) The Secretary of State shall issue or approve for the purposes of this section codes of practice giving practical guidance as to the matters mentioned in subsection (1); and—

(a) so far as an undertaker complies with such a code of practice he shall be taken to comply with his duty under that subsection, and

(b) a failure in any respect to comply with any such code is evidence of failure in that respect to comply with that duty.

(2A) In discharging the duties imposed by subsections (1) to (1B), an undertaker shall—

(a) comply with any direction in that respect given to the undertaker by the Commissioner, and

(b) have regard to such guidance as is contained in the practice referred to in section 17(4)(b) of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 (asp 12), and paragraphs (a) and (b) of

subsection (2) shall apply in relation to any such direction as they apply in relation to the code of practice referred to in that subsection.

(2B) If it appears to the Commissioner that an undertaker is not properly complying with his duty under subsection (1), he may direct the undertaker to supply him with such information as he considers necessary to enable him to decide whether that is the case and, if so, what action to take. The direction shall specify the information to be provided and the period within which it is to be provided.

(3)

(4) A direction under this section may be varied or revoked by a further direction.

Pre-works planning

This section considers only the works carried out by Inverclyde Council, Transport Scotland and Scottish Water. SP Energy Networks' works were of the emergency works type, therefore these would not have been subject to any pre-works planning.

Patrick Street signal replacement works – Inverclyde Council

Inverclyde Council advised that signs warning of works at this location were placed on site in advance of works commencing. There is also evidence social media posts and news articles in local outlets advising the public of upcoming works at this location. There was no evidence of discussion with the trunk road authority, however this was not unexpected given the distance between the site and the A78 meant that the effect of the works on the trunk road was likely to be negligible.

A78 footway resurfacing works – Transport Scotland/Amey

It has been ascertained that arrangements for when works would be carried out changed at various points during the planning process. This led to a degree of confusion on the part of Inverclyde Council. Initial notifications from Amey (early April 2024) advised works would be carried out on night shift working. Revisions advising that traffic management would be in place during the day (mid-late 2024) were reported to the Inverclyde local coordination meeting, recorded on the SRWR and shared with Inverclyde Council in copies of Amey's

programme of works. Traffic modelling of the revised proposals was also undertaken. Press releases were issued on 15 January 2025 and 14 March 2025.

High Street ground investigation works – Inverclyde Council (on Trunk Road)

These works (on the A78 trunk road) were undertaken by Inverclyde Council. This necessitated that Inverclyde Council liaise with Amey. These works were recorded as 'Minor' works, meaning their impact was likely to be limited. It is noteworthy that minutes of the February 2025 Amey/Inverclyde Council liaison meeting showed these be planned for a start in May. It is understood that the start date was brought forward due to the works being time-sensitive due to their connection with nearby re-development works.

Larkfield Road/Hilltop Road – Scottish Water

A pre-start meeting was held between Inverclyde Council and Scottish Water in November 2024. A site visit confirmed that works at this location were unlikely to have made a significant contribution to overall delays as this is unlikely to be an attractive alternative route.

Road network status prior to 3 March 2025

Both Inverclyde and Amey report no significant issues caused by works prior to 3 March 2025.

Events on Monday 3 March 2025

On Saturday 1 March, SP Energy Networks started emergency works on Eldon Street. These were necessary to ensure continuity of supply to vulnerable customers. At this time, works were also in progress on the A78, Patrick Street and Larkfield Road/Hilltop Road.

This situation remained the same and on Monday 3 March, it was reported that lengthy delays were occurring in Greenock town centre. It was also reported that similarly lengthy delays were occurring on the A78.

Discussions between SP Energy Networks and Inverclyde Council took place on 3 and 4 March. Whilst there is no formal record of these, it is understood that these focussed on expediting the works to allow traffic management to be removed as quickly as possible. It is

understood that this took place on the afternoon of Tuesday 4 March and that disruption eased.

Discussions also took place (although not recorded) between Amey and Inverclyde Council on 4 March about how traffic management on the A78 could be amended to limit cumulative disruption. There is no record of whether or not changes were made.

Post incident actions

Discussions between Inverclyde Council and Amey took place on 14 and 15 March to discuss the effect that train cancellations over the weekend of 15 and 16 March were likely to have on the road network.

A meeting between Inverclyde Council, Transport Scotland and Amey was held on Monday 17 March. Again, conclusions of this do not appear to have been recorded,

Recommendations

I would make the following recommendations for consideration in the planning and execution of future works in this area:

1. Improved liaison between Transport Scotland and Inverclyde Council.
2. Matters discussed and decisions made should be formally recorded.
3. Communication channels between utilities, contractors and the roads authority should be clearly defined with clear escalation procedures in place before works commence.
4. Works on key strategic routes such as the A78 should be well communicated in advance to ensure the largest number of affected road users is informed

Conclusions

There is no doubt that works in the Greenock area cumulatively caused significant disruption to road users for a period in early March 2025. This situation persisted for approximately 2 days. Whilst some minor shortcomings have been identified, I found no significant evidence that any statutory duties had been breached in the planning and execution of these works.

There are some lessons to be learned in the planning of the works and in particular in the response to the issues encountered but I am encouraged that the utility and roads authorities have recognised this. Going forwards, I am hopeful that improved liaison between Inverclyde Council and Amey will help to minimise disruption should a similar situation arise in the future. Improved record keeping will also allow lessons to be more effectively learned where shortcomings are identified.

Kevin Hamilton

Scottish Road Works Commissioner

19 June 2025