

This short guide explains how Kent manages work to the highway and the pipes and cables below and above it. It covers the basic legislation and how quality of the finished work is monitored. The guide explains how Kent works within national legislation to minimise the impact of road works.

The legal situation

Are utility companies allowed to dig up the road?

To provide water, sewerage, gas, electricity, and telecommunications services, utility companies have rights with regard to develop and maintain their apparatus. They all have powers to lay maintain and improve their apparatus within streets.

What powers does Kent have to manage and coordinate this work?

Work carried out on the highway, whether by utility companies or Kent as Highway Authority, can unavoidably cause disruption to road users. It is necessary to balance the rights that people have to access all available services against the disruption that may be caused in providing, maintaining, and enhancing the pipes and cables that supply these services.

The New Roads and Street Works Act (NRSWA) and the Traffic Management Act provide the framework to manage and coordinate the work to minimise disruption to the traveling public but equally to allow the statutory undertakers to carry out what is required of them by statute.

The NRSWA:

- Places a duty on the street authority to co-ordinate works of all kinds on the highway.
- Places a duty on undertakers to co-operate in the process.
- Makes provision for Lane Rental (explained later).

The Traffic Management Act was brought in to provide better conditions for all road users. It has:

- Introduced a duty on traffic authorities to manage their network.
- Created new legislation that enables Kent to run a permit scheme.

How Kent Manages and Coordinates Roadworks

Kent uses the very latest legislation and approaches. The Kent Permit Scheme drives improvement in how work on the highway is carried out, and the Lane Rental Scheme focuses on the busiest roads in Kent. Kent's roadwork co-ordination teams work with those working on the highway and use the legislation to reduce inconvenience and delays caused by road works to an absolute minimum. This aims to deliver growth without transport gridlock.

The Kent Permit Scheme

The scheme requires those working on the highway to apply for a permit. Conditions can be applied to permits granted for work and these are aimed at minimising inconvenience and disruption.

The Kent Permit Scheme delivers improvements to the way work is carried out on the highway, routinely achieving:

- Over 10 years occupation of a highway saved each year through extending working hours and joint working with several companies working at the same time. This equates to saving 1 day in every 15.
- A 26% reduction in complaints and enquiries. These have steadily reduced since the introduction of the Kent Permit Scheme as better information has been made available and the implementation of work on the highway has improved.
- Over 98% of sites have been completed to original programme or earlier. Before the permit scheme only 86% of work was completed to time.

The Kent Lane Rental Scheme

Kent additionally is one of only two authorities in the UK piloting a Lane Rental Scheme. This is aimed at further cutting congestion on key routes by giving those working on our highways a clear financial incentive to reduce the scale and duration of roadworks on the county's busiest roads.

- The Kent Lane Rental Scheme covers about 5% of Kent's 5,000-mile network.
- The charges apply at certain times of day, and in some cases at times of year when routes are impacted by tourism or school runs.
- Road closures are charged at £2,000 and £1,600 a day and lane closures at £800, £400, £600, or £300 dependant on disruption caused and the location.
- It is estimated that there has been a 90% reduction in occupying the strategic roads at the busiest times.

How Kent Checks Quality of Work and Good Working Practice

The main purpose of inspections is to protect the highway asset, arguably a local authority's most valuable asset.

It is also critical that inconvenience is minimised. Conditions are applied to permits granted for work on the highway, these are aimed at minimising that inconvenience. To improve compliance with the permit conditions more inspections are being carried out on live sites. This includes work at the weekends.

The Inspection Regime for Kent

There are three categories of inspection, these are:

- Category A for work in progress looking at how the work is carried out and the safety of the sites.
- Category B for when work is complete looking for the site to be cleared of equipment and materials and most importantly the quality of the reinstatement.
- Category C for just before the end of the guarantee period looking at the quality of the reinstatement. looking for failures such as edge cracking, trips, depressions or crowning, quality of surface, and correct material used.

Category A, B and C inspections are purely visual and can only reveal failures such as edge cracking, trips, depressions or crowning, quality of surface, and that the correct material is used.

Kent aims to inspect 1 out of every 2 sites at one of the inspection stages. This is more stringent and exceeds the national guidance. As a result the quality of work has improved steadily improving year on year with over 97% now passing the visual inspections.

There is an ongoing testing programme looking at the thickness and quality of material used in reinstatements. Kent has taken targeted action against the poorest performers demanding plans for improvement. The pass rate for the tests in Kent have risen steadily, increasing from 62.8% in 2009/10 to in excess of 80% in 2014/15, this is in contrast to a national pass rate of around 60%.

Where can I see information on Roadworks in my area?

Roadworks.org is a publically accessible website enabling virtually real time information on Roadworks planned or current and the type of traffic control and likely disruption caused.

The web page is able to be customised to match the level of information required and can provide alerts on a route or over an area of interest.

The web link is: <http://kent.roadworks.org/>