



National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) response to BEIS consultation: Building our Industrial Strategy

Introduction

As the UK's only trade association representing utilities and their contractors on street works issues, we promote best practice, self-regulation and a two-way relationship with Government and other relevant stakeholders. The National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) is also the utility arm of the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC(UK)), working collaboratively with roads / local authorities and national and regional governments to drive up standards of road and street works in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. This response is specifically the views of NJUG members, not representing HAUC.

As this response will set out, street works play a critical role delivering and maintaining UK infrastructure which is critical to improving UK productivity, competitiveness and balanced economic growth.

NJUG welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the Government's proposed approach to building an Industrial Strategy. NJUG would emphasise the importance of street works as an enabler of new and upgraded infrastructure.

2. Are the 10 pillars suggested the right ones to tackle low productivity and unbalanced growth? If not, which areas are missing?

The ten pillars which the Green Paper identifies offer an opportunity to improve UK productivity, competitiveness and balanced economic growth. NJUG welcomes the recognition of the importance of new and upgraded infrastructure to a modern Industrial Strategy.

Delivering pillars 3,4,7 and 9 requires significant investment in new and upgraded infrastructure, particularly utilities infrastructure. It is welcome that the government recognises the value of having the highest possible standards of energy, water and communications infrastructure across the UK, and appreciates the benefits these generate in terms of supporting small businesses to start and grow, securing the transition to a low carbon economy, and enabling house building on the required scale.

NJUG would emphasise the role that street works play in delivering the government's stated ambitions by allowing infrastructure upgrades and maintenance to take place. Street works are a vital part of ensuring safe, secure and reliable essential services, which underpin the UK economy and make a major contribution to economic growth, both directly through multi billion pound investment in utility networks and indirectly through connecting new businesses and consumers.

In addition, many new innovations and technological developments will require street works to install the key infrastructure. This includes electric vehicles, where street works will play a key role in installing the charging infrastructure across the UK, and in building the infrastructure to enable widespread 5G coverage.

As our members are called upon to help government achieve its Industrial Strategy ambitions, which they stand ready to do, we urge the government to ensure a supportive operating environment for street works that avoids punitive cost or regulations.

For there to be meaningful progress on these ten pillars, the government will need to take a strategic and coherent approach towards street works, recognising them as a crucial mechanism for achieving a modern Industrial Strategy.

15. Are there further actions we could take to support private investment in infrastructure?

17. What further actions can we take to improve the performance of infrastructure towards international benchmarks? How can government work with industry to ensure we have the skills and supply chain needed to deliver strategic infrastructure in the UK?

NJUG would emphasise the importance of the government adopting a strategic approach to street works, recognising the role that it plays in delivering towards at least four of the ten pillars that have been identified.

This should include the government adopting a co-ordinated approach to street works policy measures and considering in the round the impact of measures which may inhibit the ability of utilities companies to invest in new or upgraded infrastructure.

Impact of street works policy measures

Street works inevitably can cause disruption for motorists and other road users. NJUG members are committed to mitigating the impact of street works through greater collaboration and coordination of works and by using innovative methods. The NJUG *Vision for Street Works* sets out seven key goals which the industry has committed to in order to improve outcomes for everybody. These include a commitment to safety, focussing on high quality, minimising disruption, keeping the public fully informed, using sustainable methods and materials, avoiding damage to underground assets, and promoting innovation.

Local authorities have all the necessary powers to coordinate, plan and manage utility street works. To continue to find solutions to reduce urban congestion, NJUG's view is that there needs to be the time and space to allow these powers to be used effectively and consistently.

Central government and local authorities have consistently introduced new policy measures and regulations which increase the cost and compliance burden on utilities companies and contractors. There is a risk that these additional costs are passed on to customers, and that the compliance process makes it harder to deliver work on time and to budget. This could undermine progress in delivering towards the Industrial Strategy, particularly pillars 3 and 7.

Importance of government adopting a strategic approach to street works

It is critical that the government takes a strategic and coherent approach to street works. This needs to involve liaising with the Department for Transport and utility companies to shape the policy environment affecting street works. BEIS should work with NJUG and utility companies to understand and evidence the impact of street works policy measures on the delivery of pillars 3 and 7 in particular.

With much of the policy framework – including lane rental and permit schemes – facing a period of review, BEIS should use this as an opportunity to work with the Department for Transport and other organisations to understand how the policy burden on utilities companies, and ultimately their customers, households and businesses throughout the UK, in relation to street works can be

minimised, while still reducing the disruption to motorists. This should include the development of an incentive driven environment to avoid cost penalties on NJUG members for 'business as usual' street works.

While street works are clearly an enabler of infrastructure development, they also have the potential to be an obstacle or blocker to work if our members' ability to conduct street works is restricted. An inappropriate policy environment – such as one that places significant cost or compliance burden on utilities companies and their contractors – would encourage this. With delays or extra costs in undertaking street works, infrastructure upgrades are harder to achieve. One such example would be new housing development, where street works have a critical role to play in unlocking land, particularly brownfield land, to enable new housing to be development.

A cross-government approach to street works would provide the best possible opportunity for delivering on the Industrial Strategy's ambitions while also promoting best practice in street works and reducing disruption for other road users. We urge BEIS to liaise closely with the Department for Transport to in this respect, and NJUG is keen to work across government to achieve this.

For more information or to discuss this response further, please contact Angus Hill on 02072 271 645/07736 889 848 or Angus@njug.org.uk.