

A five-year Vision for Street and Road Works in the UK



Our Mission Statement

By 2025, the street and road works sector will make the most of new technology to drive forward safety, quality, efficiency and collaboration, while prioritising the interests of our customers and general public. The sector will ensure the right skills are in place to deliver the infrastructure the UK needs to thrive in the information, carbon-neutral age.

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Foreword

Our Vision is one which builds on the strong collaborative working which both Street Works UK and the Joint Authorities Group believe in passionately. This was the purpose behind the Highways Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC), and we continue to champion this approach. It is clear that utilities and highways authorities can work together, and our Vision seeks to reinforce this cooperation as we look to the future.

Over the next five years, the working practices of the street and road works sector will evolve as we play our part in building an economy fit for the digital age. The nature of future infrastructure expansion means that we will need to be cognisant of new and emerging drivers that will impact our work. As we look ahead to building an infrastructure to support an economy fit for 2025 and beyond, we believe that our future work will be defined by: digitalisation; innovation; skills and workforce; collaboration; and environment and decarbonisation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the way we conduct our day to day business and our working lives, as well as the infrastructure we use and how we travel around our communities. Some working practices may change forever and as our industry adjusts and helps to build and support the UK's economic recovery, we must also strengthen our sector's resilience so we can adapt to change and respond to similar crises should they ever emerge.

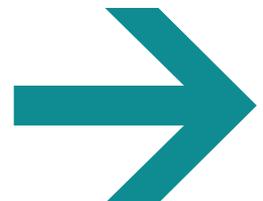
As we look ahead to 2025, we are committed to building on our existing best practice to deliver a Vision that enables street and road works to play its role in supporting an economy and society fit for the 2020s and beyond.



Clive Bairsto CBE
Chief Executive
Street Works UK



David Capon
Chief Executive
Joint Authorities Group (UK)



Introduction



The industry is well-placed to deliver. Across the UK, our sector is leading and supporting the charge to accelerate gigabit-capable broadband coverage and the decarbonisation of our economy.



Across governments, there is wide and increasing recognition of the vital role that street and road works will play in the delivery of the UK's ambitious infrastructure priorities for this next decade. Our country is on the cusp of an infrastructure revolution which will place the street and road works sector firmly into the spotlight, as we make provision and build the support for an economy fit for the information and carbon-neutral age.

The industry is well-placed to deliver. Across the UK, our sector is leading and supporting the charge to accelerate gigabit-capable broadband coverage and the decarbonisation of our economy. Our role in helping to meet these ambitions is even more important as the UK charts its way out of the economic turbulence caused by COVID-19.

To ensure our sector continues to prioritise the interests of consumers and the wider public and ensures the UK continues to thrive, we have developed this five-year Vision which sets out our aspirations for street and road works. We have identified five main themes that will be at the heart of our future work:

- 1. Digitalisation**
- 2. Innovation**
- 3. Skills and workforce**
- 4. Collaboration**
- 5. Environment and decarbonisation**

With a strong focus on these areas, we will rise to the challenge. But that will not be enough. We will need to be agile, adapting to changes that need to happen in partnership between Promoters, Authorities, and respective governments.

This Vision analyses each theme, sets out its importance to our sector and conveys the role street and road works should be playing to contribute powerfully to the UK's development over the next five years.

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1. Digitalisation



If we are to help build a digital future that benefits our members, meets the expectations of our partners in government and provides the service customers and the wider public need, we must know our aims for the digital future.

1. Digitalisation



Why is it important?

Our world is becoming increasingly digital. The public are used to shopping and transacting online and our businesses are increasingly reliant on digital processes. This can speed up processes that in the past took extra time, cost, and travel; but in its place comes a demand for near instantaneous information.

Customers and the general public increasingly expect to know where works are and the impact it is likely to have on them. Delivering more efficient and effective works will help meet the dual challenges for local authorities and central governments of greater efficiency and speed of works, whilst also helping to reduce administrative and cost burdens for industry. We should instinctively challenge any 'business as usual' approach that does not deliver information and works at a fast pace to keep road space available.

Critically, the sector has already glimpsed the challenges posed by introducing digital systems and in the coming five years there will be calls for more digital change, not less. We cannot be a passenger in this work, as it risks our ability to deliver the high quality of works expected of us. As a result, we must be clear on our priorities and how we can drive digitisation that truly benefits the sector.



Our Vision

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Street Works UK and JAG(UK) believe that key to this is ensuring greater transparency of information. Greater transparency can help to keep customers informed, demonstrate the quality of work being undertaken and the scale of economic value it brings. It can also help to underpin important benchmarking and ask important questions about how these projects can be improved, whilst rightly championing teams leading the way. Transparency can go further, by aiding organisations to work together more seamlessly with other utilities and local authorities, and being a strong empirical basis for government to consider incentives for strong results. Together, this will drive performance improvement and deliver the service and information that will help consumers, utilities, local authorities and government to do more.

A digital future should also support all parties to better understand the sector through analytics. Better data drives better operational decisions.

Digital solutions must be used to overcome barriers that utilities, highways authorities, the public and partners face and not create new or larger bureaucracy that adds extra burdens. Managing this and prioritising the effective planning and decision-making surrounding works over the next five years will help achieve a step change that everyone can recognise as a benefit.

“Digital problems require digital solutions, and the street works sector is not exempt from that. We must harness the power of data and analytics to enable us to work faster and smarter, and overcome any cultural or bureaucratic barriers.”

Richard Broome
Managing Director of LSBUD

2. Innovation



The uptake of innovation can be costly for utilities and local authorities. Businesses and highways authorities need to manage risk well, but equally be prepared to robustly make the economic case for investment in innovative techniques and materials.

2. Innovation



Why is it important?

Innovation is a core part of the street works sector and a key component to delivering the UK's infrastructure priorities. However, it can be easily deprioritised or viewed with studied scepticism.

The uptake of innovation can be costly for utilities and local authorities. Businesses and highways authorities need to manage risk well, but equally be prepared to robustly make the economic case for investment in innovative techniques and materials. Within the context of a post-COVID world, it is even harder to justify additional expenditure at a time when the country is responding to a global health crisis.

However, innovation in street works is a proven way of streamlining works to help avoid disruption. Street Manager is an excellent example of how the sector is innovating to create a new digital platform to improve the management of street works. Similarly, the new edition of the Specification for the Reinstatement of Openings in Highways (SROH) provides utilities and contractors with an opportunity to be flexible, to innovate and conduct works at the first time of asking. Ultimately, driving an uptake of innovation will help to deliver efficiency in street works, thereby helping to drive down costs across the sector and, in some areas, contribute to the decarbonisation agenda.

“It is important that the street works industry strives to be at the forefront of innovation, constantly evolving with newer and better methods of operating to meet changing conditions. We have a unique opportunity with the implementation of new regulations, and this Vision will be crucial for us if we want to drive innovation forward.”

Harry Pearl
CEO of Roadmender



Our Vision

To meet the ambitions set out in our mission statement, our sector has an important role to play in delivering innovation in street works.

Firstly, over the course of the next five years we must drive an uptake in innovation. As part of this, HAUC will act as a champion of innovation by demonstrating the role it can play in realising the country's infrastructure ambitions. However, we cannot act alone. Government, local authorities and utilities must all work together to create an environment which fosters innovation, helping to deliver more efficient works. Infrastructure providers, utilities, contractors and suppliers will then be able to make the business case for investment and help drive greater use of available innovation.

Secondly, we must also cast our eyes forward to look at the challenges that will await us in five years' time. By then, many of the systems and materials that we use today will be outdated and as a sector, it is essential that we are at the forefront of driving the development of future innovation. Together, we will need to analyse how our sector will look in the new Information and carbon-neutral age so we can identify the types of innovations will help us to deliver efficient and cost-effective works. To support this, over the course of the next five years, government, utilities and local authorities will need to collaborate to drive the development of innovations for future use. This work will already be taking place in-house and in partnership with suppliers, but we must seek greater commitment to innovation adoption. We need to foster an environment of shared learning and ensure information-sharing in innovation terms is instinctive and accessible.

3. Skills and workforce



The scale and speed of street and road works will increase in the future to support infrastructure development. To that end, customers and the general public are likely to see more operatives conducting works in their area.

3. Skills and workforce



Why is it important?

Over the course of the next five years, more will be expected of our workforce to deliver the vital works that will underpin the bold infrastructure priorities being set out by the UK government, devolved administrations, and Metro Mayors.

Before we look ahead, one of the challenges that we must all overcome is the misconception around the types of works that street and road works operatives undertake. Everyday our operatives conduct jobs across the country to ensure we keep the lights on, gas running, water flowing, roads safe, and households online. This misunderstanding was highlighted during the initial response to COVID-19 as many did not know that our operatives were conducting essential works to keep basic utilities and services running. Over the next five years our sector will need to continue championing the role of our workers, setting out the value of street and road works and highway management and why they are taking place.

The scale and speed of street and road works will increase in the future to support infrastructure development. To that end, customers and the general public are likely to see more operatives conducting works in their area. Although the sector will always work to minimise disruption, the public want reassurance that the work being undertaken on their street is of the highest quality. This is particularly pertinent as there is a growing recognition within the industry that gaps are beginning to emerge in the skills of the workforce. While data is scant in this area, to combat these pressures, it is vital that the street and road works workforce is agile, well trained and that sufficient numbers are recruited to meet rising demand.

To build the workforce of the future we must also attract it. Bluntly, an adequately trained workforce of appropriately accredited personnel is a significant resource challenge to our sector already.



Our Vision

Our workforce must be ready to match the scale and speed of street works over the next five years. While utility companies, contractors and local authorities will be working to ensure operatives at all levels are qualified and ready to deliver works, as a sector there are two key challenges that we need to address together.

Firstly, our industry undoubtedly has an image problem. This issue is two-fold: a misconception around the role we play in delivering works; and difficulty in attracting the workforce of the future. Customers and the general public are unaware of the vital role our operatives play. They only see the impact that street and road works have on congestion and liveability in their areas. As the volume of street and road works increases, it must be matched by a sector-wide drive to properly communicate the necessity, value and benefit of street works.

To build the workforce of the future we must also attract it. Bluntly, an adequately trained workforce of appropriately accredited personnel is a significant resource challenge to our sector already. We therefore need to be on the front foot to challenge misconceptions on the types of work and roles that are available in street and road works and demonstrate the career path for young and cross-career professionals joining the sector. We need to actively champion the vital work of our industry and show the entire country the value a role in street works can have on our community, and people's lives. Gaps in the workforce will be fixed in part if we can effectively promote a valued career trajectory for an individual that chooses to enter our industry.

Secondly, while we can accept there are growing gaps in our workforce for a variety of reasons, we lack the necessary data to showcase the areas of greatest need. Often, workforce gaps are only raised through anecdotal evidence. We need to reverse this and accumulate data that cuts across the entirety of our sector so we may begin to analyse and identify which areas need the greatest level of support. By doing so, we will ensure that the street and road works industry continues to play its part in delivering high quality works into the next five years and beyond.

4. Collaboration



The industry has seen at first-hand how sector-led collaboration can be used to tackle the most complex works and knotty problems. Our ambition is that this approach be adopted throughout the sector on a consistent basis.



4. Collaboration



Why is it important?

A shared understanding of our work, processes and problems is the clearest way to begin tackling many of the cross-cutting challenges facing the utilities and highways authorities over the coming five years.

A common picture for all will help to reduce disruption for our workforce and customers and will protect our utility infrastructure from unnecessary repair work and fewer digs. As well as reducing administrative and operational costs for the sector, it will also tackle concerns road users have and highlight the work of industry and highways authorities in delivering high quality works and lower occupation of the road. Fundamentally, driving greater collaboration will help the sector to deliver more efficient work programmes.

Working together is too often done at the point of need when confronted with the most challenging circumstances. It can mean that issues go further than necessary, problems are exacerbated, and conflict becomes the default. But when confronted with complex challenges, local authorities and utilities can work together quickly to develop fresh and innovative solutions. Yet this is not default practice due to the challenges facing all parties. Embedding these practices and removing barriers to doing so must be a key focus over the next five years.

“The next five years will be critical. Working collaboratively with partners, the Vision will help UK’s energy network operators to keep the country’s energy flowing while tackling climate change, supporting the economy and training a skilled workforce.”

Paul Fidler
Director of Operations at Energy Networks Association



Our Vision

The industry has seen at first-hand how sector-led collaboration can be used to tackle the most complex works and knotty problems. Our ambition is that this approach be adopted throughout the sector on a consistent basis.

Over the next five years, we must drive the uptake of collaboration across utilities, contractors, local authorities and government. This is the only way the utilities and highways authorities can unlock the benefits highlighted above. Street Works UK and JAG will act as champions for greater industry collaboration and seek to embed these practices in our organisations. Work will also need to be undertaken to identify clear steps that can be taken which aid and incentivise collaboration.

In part, this will require our industry championing greater clarity and consistency of approach taken by our partners. Devolution of power has led to a patchwork of different local authorities and systems, and for national companies that partner with the majority of authorities, this can create administrative and regulatory burdens. All parties recognise the importance of schemes designed with local communities in mind, but this can also have practical implications for utilities and project teams. Over the next five years we must help build a more consistent approach built on enduring principles, that can better help delivery of works and drive instinctive collaborative working in the industry.

Consistency and uptake must be supplemented by better communication across our sector, too. Communication can help operators and local authorities to better understand when works are taking place and afford opportunities to set up collaborative ventures. As greater information, transparency and innovation is developed over the next five years, our sector must take steps to find strong local avenues to share information and promote more flexibility to adopt new schemes and seize opportunities. Doing this will put industry and highways authorities in a strong place to call for the tools it relies on to be enhanced, to improve communication between utilities, contractors, local authorities and government.

5. Environment and decarbonisation



Our governments have committed to net zero emissions by 2050, a commitment industry and highways authorities welcome and support. Alongside this sits a grave responsibility to ensure are activities do not harm the environment.



5. Environment and decarbonisation



Why is it important?

Tackling climate change is a burning issue for so many people that industry and local government engages with. Customers are more aware of it, government has set out ambitious plans for it, and the regulators are setting obligations to help meet it. Taking steps to address it has never been a greater priority, with high expectations on all sectors to deliver a national ambition.

At a time when more nationally important infrastructure works will take place, people will increasingly ask whether the sector is playing its part to protect our environment. If we fail in this endeavour, we will rightly be held to account by regulators, government and most importantly the general public. Yet, in the face of this challenge it is an opportunity for our sector to define the role we will play in delivering the nation's priorities and showcase the positive work we are doing to drive this agenda forward.

An active focus on the environment and decarbonisation will also help to place industry and highways authorities on a stronger footing as new challenges emerge. A credible and ambitious commitment from our sector, that balances decarbonisation, health and safety and delivering infrastructure will help organisations to better plan the steps they must take, drive discussions on reforms that can help the industry and build new resilience.

“Our sector has a responsibility and part to play in mitigating climate change and reducing emissions. The Vision is a clear statement of intent to put the environment at the heart of our sector's work over the coming years”

Samuel Larsen
Programme Lead, Water UK



Our Vision

Our governments have committed to net zero emissions by 2050, a commitment industry and highways authorities welcome and support. Alongside this sits a grave responsibility to ensure are activities do not harm the environment. Our Vision for industry and highways authorities over the next five years is that active steps are taken to define what practically these strands mean for the street works sector.

By defining the role we should play, the sector can help to shape the expectations of customers, local authorities, regulators and government. Defining our role will be a positive step that shows our industry understands the importance of taking action in this area. Moreover, it will help us to better understand what challenges we face to deliver this, both in terms of logistical pressures and current practices which need to be reviewed. As an industry we will probably always have to undertake works of some description in the next half decade, and therefore we must understand the impact this will have on our environment and how we can mitigate it.

Our sector's role in delivering net zero will be crucial. From delivering new infrastructure that aids customers, to embracing electric vehicles and reducing emissions ourselves, street works will be at the heart of future change. Without a positive plan defining the role we intend to play, we risk being side-lined by other sectors taking steps to reduce emissions. In five years' time, the street works sector must have a clearer understanding of how it can uniformly reduce emissions to help build this message further. We must also be open to the challenges of innovation, our workforce and digitisation that we will need to work with our partners to overcome if we are to achieve it. Together, this will help propel us forward and present as the sector as looking to the future and its role in achieving net zero.



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