

A-one+

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F.A.O. C Bailey
Acting Senior Coroner for Teesside
The Coroners Service
Middlesbrough Town Hall
Albert Road
Middlesbrough
TS1 1QJ

16 October 2014

Our ref
Your ref



Dear Sir

A66 Elton Interchange, Stockton-on-Tees
Jerome Antoine Marie Gonnet

I write on behalf of A-one+ Integrated Highway Services (“A-one+”) in response to your letter of 22 September 2014 and the attached Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths

The Report relates to a road traffic collision that took place on the A66 eastbound carriageway in the vicinity of Long Newton, to the west of Stockton-on-Tees after a driver travelling in the wrong direction entered the A66 eastbound carriageway from the A66 Elton Interchange, Hartburn.

Section 5 of the Report raises a number of matters of concern in relation to this interchange. Before addressing each of these matters in turn, I consider that it would be helpful to provide some background information on the way in which A-one+ operates, and how our responsibilities interact with those of other organisations.

Background

The Highways Agency is responsible for the management and maintenance of motorways and trunk roads in England. The network of roads which the Highways Agency is responsible for is divided into six regions, which are subdivided into 13 operational areas. Each of these areas is maintained on a day to day basis by a Contractor on behalf of the Agency. A-one+ acts as the Managing Agent Contractor for the North East England region. A-one+’s role is to maintain and carry out minor improvements to the road network within its areas, with overall responsibility retained by the Highways Agency.

Local highway authorities are responsible for the management of maintenance of local roads, which are outside of the Highways Agency's remit.

I have reviewed the matters of concern which you have raised, with input from the Highways Agency, and set out our response below. However, as some of the roads involved form part of the local, rather than national, road network, the local highway authority, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, may be able to provide further clarification and assistance.

Response to matters of concern

1. It is unclear in advance of approaching the junction that the slip road is "no entry", with no information in this regard on the road signs surrounding the junction

The Highways Agency is responsible for the A66 trunk road in the vicinity of Elton Interchange, including the main through carriageways from highway boundary to highway boundary. The Highways Agency is also responsible for the entry and exit slip-roads from and to the locations where they meet the edges of the circulatory carriageways of the roundabouts located to the north and south of the over-bridge.

However, the local roads, including all other arms of these roundabouts, the over-bridge and the roundabouts themselves, are the responsibility of the local highway authority, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. This means that responsibility for the installation and maintenance of road signs leading up to the slip road taken by the female driver on 2 May 2012 rests with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. This responsibility includes placing appropriate advance direction signs on the approach to the interchange to ensure that motorists are aware of the road's layout and direction of traffic.

As the provision of these signs is outside of the responsibility of the Highways Agency and A-one+, I am unable to provide any further information in relation to this concern. However, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council may be able to provide further assistance.

2. Temporary 'No entry' signs at the end of the exit of the slip road are occasionally knocked down, rendering them unnoticeable.

Permanent illuminated 'No entry' signs have been in place on both sides of this slip-road for many years (and were in place at the time of the incident), as required by the relevant regulations, (Chapter 3 of the Traffic Signs Manual) which gives guidance on the size and mounting of such signs as follows:

'The 'no entry' sign to diagram 616 (of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions) should be placed on each side of a one-way road at the point where entry is prohibited. When the road to which the signs apply forms a junction with the side of another road, the signs should be sited in line with the backline of the major road. The signs must be placed so that one is clearly visible at all times to traffic approaching from any permitted direction; this might require a sign to be angled slightly.'

Appendix A of this document also indicates the recommended size of such signs, which relate to the speed of traffic on the relevant road (in this case the roundabout). On the slip road in question, 600mm diameter signs have been installed, which are suitable for traffic speeds of up to 30mph.

In response to the road traffic collision of 2 May 2012, and at Cleveland Police's request, supplementary 'No entry' signs, which are in addition to those mandated under statutory requirements, have been installed. However, one of these signs has been placed in a block paved area of carriageway and this sign is at times knocked over by passing vehicles, as indicated by the Report.

The block paved area at this location was installed to address problems associated with the lower than normal bridge deck level at Elton Interchange when the interchange was originally constructed. When abnormally tall and wide or long loads are being moved along the A66 eastbound carriageway, these vehicles are required to divert from the main carriageway of the A66 over the extents of this interchange. Some of these vehicles, under escort, need to pass through the block paved area and travel in an anticlockwise direction around the roundabout's circulatory carriageway, in order to rejoin the A66.

Consequently, it is not possible to install permanent traffic signs in this area. To address this the supplementary sign has been installed on a temporary sign-frame. This sign is regularly inspected by A-one+ on behalf of the Highways Agency and any damage is rectified as soon as possible.

3. Two other incidents have been reported involving drivers travelling in the wrong direction on this exit slip road.

Both A-one+ and the Highways Agency have been made aware of one of these incidents by Cleveland Police. I can advise that an investigation has been undertaken to identify options for improvement at this interchange. The improvements which are being considered include installing demountable bollards or marker posts in the block paved area and installing additional road markings.

Any proposed improvements are subject to securing appropriate funding. The Highways Agency, allocates its limited funds to improvement schemes by prioritising funding for schemes which are assessed to have the greatest potential safety benefits.

A proposal for these works will be submitted for funding during the next bidding round for improvement schemes. If successful, it is likely that these improvements will be implemented in 2015. In the meantime, the supplementary signs will continue to be regularly inspected and maintained.

I trust that this information is of assistance. If you require any further information or clarification please let me know.

Yours faithfully

General Manager