

Report for Resolution

Report to	Norwich Highways Agency Committee 26 January 2012	Item 6
Report of	Head of city development	
Subject	Review of road closures on football match days	

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to review the experimental arrangement of road closures in the vicinity of Carrow Road on match days and to consider whether to continue with such a scheme

Recommendations

That the committee to ask the head of city development services to arrange for the necessary statutory processes involved in making the experimental traffic regulation order associated with the road closures around the football ground on match days permanent.

Financial Consequences

The costs associated with the road closures are being met by Norwich City Football Club.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority "Strong and prosperous city – working to improve quality of life for residents, visitors and those who work in the city now and in the future" and the service plan priority of maintaining road safety.

Contact Officers

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Background Documents

Experimental Traffic Regulation Order

Correspondence

Report

Background – The need for the road closures

1. In the first few months of the 2010/11 football season there were a number of conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles outside the Carrow Road football ground on match days involving injuries, assaults and vehicle damage. Discussions took place between the football club, the police and the city and county councils to look at ways of avoiding these conflicts and it was decided that vehicles should be excluded from the roads in the immediate vicinity of the ground at the end of the match to allow the supporters to disperse quickly and safely.
2. Until 2006 the police had closed the roads on match days under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 but this practice ceased when the constabulary were advised that it was not appropriate to use such powers as this Act only covered the unexpected thronging of crowds and this was clearly an anticipated event. The council has powers to close roads for events on the highway, but in the instance the event (the football match) was not itself on the highway, the road closures were required for crowd safety, and no specific legislation covers this situation. Many other local authorities have faced the same dilemma in managing football crowds.
3. The decision was taken to introduce a traffic regulation order under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTA84) to allow the roads around the football ground to be closed at critical times. Orders made under RTA84 are normally for fixed times or days, e.g. 10am to 5pm in the Walk, or in certain towns it maybe a specific day of the week for a market.
4. When considering a football match it is more difficult to predict when any closure will be needed and although fixture lists are published in advance these can be subject to change. Even when the date and start time of a match is known, the end of the match is dependant on how much extra time is added. As a consequence, and with the aim of ensuring that as little disruption as possible is caused on the ring road, the descriptions used in the TRO related the closure times and periods to the actual start and end times of the match. This has required us to be creative in descriptions used in the TRO and the times chosen were
 - Old Carrow Road to be closed 90 minutes before the matches started to allow crowds to congregate.
 - The ring road between King Street and Clarence Road to be closed for approximately 5 minutes before the end of the match
 - All closures to be lifted as soon as the majority of the crowds had cleared the stadium area, approximately 15 minutes after the final whistle.

5. As this was an innovative use of a TRO and to allow the effectiveness of the closures to be properly assessed it was decided, with the agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair and local members, that the order should be introduced on an experimental basis. Initially this was for the home matches against Leeds United and Ipswich Town in late 2010, when capacity crowds were expected and there was potential for crowd trouble. Following the success of this initial trial it was decided continue the experimental order for the remainder of the 2010/11 season. When the football club won promotion to the Premier League the experimental order was again extended to see whether this threw up any further challenges in terms of crowd management.
6. An experimental order can run for a maximum of 18 months, and as this one has now been in place for 14 months, a decision is needed on whether to make the experimental order permanent.

Reaction to the Road Closures

7. A meeting was arranged with Councillors from the wards closest to the football ground, to discuss the impact that the closures had had on local residents. Only one member attended and their concerns were much more about the parking problems created by the football club and the noise issues resulting from events at Carrow Road, rather than any direct concerns about the road closures themselves.
8. Throughout the period that the experimental order has been in place the city council has liaised with the security team at Carrow Road, and it is their Head of Security who decides when the closures of the ring road should be implemented (just before the anticipated final whistle of the game) and when they should be lifted (when the majority of the crowd has left the stadium and the immediate vicinity of the ground). The football club considers the closures work very effectively and do not see the need for any changes.
9. The city council has received a handful of comments and complaints about the closures; one supporter complained that he was unable to leave the football club car park just before the end of the match as the roads were closed, while a local resident asked if permits could be issued to people living in the immediate area to allow them access through the closures, which was not practical.
10. The owner of a traffic management company and season ticket holder at NCFC questioned the legal basis for the closures and the methods used for closing the roads. The legal basis for the closures is set out at the start of the report and it is acknowledged that there is no specific legislation to cover this. Similarly there is no legislation to prescribe how such closures should be implemented. Traditional methods of closing roads for the purposes of road works require physical barriers to stop access. This would be completely inappropriate in this instance as the whole idea of the closures is that they stop vehicles but are permeable for pedestrians. Officers are satisfied that the closures are being managed in such a way to effectively manage crowds while minimising the disruption to vehicles.

11. Questions have been asked about the need for advance warning signing of the closures on the ring road. This has been considered but it has been concluded that given the closures are in place for such a short period that any signing would be misleading and cause unnecessary disruption as the time taken to erect and remove the signs would make drivers think that the road was closed for far longer than it actually is.

Conclusion

12. While there remains no ideal legal solution to the problem of managing crowds on the highway in the area of an event, the innovative use of a traffic regulation order has provided a solution for Norwich. It is therefore proposed that the experimental traffic regulation order is made permanent to enable the roads around the football ground to be closed at certain times on match days to ensure that crowd safety is maintained.