



HOW TO AVOID AN 18 MONTH DELAY ON YOUR PROJECT

With the potential for up to 18 months lead time on utility infrastructure work, it is worth giving priority to it in your project programme. Whilst this lead time does not fluctuate with demand in the same way as some of the other major programme items, it is all too often under estimated with significant implications for the project.

Typically a project will require new connections or the abandonment of existing services and in a town or city centre it is most likely that the existing services will need to be diverted to accommodate the project construction programme. As the utilities industry is regulated, this is an area of the programme that is outside the direct control of the project manager who often finds dealing with utilities companies time consuming and frustrating. With the client generally bearing the risk and potentially the cost of a statutory authority's delay, it is important that adequate provision is made in the programme and that once set, it is adhered to.

These timings are seriously affected where infrastructure is physically large. Finding new routes for large diameter pipes in densely packed urban environments is time consuming.

Crossing major barriers such as railways or canals will add significant delay to the programme; six months is not uncommon. The stakeholders responsible for these major barriers also have to protect their own interests as these will be outside the direct control of the utility companies. It may not always be obvious that a major reroute is necessary; this may be dictated by the lack of space locally for the excavation to make the connection and therefore require a lengthy reroute, potentially crossing major barriers to find suitable space to carry out this work.

Whilst it is acceptable to construct most of the diverted infrastructure using your own accredited contractors, the utility companies own the assets and are responsible for service delivery. The utility company therefore has to approve the work in advance, monitor progress and oversee

IT CAN TAKE 18 MONTHS TO MOVE EXTRA HIGH VOLTAGE ELECTRIC CABLES OR LARGE WATER MAINS

“On large projects, there is often a component that requires hard pressed project managers to deal with statutory utilities providers. These interfaces require a detailed understanding of the utilities providers' public-facing agenda and a wide range of ever changing legal restrictions. In short, some specialist knowledge is required to make sure things run smoothly”.

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connection to their network. They will also commission the works and agree to adopt the programme. There is no short cut to this process.

However the statutory utilities companies do have a duty to provide support services to a published standard and are answerable to their regulator. This should at least provide a level of programme certainty. They have to manage every project that is sent to them and provide trained resources to do this.

The key is to give the utilities companies early visibility of the project, establish a positive relationship with them as soon as possible and nurture that relationship throughout the programme of works. It is therefore essential to find out what infrastructure is on or adjacent to the site by commissioning the necessary studies. In addition to helping to determine the impact on a programme, it is also a duty of the client under CDM 2007 regulations to provide this information to the designers. The earlier the information is collected and verified the better the solutions for dealing with any conflict.

Coordinated services drawings should be developed and overlaid with the project design in order to determine the impacts of the infrastructure. This information can be used to generate a utilities programme.

Budget estimates for work should be commissioned from the utilities companies but formal estimates must be commissioned before any works can be programmed. It is worth mentioning that it is very common practice for utility companies to ask for payment in advance of providing services, be they designs, commercial reviews, or construction. The value of some of this work may be less than £100 but the process or service won't start until payment has been received.

TASK	TIME
Information gathering	6 weeks
Invasive site trial holes	20 weeks
Determination of impacts and collation of C3 and C4 quotations	14 weeks for each
Arrangement of new service connections	25 weeks
Abandonment of existing assets	13 weeks
Preparation to construct minor works	5 weeks
Preparation to construct major works	13 weeks
Construction and commissioning of minor works	6 weeks
Construction and commissioning of major works	Several months

This table provides an indication of the times that should be allowed for the various stages of the utility infrastructure work.

It is worth agreeing a procurement strategy with the commercial team at the start of the project. This is a simple step that often gets overlooked and can lead to frustrating delays.

The utilities companies build their construction programmes on a first come first served basis following receipt of payment so project programme dates can't be planned beyond the current date. Leave it to the last minute and you may be facing a very long lead time. In addition you should factor in key holidays where utilities contractors close their sites and pull off the highway. You also should not expect utility companies to keep every type and size of pipe and cable in stock; some special items may take up to three months to procure.

Where works are required on the public highway, the utilities companies have to seek permission from the highways manager for a permit to dig. The rules of engagement are detailed in the Traffic Management Act 2007, which

is currently being enabled across the country. As a general rule, the notice period is three months from receipt of application by the highways authority and this won't start until the money has been paid in advance and the work formally requested by the project manager. Under certain circumstances the notice period can be six months.

These procedures are laid down in law and no protestations from projects managers wanting to make up ground on their programme will change this. Due to the ever-increasing complexity involved in dealing with the utilities companies, projects are beginning to call upon specialist support from consultants that have the knowledge and experience to deal with these matters.

Written by Brian Moone of the Mace Business School and Bob Hollingsworth, services coordination manager with the Mace Group's utilities sector.