

West End electricity cable replacement project – assurances given



I have obtained assurances from Scottish and Southern Energy about a high-voltage electric cable replacement project for part of the West End, following the failure of the first attempt to replace the cable last year after some five weeks into roads disruption on Lochee Road, Fleuchar Street, Scott Street, Blinshall Street, Glenagnes Road and other roads in-between.

Last year, after this disruption, the company abandoned the work as the new underground cabling failed a final quality test.

Last year, whilst it was understood that the company would not implement a cabling system that failed a safety test, I questioned why the testing took place some five weeks into roads disruption. At the time, I wrote to Scottish and Southern Energy seeking an explanation as to why was testing of the new cabling not undertaken before the roads were dug up and made it clear this disruption for no purpose should never happen again.

I have now been advised that the company is coming back next month to re-do the project, as follows :

"The highly technical and challenging project will commence on 6 March 2017 and is programmed to take six months to be completed.

Traffic management systems and diversion of footpaths will be required to protect the public and also our workforce. A brief summary of the requirements as follows:

***A923 Lochee Road, Joint Bay 1/2* – An excavation will be located mostly in the public footpath. A traffic management system will see the A923 road slimmed down in two locations to accommodate a diverted footpath. The road will remain open to traffic which will be able to pass with care. The works are programmed to be undertaken between 6 March 2017 – 24 August 2017.**

***A923 Lochee Road, Joint Bay 2/3* – The excavation is located in the road and will impact traffic turning left into Polepark Road from the City Centre, a traffic management system will see the sequencing of traffic lights staggered to accommodate single direction traffic. The works are programmed to be undertaken between 13 March 2017 – 24 August 2017.**

***Fleuchar Street, Joint Bay 3/4* – A road closure will be required as the excavation will take up a large section of the narrow public road. The diversion around the excavation is 0.3 miles and would take approximately 1 minute by car. Local access for residents, pedestrians, cyclists etc. will be maintained whilst the excavation is open. The road closure and associated works will be in operation from 20 March 2017 – 24 August 2017.**

Scott Street, Joint Bay 4/5 – There a requirement to divert an existing gas pipe ahead of the cable installation works. This will require a full road closure and will be in place for approximately 4 weeks, between 27 March – 24 April 2017. When the gas pipe has been relocated, the road will be opened to a single lane. A traffic management system will be used to protect the public and workforce during the works. All works are programmed to be undertaken between 27 March 2017 – 24 August 2017.

Glenagnes Road , Joint Bay 5/6 – The final excavation will be mainly located on the main road across form the Junction at Logie Avenue. The road is wide enough that traffic will be able to pass the works with care. A traffic management system will be used to protect the public and workforce during the works. The works are programmed to be undertaken between 3 April 2017 – 24 August 2017

SHE Transmission will be engaging the specialist services of Balfour Beatty and Nexans to undertake the project. Balfour Beatty and Nexans are regarded as industry leaders in this field of work and have completed two similar projects in Aberdeen, on behalf of SHE Transmission, to a high standard.

The works are being undertaken through our permitted development rights for underground electricity cables and are programmed to be undertaken between 0730 – 1900, Monday to Friday and 0730 – 1700 on Saturdays. We do not anticipate the need to operate on Sundays unless an emergency situation arises.

Where works are in a residential zone, Fleuchar Street as an example, we will aim to begin the working day from 0800.”

I therefore wrote to Scottish & Southern Energy as follows :

“Can I have an assurance that the new cable has been fully tested in advance of the work taking place to give a guarantee that, unlike in 2016, the area will not be disrupted then the work abandoned due to failure of the safety test on the new high voltage cable?”

I have now received the following reassurance from the company’s Community Liaison Manager :

“In relation to the high voltage cables, you have our assurance that no works will commence on site until the cables have passed their final factory assurance test (FAT). The cables have been through numerous quality and assurance tests and they have passed. The final assurance test will take place on 14 and 15 February. I can certainly let you know the outcome of this.”

I am pleased that Scottish & Southern Energy has given assurances that the new cabling will have completed its testing before any road is dug up to fit it. We cannot have a re-occurrence of what happened last year. There’s been a lot of utilities’ work in the area in the past year and I am anxious this electricity work is undertaken with the minimum of disruption to residents and businesses in the area.

Image of area affected (thin red line shows route of the cable) :



[“Obvious benefits” to Third Menai crossing – Ken Skates](#)

Speaking ahead of the meeting, he outlined the work which has taken place to date and explained why the Welsh Government’s preferred solution was a third Menai crossing.

The Economy and Infrastructure Secretary said:

“I have long been clear in my commitment to a third Menai crossing, and the obvious benefits it would bring to local communities and the economy. The current system is often at or over capacity and with major projects such as Wyfla Newydd in the pipeline it’s imperative that we act quickly to look at how we can improve accessibility.

“We’ve looked in detail at all possible solutions to the existing Britannia Bridge, from providing three narrow lanes with tidal flow on the existing bridge to moving the eastbound merge to smooth traffic flow. These options have been ruled out following significant safety issues identified in risk assessments and concerns raised by the emergency services.

“We are now developing a preferred option for a new bridge in consultation with interested parties to see what’s possible. As

part of this process, we continue to explore with the National Grid opportunities for a combined road and cable crossing – something which could provide added benefits to the scheme for all concerned.”

Turning his attention to other transport projects currently taking place in North Wales, the Economy Secretary said:

“The A55 is clearly another priority for Welsh Government, with several multi million pound improvement schemes to improve resilience, reduce traffic delays, tackle pinch points and upgrade junctions already in progress, and the consultation into the £200m Deeside Corridor project almost under way.

“Alongside rail modernisation, our first Wales and Borders franchise and our plans for a North Wales Metro, these are exciting times for transport in North Wales. I’m keen to progress these projects at the earliest opportunity so that communities across North Wales can feel the benefits as soon as possible.”

[Li sends congratulations on China-Australia Tourism Year](#)

Premier Li Keqiang sent congratulations to the opening ceremony of the China-Australia Tourism Year, which was held on Sunday in Sydney.

The premier affirmed that cultural exchanges are one of the most significant pillars for a bilateral relationship and he hopes both countries can expand cultural and people-to-people exchanges through such events as the China-Australia Tourism Year.

Li also said China and Australia are popular tourism destinations, with more than 2 million trips made between the two countries last year.

Both countries, the premier said, respect the diversity of global civilization and China is willing to promote cooperation with Australia based on mutual respect and openness, and bring more benefits to both peoples as well as global peace and stability based on their friendship over the past 45 years.

In his congratulatory letter, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the past 20 years has seen major achievements in tourism cooperation due to the efforts of both countries. China has become the most significant tourism market for Australia, and the number of tourists visiting the Oceanic country

reached 1.2 million in the last year, he said.

Turnbull said the China-Australia Tourism Year marks the beginning of a new era for bilateral relationships and both countries will share opportunities for development in the future.

More than 2,000 people, including officials, leading tourism figures and local residents, attended the ceremony.

Bias, balance and alternative facts

The BBC regularly says it must be getting it right because both sides accuse it of bias. The problem is there are more than two sides in many cases.

I have never argued the BBC is biased against the Conservatives and in favour of Labour. I understand the lengths they go to criticise both Conservative Ministers and Opposition Spokesmen, and grasp their idea of balance, offering an alternative view in many cases.

The issue of bias and alternative truth takes more subtle forms. There is firstly the bias in the selection of stories. The BBC loves running endless Brexit and climate change stories. It loves making other news items into Brexit or climate change stories, when many of us think there is little or no link. There is the endless sourcing of "the government should spend more" stories, because there are so many lobby groups with that as an objective. People who want less government, who like Brexit, or are sceptical about the theory that man made CO2 is driving damaging climate change do not feel properly represented. Scientists are not interviewed with a view to highlighting errors, inconsistencies and poor research in the way politicians are.

Then there is the unintentional bias of the questions. Ministers are regularly put under pressure for not spending enough. It is very rare to hear Ministers under pressure for spending too much, for presiding over government waste, for failing to find cheaper and better ways of doing things. There is nearly always an automatic assumption that spending a lot in any particular part of the public sector is good, and spending more is even better. There is little probing behind the slogans to find out what the real numbers are, and to ask why in some cases so much is spent to so little good effect.

There is the permanent anti Brexit bias in many scripts and questions. The interviewer or journalist starts from the assumption that Brexit must be damaging. Good news is then recorded "despite Brexit", often with a caveat that it could deteriorate in the future when Brexit bites more. Never do you hear an interviewer asking the other side to comment on how the Brexit vote has triggered higher car output, more homes being built, higher consumer activity, better confidence levels.

Prior to the referendum there was always a bias against Brexit or Eurosceptic speakers. We had to be introduced with unflattering descriptions, interrupted more, and usually assumed to be wrong. I remember when I was warning about the banking crash and had a proposal on how to handle it, I was competing with Lib Dem Vince Cable. I wanted controlled administration of overstretched banks – the system they now say they will use in future – whilst he wanted bank nationalisation. He got many more interviews than I did. He was often introduced as an expert because he had had a former job as an economist at Shell. I was introduced as a Eurosceptic with my past roles in business and investment ignored, though they were more relevant experience.

I'm all in favour of them asking me tough questions, but I just want them to do the same for all the so called experts as well.

[UN urges renewed fight to end female genital mutilation as populations grow in countries where practice occurs](#)

6 February 2017 – Female genital mutilation denies women and girls their dignity and causes needless pain and suffering, with consequences that endure for a lifetime and can even be fatal, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has said, stressing that the UN Sustainable Development Agenda promises an end to this practice by 2030.

On this Day of Zero Tolerance, let us build on positive momentum and commit to intensifying global action against this heinous human rights violation for the sake of all affected women and girls, their communities and our common future, the Secretary-General said in a message on the International Day, marked annually on 6 February to strengthen momentum towards ending the practice of female genital mutilation, globally recognized as a violation of the human rights of girls and women.

Despite a significant overall decline in the prevalence of the practice, widely referred to by the acronym FGM, the United Nations warns that this progress is likely to be offset as the population grows in countries where female genital mutilation is practiced, and without beefed up efforts to eliminate it, more girls will be cut.

In a blog post on the occasion of the International, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women, wrote: "The cutting and sewing of a young child's private parts so that she is substantially damaged for the rest of her life, has no sensation during sex except probably pain, and may well face further damage when she gives birth, is to many an obvious and horrifying violation of that child's rights."

It is a kind of control that lasts a lifetime, she continued. It makes a mockery of the idea of any part being truly private and underlines the institutionalized way in which decisions over her own body have been taken from that girl – one of some 200 million currently.

The main reason that FGM continues – as it does in some 30 countries across three continents – is out of a desire for social acceptance and to avoid social stigma, according to a 2016 report by the Secretary-General .

The hidden nature of the support for ending the practice slows down the process of abandonment, the authors wrote.

World must speed up progress to end female genital mutilation by 2030

Underlining that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 and now heading their second year of implementation, recognized the close connection between FGM, gender inequality, and development – and reignited global action to end the practice by 2030, heads of UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UN Population Fund (UNFPA) called for faster action to achieve this commitment.

It means creating greater access to support services for those at risk of undergoing FGM and those who have survived it, said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin in a joint statement.

It also means driving greater demand for those services, providing families and communities with information about the harm FGM causes – and the benefits to be gained by ending it, they added.

Calling on governments to enact and enforce laws and policies that protect the rights of girls and women and prevent FGM, they urged everyone to make this the generation that abolishes FGM once and for all – and in doing so, helps create a healthier, better world for all.

UNFPA, jointly with UNICEF, leads the largest global programme to accelerate the abandonment of FGM. The programme currently focuses on 17 African countries and also supports regional and global initiatives.

The theme of the 2017 edition of the International Day is: ‘Building a solid and interactive bridge between Africa and the world to accelerate ending FGM by 2030.’

Colombia: Bringing a hidden practice to light

In Colombia, for example, some members of the Emberá, a historically impoverished and marginalized indigenous group, continue the practice.

The practice is done quietly, so there are few reliable statistics. The Colombian National Indigenous Organization (ONIC) estimates that two out of three Emberá women have been cut, according to information used by the UNFPA.

But in 2007, after two girls died from infections caused by FGM, some women tribal members began being more vocal about the practice.

“In the beginning, it was really difficult,” Solani Zapata told UNFPA. “Nobody wanted to talk about the subject.”

Slowly people began to open up, leading to conversations about related issues, including gender-based violence.

Girls who undergo the practice are less likely to finish school, have limited formal employment prospects and are more likely to be married to an older man and become pregnant early in life.

The practice has since been abandoned in many communities.

“We don’t do it here anymore,” said Amanda Guasiruma Gaisama, in Valle del Cauca. “The adults know that if it’s done here and something happens to the girl, there are consequences... We know it is not normal for a girl, even if it’s part of a tradition.”

To raise awareness about the negative impact of FGM, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is holding Facebook Live programming all day today. Watch live at [facebook.com/UNFPA](https://www.facebook.com/UNFPA).