

IN BRIEF

Charging funds not for roads

The European Parliament has weakened a draft obligation on European Union governments to spend money raised from harmonised road charging systems on maintaining roads.

In amendments to the proposed directive, MEPs deleted an insistence that 'revenue from fees must be used for road maintenance and for the benefit of transport'. Instead the parliament substituted a commitment for governments to undertake 'to reduce congestion and complete the Trans-European Network infrastructure'.

MEPs also changed the directive so that it would only apply to TEN roads, unless local authorities wished otherwise. Charges would be calculated to give greater weight to environmental costs such as pollution under another amendment.

The parliament also approved a final draft of a directive requiring electronic tolls to be capable of using ground-based microwave and satellite technologies by 2011.

MPs back walking targets

More than 100 MPs have joined campaigners in pushing for stronger Government support for walking and cycling, adding to pressure on ministers to beef up their 'active travel' strategy which is expected to be launched next month.

By the time Parliament resumed this week 117 MPs had signed up to an early day motion calling for a Government commitment to targets to substantially increase walking and cycling and effective monitoring of local authorities' progress. Campaign manager for cyclists' organisation CTC, Roger Geffen, had a hand in drafting the EDM and said the cross-party support showed a will across the Commons to see a major boost in walking and cycling levels.

Visionary cities

Eight of England's cities have been hailed as exemplars of the visionary civic leadership sought by a Government review.

Deputy prime minister John Prescott launched a report on the 'core cities' to coincide with the Egan's review of the skills needed to develop sustainable communities. It praises the success of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield, while noting how they lag behind their European counterparts, especially on economic performance.

● *A Tale of Eight Cities*. Published at www.odpm.gov.uk

HIGHWAYS

Sheffield's inner relief road could arrive early - if a price can be agreed - **By Robert Bond**

Work to start on relief road

Work is due to begin on the next leg of Sheffield's inner relief road in October - two years earlier than first planned - but could be held up until the new year if the city council and contractor Birse fail to agree a maximum price.

The council has begun land assembly and highways alterations for the scheme after the Government approved side roads and compulsory purchase orders following a December public inquiry. Although about 60% of the route is based on existing highway, 40 properties will be demolished to make way for the road which is designed to help regenerate the city centre.

The council is in line for a £0.5M reward for meeting a public service agreement target to speed up the CPO process.

Under its early contractor involvement (ECI) contract, believed to be the first of its kind with a local authority, Birse has been acting as fee-paid consul-

tant since last May working with council engineers on the design, traffic management and utilities planning as well as construction methods, value engineering and risk management.

But it will only win the two-and-a-half-year construction contract, currently put at £25M, if it comes up with an acceptable, guaranteed maximum price. Otherwise, the contract will have to be re-tendered delaying work for at least three months.

The council is hoping Birse's efforts to secure best value for money through its supply chain will keep the overall bill within the £56M Government funding provisionally agreed by the DfT in December. But Sheffield's assistant chief engineer Rob Davison said the price would not be finalised until August or September and it was too early to judge the contractor's performance.

'If their price is above the

Government grant then obviously we have a problem. But we're all working to try and keep it down,' said Davison.

The cost has previously been put at £58.4M, which would leave the council to fund the balance, but the aim is to reduce this while still affording quality finishes such as granite paving and stainless steel parapets.

The 1.5km road will link existing sections on the north-east side of the city centre and will include two 40m-span bridges, one crossing the River Don and the other carrying a local rail line.

Sheffield is accompanying the scheme to remove through-traffic from the city centre with measures to give pedestrians greater priority. Work has started on the £12.3M Sheaf Square redevelopment designed to make pedestrian access from the train station into the city centre easier, which includes a new public plaza.

STREETCOMBER

ROOM WITH A VIEW?: Here's another *Highway Howler* sent to *Streetcomber* this week. Once again, it involves some nifty building work and a streetlight. The sender is not specific when it comes to the country of origin, simply saying that it is 'somewhere east'.

Streetcomber is certain that there must be other examples out there which do not involve streetlights. Remember, there's a £5 wine voucher for each one used. Send entries to *Streetcomber's Highway Howlers* at the usual address or e-mail editorial.surveyor@hgluk.com

SPIDER SENSE: Here's one for all you budding traffic managers out there who have major bridges and structures to contend with. San Francisco highway patrol is calling on inventors to develop a 'spider gun' to tackle those with suicidal tendencies who use the



city's bridges as a final launch pad.

According to reports, police are seeking a new approach to the problem following a recent example where a man brandishing a knife held up traffic during a 13 hour stand off with highways patrol officers on the San Francisco to Oakland Bay Bridge. Drivers were so furious that they were shouting for the man to jump.

The proposed device, officers hope, would enable them to catch would-be jumpers in a 'spiders web'.

Despite their frustration, they don't appear to favour the approach of that famous fictional San Francisco cop Dirty Harry. Punching the jumper in the face and carrying them off the structure doesn't appear to cut it with the modern police force code of ethics.