



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2011-03640

**Keyword:** Road Policing

**Subject:** M1/Westlink Road

### **Request and Answer:**

I understand that the M1/Westlink, an incalculably important road, is the strategic route that connects the M1 to the M2 and M3 Motorways within Belfast and that it also provides access to Belfast City Centre, the Port of Belfast and Belfast City Airport which if closed causes severe traffic disruption for a huge number of the travelling public.

Will you please provide me with the answer to the following questions?

#### **Question 1**

How many times since January 2009 have police attended incidents RTA's, disturbances etc where the Westlink has subsequently been closed?

#### **Question 2**

How long has the carriageway been closed on each of these occasions?

#### **Question 3**

What arrangements are in place to remove vehicles which are causing obstructions?

#### **Question 4**

What arrangements are in place to notify blocked traffic what the problem is and how long it will take to rectify the situation?

#### **Question 5**

What arrangements are in place for Police to direct traffic away from the closure point?

#### **Question 6**

How far from the Westlink is the vehicle Recovery firm currently being deployed to recover vehicles based?

#### **Question 7**

Has this Recovery firm got sufficient recovery vehicles to remove all types of vehicle in particularly fully laden HGVs?

### **Question 8**

Have Police got a condition in their contract with the Recovery agent that a recovery operator will be in attendance within a set time scale and if so what is this?

### **Question 9**

Have Police received recorded the complaints received from the Public re the considerable delays they have endured due to the closures and if so what responses have been given?

### **Answer**

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

It is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which is currently set by the Secretary of State at £450.

The information requested in relation to the service is not held in a central location within the PSNI but is held within A District, Roads Policing Branch and Belfast Regional Control (BRC) Department. I contacted each of the Departments/ District to request that they retrieve the information from their systems. A District responded and for them to retrieve the information requested regarding public complaints would require a trawl of all letters addressed to the District. From the beginning of 2009 to date there were approximately 600 letters addressed to the District Commander. Therefore allowing a minimum of 2 minutes per letter to ascertain the nature of the contents which refer to complaints from members of the public and then to establish if any referred to the M1/Westlink would amount to 20 hours. Correspondence is also addressed to the Area Commanders in the district which would also require a manual trawl and would increase this estimated time substantially. For BRC to obtain the information would require a trawl of the incidents reported on the West Link and various feeder roads. There are over 250 incidents relevant to your request and to check each incident would take 5 minutes and therefore the total estimated time would take a minimum of 20 hours. It is therefore estimated that the total time required for A District, Roads Policing Branch and BRC to locate, extract the information requested would take an estimated 40 hours 30 minutes.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and the request has therefore been closed.

You may wish to submit a refined request in order that the cost of complying with your request may be facilitated within the 'appropriate limit'. In compliance with Section 16 of the Act, I have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit however the nature and structure of the information unfortunately makes this impossible.

Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

Although excess cost removes the PSNI's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, I have provided below the information which was retrieved before it was realised that the fees limit would be exceeded. I trust this is helpful but it does not affect our legal right to reply on the fees regulations for the remainder of your request.

The PSNI has a "Contracted" Managed Vehicle Recovery & Storage Scheme.

The arrangements in place to notify blocked traffic what the problem is and how long it will take to rectify the situation is a joint information strategy involving Roads Service & PSNI. This will trigger contact between the respective communication/incident rooms and traffic reports generated. Depending on the scale and incident, press messages will vary in content, either an expected time of

re-opening or “unable at this stage to advise”. If a full police investigation or difficult recovery is on going, the road will stay closed until further information is available. Police where available will be deployed at various junctions in order to keep traffic moving. This will depend on the type of incident, time of day, and how long the road potentially will have to remain closed/partially closed.

The arrangements in place for Police to direct traffic away from the closure point is that Traffic Information Control Centre (TICC) & Belfast Regional Control (BRC) will depend on who receives the information first and each will inform the other Department. TICC will ensure appropriate traffic control signs and signals are set to protect the scene of the incident, assist in avoiding secondary incidents and inform drivers of traffic conditions and the diversions ahead. Traffic signal timings on diversion/alternative routes will be adjusted to cater for increased traffic flows and overhead warning signs on the motorway will be illuminated with the advised speed and a message where appropriate.

The PSNI currently has a Managing Agent who is contracted with conducting vehicle recoveries on behalf of the Police and there is currently a contracted operator based within 3 miles of the Westlink.

The recovery firm has got sufficient recovery vehicles to remove all types of vehicles including HGVs and the times scale set for recovery is, for light recoveries 30 minutes and heavy recoveries 60 minutes.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing [foi@psni.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@psni.pnn.police.uk).

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner’s Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner’s Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ [www.psnipolice.uk](http://www.psnipolice.uk)

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.