

REPORT: Executive Board Sub-Committee

DATE: 7 February 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Environment

SUBJECT: Enhancement of Variable Message Signs System

WARDS: Borough Wide

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report requests the Sub-Committee's agreement to the award of a contract for the supply, installation and commissioning of Comet Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) database software for the Variable Message Signs System within the Borough. The report identifies significant benefits arising from operating systems that are compatible with neighbouring authorities. Procurement is therefore proposed to be restricted to one supplier and the waiving of standing orders is sought.

2. RECOMMENDED: That

- 1) That Procurement Standing Orders 3.1 to 3.7 be waived to obtain equipment that is the same as neighbouring authorities to allow future joint use.**
- 2) That the quote from Siemens Traffic Controls for the supply, installation and commissioning of Comet UTMC database software for £59,326.00 be accepted.**
- 3) That the Authority agrees to pursue joint working with the Merseyside Authorities, Warrington BC and Highways Agency for joint use of each others Variable Message signs, using reciprocal arrangements**

3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 On 16 November 2006 Executive Board Sub-Committee approved a report for the provision of Variable Message Signs (VMS) on the approaches to the Silver Jubilee Bridge, to provide information on traffic conditions and proposed works. Six signs have now been installed and are operational, and we are generally receiving good feedback regarding the information supplied. A further two signs are to be installed within the next few weeks.

3.2 The signs are currently controlled via a computer in Rutland House and arrangements have been made for the signs to be set outside of office hours by the staff within the 24/7 Team at the Contact Centre. The Contact Centre staff have a library of pre-determined legends, which they can set when requested by the Police or the Highways On Call staff. For planned events the system is programmed in advance to switch the signs on/off. The system is continuing to be developed to improve the information provided to the travelling public.

- 3.3 However on Thursday 18 January 2007, the Silver Jubilee Bridge was closed due to a high-sided vehicle being blown over in the high winds. Following the incident, a review of the procedures was carried out and following discussions with other bridge operators (mainly in Scotland) and the Police, thresholds for the staged closure of the bridge, initially to high-sided vehicles and ultimately a total closure are being drafted to produce agreed protocols with Cheshire Police. To enable these decisions to be made based upon actual wind speeds on the bridge an anemometer (wind speed measuring instrument) has been ordered and should be installed shortly.
- 3.4 During the development of the protocols it was felt the best way forward was to automate the system so that the messages to warn of high winds and closure of the bridge to high-sided vehicles are displayed automatically when pre-determined wind speeds are reached. It was always envisaged when the system was proposed that there would be some automation, to allow the signs to be activated by the system when predetermined scenarios occur. To facilitate this automation there is a need to install some additional equipment and software, which links the different systems together, this software is called a Common Database. This software will also be used to link our system to those of our neighbouring authorities and the Highways Agency's systems, who will reciprocate with similar sharing arrangements for their signs
- 3.5 A number of options are available to provide this common database, however as most of our systems (i.e. variable message signs, journey time monitoring system (JTMS), remote monitoring of traffic signals (RMS)) have been supplied by Siemens Traffic Controls a price has been obtained from them for the supply, installation and commissioning of a Comet UTM common database for £59,326.00. This price includes for linking to the anemometer and training the relevant staff. This is compatible with the system used by our neighbouring authorities and the Highways Agency and hence enables the proposed sharing of facilities whilst avoiding expenditure for all.
- 3.6 The common database will eventually link with the JTMS to be able to supply journey time data for journeys across the Silver Jubilee Bridge. The JTMS is to be linked with the Cheshire Police system to provide additional data on traffic flows within the Borough.
- 3.7 The proposed system development is a further step to comply with the requirements of the Traffic Management Act to provide information to drivers on traffic conditions and monitor traffic flows. It is likely that the system will need to be expanded, when funding is available.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Under the Traffic Management Act there is a requirement to provide information to drivers on traffic conditions and to monitor traffic flows.

5 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

Funding for the installation costs will be provided through the LTP and operational costs through the Intelligent Traffic Systems Revenue Budget.

5.2 Social Inclusion Implications

5.2.1 None

5.3 Sustainability Checklist

5.3.1 Under the Traffic Management Act there is a requirement to provide information to drivers on traffic conditions and monitor traffic flows. Providing better information to the travelling public helps reduce congestion and delays, which results in reduced pollution and frustration to motorists.

5.4 Best Value

5.4.1 The use of tried and tested systems, which are already in use by neighbouring authorities, provides good value for money.

5.5 Legal Implications

5.5.1 None

5.6 Crime and Disorder Issues

5.6.1 None

5.7 Human Rights Act Implications

5.7.1 None

6 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

6.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.