



BRIEFING PAPER

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Background

This paper has been submitted in response to an action raised at Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership to report back to the Management Committee regarding road closure processes and associated communications procedures. The paper sets out reasons that roads required to be closed, further detail as to processes at road traffic collisions, implementation and communication of diversion routes and co-ordination of key stakeholders.

1. Reasons for Road Closures

Road closures are most commonly implemented due to road traffic collisions and are necessary to provide safe working conditions for the emergency services to effectively deal with the incident. The police have legislative powers:

- Section 67 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, power to close a road
- Section 163 Road Traffic Act 1988, power of police officer in uniform to stop vehicles

Closures will also be put in place for various other reasons such as the preservation of crime scenes, fires, unsafe structures, vehicles which have shed their load etc. During periods of inclement weather closures may be required due to snow, ice, flooding or for blockages caused by the likes of fallen trees or landslides. It is often the case that for weather related issues the police will implement initial closures when required before handing over to the relevant road operator.

In such circumstances Police Scotland will take guidance from the appropriate authority as to when it is safe for the public to access the road.

2. Communication Procedures

When officers require to implement a road closure, Police Scotland Area Control Room, (ACR), will inform the relevant road operator of the closure and request their assistance with deployment of proper signage. If the closure is expected to be for a prolonged period of time and/or have a significant impact on the surrounding road network the ACR will also contact Traffic Scotland who will cascade this information to road users via their website, radio etc. The ACR will also contact local bus operators, taxi companies and local authorities of the closure. When the road is to be re-opened the ACR will again contact the road operator and Traffic Scotland to ensure information is relevant.

3. Road Closures for Road Traffic Collisions (RTC)

On attending a road traffic collision the first priority for officers is safety, namely the safety of those involved in the collision, occupants of vehicles driving towards the collision, (pedestrians if within a built up area) as well as the safety of any emergency service personnel in attendance. If the carriageway is blocked or the collision has occurred in a dangerous position (around a blind bend/ area of invisibility etc.) then the road will require to be closed to prevent further collisions and to create a sterile area for the emergency services to deal with the incident and assess the severity of any injuries. Road traffic collisions will be categorised as non-injury, slight injury, serious injury or fatal.

Non-injury or Slight Injury RTC:

If there are no injuries or only slight injuries then the vehicles will be removed from the carriageway as soon as possible and the road re-opened. On a single carriageway this may result in a single lane closure with traffic control until the vehicles are recovered. If any vehicle is extensively damaged and unable to be driven/ pushed off of the carriageway then a police removal will be arranged to have it recovered. The recovery operative should be at locus within 30 minutes. The road will be re-opened once the vehicles are recovered unless the roads department are required to attend due to contamination of the road surface. This would normally be arranged at time of recovery to avoid any unnecessary delay. Minor contamination can be dealt with by recovery operatives. Extensive contamination may require a road operator with appropriate equipment.

Serious Injury or Fatal RTC

If it is a fatal road traffic collision or it is suspected that any person involved in the collision is seriously injured or has life threatening injuries then the road will be closed immediately. The ACR will be informed, they will in turn notify the road operator (Local Authority or Trunk Road Operator for that area) as well as Traffic Scotland to ensure that the media are made aware timeously of the closure. Police officers will close the road using their cones and signs until the relevant road operator attends to implement a full closure/ diversion route, this will be communicated by Traffic Scotland via local media, social media and radio. Local Authorities and Police Scotland will often also use social media to further communicate messages.

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For a fatal RTC or when police are advised by attending ambulance crew that the injuries are serious or life threatening then the road will remain closed until a medical update is obtained. If the injuries are found to be slight then the road will be re-opened. If the injuries are serious then the road will remain closed to facilitate the necessary investigation.

In the event of fatal/ serious injury collisions the road will remain closed to preserve best evidence and remain closed until:

- essential medical assistance has been given to those requiring it
- all persons involved have been removed from the locus (hospital/ mortuary)
- specialist Road Policing collision investigators have carried out a detailed examination of the locus
- a scenes of crime photographer has photographed the locus
- all vehicles involved have been recovered (for later mechanical examination)
- debris/ any contaminants removed from carriageway

4. Collision Investigation

Collision investigators will attend all fatal and the majority of serious injury collisions. The time taken for the collision investigation process will vary depending on the availability of such specialist officers and the distance that the officers require to travel to attend a locus.

Every road traffic collision is different. Road closures are only implemented when absolutely necessary and roads will be re-opened as soon as is possible with all steps being taken to minimise any delays with recovery, decontamination of road etc.

5. Vehicle Recovery

Recovery of vehicles is arranged via the ACR and where possible this will be co-ordinated to start once collision investigation has finished and the locus has been photographed. Recovery operators should attend within 30 minutes but this will inevitably take longer if the recovery vehicles are caught in the congestion caused by the road closure.

Vehicles which have ended up off road into trees/ verges etc. will take longer to recover and will result in a longer road closure.

Specialist recovery will be required for certain types of heavy good vehicles and bus/ coaches particularly when these vehicles have left the carriageway. Special recovery can add a significant delay as they will often be attending from a distance.

6. Decontamination of Road Surface

Where the road surface has been contaminated with a small amount of oil/ fuel etc. then this can be dealt with by the recovery agent who carry absorbent granules in their vehicles.

In the event of a larger scale contamination of oil, fuel, mud etc. then this may require the assistance of the road operator by means of a road sweeper being sent to clean the surface with detergent to ensure that the road is safe to be re-opened. The requirement for a road sweeper can also add a significant delay due to the distance that they will be attending from and their availability.

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In the event of a pedestrian or motorcyclist fatality the road surface may also be contaminated by blood and body matter. Body matter will have to be removed before a road can be re-opened and may require the attendance of the Disaster Victim Identification officers to ensure that this is carried out in a thorough and systematic way, such procedures would necessitate extended closures.

7. Damage to Street Furniture/ Barriers etc.

Any damage caused to street furniture such as pedestrian railings and street lighting will require to be made safe prior to a road re-opening if they pose a risk of injury to members of the public. Crash barriers, if extensively damaged may require the road operator to attend and repair or install a temporary barrier until the original can be fully repaired or replaced. Additional measures such as these will delay roads from being re-opened or may result in a partial opening until the work is complete.

8. Diversion Routes

Trunk roads such as the A82 and A83 have pre planned Standard Incident Diversion Routes (SIDR) which have been created by Transport Scotland as they are suitable for all vehicle types. Depending upon the locus of a closure the relevant SIDR will be selected and implemented by the road operator for that area. Closures of local authority roads will be implemented by the relevant council with a suitable diversion put in place.

9. Summary

Road closures are implemented for a variety of reasons as outlined, the primary reason being for safety. It is recognised that within rural areas such as Argyll and Bute there are a limited number of routes and that a closure of these routes and the associated lengthy diversion routes has a significant impact for communities, and relevant stakeholders within Argyll and Bute are sensitive to these concerns and work to provide accurate information to communities and to re-open routes as a matter of priority.

Submitted for information of Superintendent Brian Gibson, Operations, Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire.