

7<sup>th</sup> June 2007

## **WINTER SERVICE FLEET REPLACEMENT – UPDATE**

The Highways Agency (HA) is in the process of procuring a new fleet of salt spreaders and ploughs to serve its motorway and all purpose trunk road network. This note provides an update on progress and an opportunity to express interest in attending a user day to find out more.

The HA currently owns a fleet of vehicles dedicated to the provision of winter service on the motorway and some of the all purpose trunk road network. The existing fleet comprises salt spreaders, plough blades, snow blowers and loading shovels. The salt spreaders (gritters) and ploughs are made available to our contractors (service providers) for use on routine winter maintenance mainly on the motorway network, but some also form part of the reserve fleet to cover breakdowns or the need for extra effort due to severe and/or prolonged winter weather conditions.

The current spreader fleet is made up of Foden chassis and Telstar spreader bodies with an age range from 13 to 18 years old. At the time of supply the vehicles were state of the art for their purpose. We have undertaken detailed studies of the existing fleet and concluded that the equipment has reached the end of its economic life. The spreading vehicles require increasing amounts of maintenance to keep them reliable. They are several generations behind the equipment available today and lack the flexibility of modern equipment to adapt to different treatment techniques and materials.

The HA has decided to replace its current fleet of spreaders and ploughs with a new fleet to serve the whole of its network including the motorways and all purpose trunk roads. The spreaders and plough blades will be purchased as this will provide the HA with the best network resilience and minimum delivery risk. The vehicles will be maintained and cared for by our service providers as they are now.

It is recognised that the current Foden vehicle is widely regarded by it's users as a Rolls Royce of salt spreaders. This standard will be replicated within the new fleet. Together with many advances in spreading technology the new vehicles will be provided with full pre-wet spreading capability to maximise the efficiency of treatments and reduce salt usage. The vehicles will be provided with a plough blade capable of clearing 3m, with a smaller 2.5m option designed for use through road works.

The plan is to roll out the new fleet between July and September 2008 for the HA's service provider contracts in Areas 3, 6, 8 and 10. The remaining areas will receive their new vehicles to tie in with each area contract renewal. A total of 420+ vehicles with 500+ plough blades will be in place across the HA's network by 2013.

Stakeholder engagement is vital in ensuring the successful delivery of the new winter fleet and the project included several initiatives to achieve this. The first was to engage with fleet procurement teams to learn lessons from previous fleet contracts. Visits were made to a number of HA service providers together with Lincolnshire County Council to discuss their approach.

To ensure that the HA maximised its product knowledge and fully understood what the industry could deliver, all the known spreader body manufacturers in the UK, together with a cross section of chassis manufacturers, were visited.

In addition, to ensure that the new fleet is fit for purpose and can meet the needs of our service providers it was essential that the HA obtained the views of the end users of these vehicles. Six HA areas, 1, 4, 7, 11, 13 and 14 were visited to draw together a schedule of User Requirements. Within each area all users, from drivers through to senior managers, were questioned on what they required from the new fleet. This information was used to help develop the detailed specification for the new fleet.

To conclude the earlier stages of stakeholder engagement, an Industry Open Day was held on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2007. Advertised through the European Journal, the open day presented to potential suppliers details of the HA's intended approach to the contract and the fleet specification. The format was such that feedback was actively encouraged to influence the final approach.

At the open day, a number of issues were raised which have resulted in changes to the HA's approach. It is acknowledged that the contract must have the flexibility to appeal to all users. With this in mind, whilst the Agency primarily requires a fleet of permanently mounted pre-wet spreaders, the contract will include options for dry and de-mountable spreaders.

The HA is keen to embrace Gershon principles within this procurement exercise. The Contract will be written in such a way as to allow both Local Highway Authorities (LHAs) and DBFO companies to purchase vehicles, sharing both the HA's bulk buying power and high quality specification. The contract will include pre-wet, dry and liquid spreader options for both fixed body and de-mountable vehicles.

This brief paper has hopefully explained the HA's approach to its new winter fleet procurement. The option for a second open day is now offered, subject to levels of interest, to cover this in more detail. The day would be open to the HA's service providers, DBFO companies and LHAs and would provisionally be held in the Birmingham area in July/August 2007.

To register interest in attending an open day to find out more, please send an email to [allyson.goodfield@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:allyson.goodfield@highways.gsi.gov.uk). If you have any queries please call Allyson on 0117 372 8557.

**Martin Hobbs**  
**National Winter Team Leader**