

Operations Update: Victoria Road

SUMMARY

This report summarises an analysis of operational issues at Victoria Road transfer station, the potential impacts on Boroughs and steps being taken to resolve the issues.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Authority is asked to:-

- 1) Note the report

1. Introduction

Victoria Road waste transfer station in Ruislip is one of the two rail-linked waste transfer stations owned by the Authority and operated through the Residual Waste Services contract with West London Energy Recovery Limited (WLERL). Suez is the operating sub-contractor that runs the contract, which includes operating the Victoria Road transfer station.

Victoria Road receives 220,000 tonnes of waste a year, including 180,000 tonnes of residual waste, 21,000 tonnes of wood from Borough sites and 11,000 tonnes of food waste. The site is available to all six Boroughs for tipping, but it is used most heavily by Harrow, Brent, Hillingdon and Ealing.

The site, which was built in 1978, centres around a large building containing two waste bunkers. Borough vehicles delivering residual waste drive into the tipping hall and tip into the bunkers via one of eight tipping bays. Once the waste is in the bunker, cranes move the waste into compactors which pack it into small shipping containers to be loaded on to trains and transported to Severnside Energy Recovery Centre.

The two bunker cranes are at end-of-life and Suez has been reporting increasing numbers of breakdowns since the summer. This has coincided with reports of increased tipping times from Boroughs that use Victoria Road. WLWA officers have worked with Suez colleagues to analyse the impact of crane breakdowns and other operational issues on tipping times at Victoria Road, and identify mitigations.

2. Analysis

Appendix 1 sets out the analysis of operational issues and tipping performance. These are summarised as follows.

Chart No.	Key findings
1	Victoria Road has been experiencing high waste levels on site since the start of August. There have been a number of causal issues which are marked on the chart. Some of the issues are the responsibility of the contractor e.g. crane failure, container failure, some mobile plant failures. Others are caused by Boroughs, e.g. non-conforming waste, and

	some fires caused by flammable items. Train failures or 'light trains' are caused either by the rail haulier, or problems on the rail network. The site exceed maximum capacity on one occasion during this period due to a complicated mix of issues.
2	Turnaround times are measured as the time between a vehicle weighing into the site and weighing out as it leaves. The average turnaround time in the period is 13.5 minutes, but this can vary significantly day by day, and there are clearly outliers as the orange bars (maximum turnaround time per day) show. It is difficult to draw clear links between high turnaround times and the operational issues. Note that turnaround times do not show the times that vehicles are queuing before they weigh in. Boroughs have been asked to provide this information from their vehicle tracking systems.
3	A comparison turnaround times from the year to date (April to Oct) 2023 compared to the same months in previous years shows that the number of long waits is similar to previous years, and the number of waits below ten minutes has increased.
4	The Borough's tipping profiles throughout the day show a very clear peak around 9:30am, particularly for Brent and Harrow, followed by a secondary peak around 1:00pm. Most Boroughs have finished tipping by 3:00pm.

The analysis shows that:

- Victoria Road experiences a range of operational issues with different route causes, but is able to remain within its maximum waste capacity on most occasions.
- Average turnaround times are low, but can vary significantly day-by-day and vehicle-by-vehicle.
- Turnaround times in 2023/24 so far are not longer than previous years.
- Borough tipping profiles put pressure on the site at specific times of the day.

Conversations are taking place with Boroughs to better understand waiting times from the back of the queue (rather than the point of weighing), the impacts of waiting times on the collection services and costs, and the extent to which specific rounds/communities are affected by delays.

3. Contractor improvements

Appendix 2 shows the improvements that the Contractor has made, or is in the process of making, to improve the site and reduce tipping times.

Work to replace the cranes, at a cost to the Contractor of £5m, is well underway and due to be completed in April. This is expected to significantly increase the reliability of the cranes, reducing waiting linked to break-downs.

A major upgrade to the fire suppression system, costing the Contractor £2m, is approaching completion and will speed up tipping due to the end of disruption from the works and suppressing future fires, reducing site closure time and reducing the chances of losing the site completely.

The Contractor has already replaced all of the compactors at a cost of £2m, increasing reliability and efficiency. Further investments will be made in 2024 for weighbridges (doubling them) to reducing waits for weighing in/out, and new mobile plant to reduce breakdowns and increase efficiency. The Authority will also be investing in a new bulking shed on the site to receive food waste and other materials.

Site layout changes have also been made to keep more tipping bays open during busy periods and reduce waiting times (see slides 3 & 4).

The Contractor's waste transfer station at Hayes was badly damaged by fire in August 2022 due to flammable items in household waste. The site is being rebuilt and is expected to open in January 2024 providing contingency capacity in the event of major disruption at Victoria Road.

4. Next steps

One-to-one meetings have already taken place with most of the Boroughs that use the site. Remaining actions include:

- Further Borough-specific analysis on the impacts of waiting times on collection costs and service to residents
- Borough-specific work to identify and eliminate non-conforming waste delivered in Borough collection vehicles and from Borough sites
- Planning with Boroughs to manage the impact of replacing the waste cranes.

Progress will be reported to future Authority meetings via the Contract and Operations Update report.

5. Financial Implications - None

The Contractor's improvement work includes the fire suppression system (£2m), compactor replacement (£2m), weighbridge replacement (£0.5m), crane replacement (£5m), and plant replacement (cost TBC). This will be funded by the Contractor. Construction of the bulking shed will be funded by the Authority and has been approved as part of the 2023/24 budget.

6. Legal Implications

None

7. Impact on Carbon reduction

The improvements at Victoria Road will speed up tipping times, increasing the efficiency of the Boroughs' collection services and saving carbon.

8. Impact on Environment Directors Priorities

Priority	Key points raised within this report
Bringing residents with us	Tipping delays may have knock-on implications to residents' collection services. Improvements will reduce these and increase trust in waste and environmental services.
Sustainable decision making	N/A
Climate adaptation and decarbonisation	Increasing the efficiency of the operation reduces carbon.
Dealing with financial challenges whilst delivering on climate change	Investments in the cranes at Victoria Road will save Boroughs costs and carbon through reduced tipping times and more efficient collection operations.

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