**Briefing pack: Pothole-spotter trial extension**

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**1. Media release**

**Buses and bikes join Britain’s pioneering ‘Pothole-spotter’ project**

A pioneering project which seeks to improve road safety and help councils adopt a ‘smarter’ approach to highway repairs through the identification of potential potholes is to be extended following its early success. The trial, which is being funded by the Department for Transport (DfT), is now being rolled out in York and Wiltshire, as well as Thurrock, with an expanding portfolio of vehicles and approaches to data capture.

The addition of buses and bikes to the innovative ‘Pothole-spotter’ project, will enable it to build-up a rich and varied data set, according to Soenecs and Gaist, the private-sector SMEs leading the scheme in partnership with the DfT and the three participating highway authorities (Thurrock, York and Wiltshire). The data will be harnessed by these authorities to enable them to more effectively and efficiently tackle road problems, predict how and where potholes will form, prevent expensive emergency repairs and compensation payouts – and critically - to improve safety for all road users.

The new phase of the Government-backed project will see the trial team working with two local companies – Reliance bus company and the York Electric Bike Company – to have a bus and bike equipped with high-definition (HD) cameras deployed in York this summer. They will identify cracks and defects that, if not repaired, could develop into potholes.

The project is also set to ‘go-live’ in Wiltshire, with four ‘Pothole-spotter’ refuse collection vehicles (RCVs) deployed in the county over the coming months. One will be equipped with a special thermal image camera to study the impact of hot and cold weather on road surfaces.

The Pothole-spotter project first launched in February in Thurrock when an RCV fitted with a high-definition camera was deployed to identify future potholes. Data from that trial is already being used to help inform the council’s road maintenance and repair strategy.

Dr David Greenfield, of Soenecs, said: “The new vehicles and routes will enable us to gather significantly more data to assist in preventing potholes, whilst exploring road safety issues for more vulnerable road users, such as cyclists.”

David will today be one of several panel members including Steve Berry, OBE, of the Department for Transport, who will discuss the innovative techniques used in the Pothole-spotter scheme at the Local Government Association (LGA) annual conference in Birmingham.

Today also sees the launch of a compelling animation explaining how Pothole-spotter works. The animation, created by PCSG and DTW, can be viewed at www.pothole-spotter.co.uk

The new pilot areas were selected for their unique characteristics – further building the richness and variety of data which can be amassed through the project. The ancient city of York has one of the highest number of cycle journeys in the country, in addition to high traffic volumes, particularly in the peak summer tourist season. In Wiltshire, the data collected will be illustrative of a typical rural area with large volumes of heavy agricultural traffic.

Thurrock was initially chosen due to its busy roads resulting from three ports and its proximity to London.

Bridget Wayman, cabinet member for highways and waste, at Wiltshire Council, said: “As we continue to invest over £20m a year in highways to get rid of a historic back log of maintenance, we look ahead to find new ways of avoiding potholes and other defects on our roads.

“We have a good track record of innovation in Wiltshire, and I’m delighted we can help with this trial. I look forward to sharing how it worked with colleagues in other local authorities.”

All the vehicles deployed for the project will frequently survey the same stretch of road network and so create a detailed data bank illustrating the development of road problems over a much shorter time frame than has previously been possible.

Though road surveys are already conducted by local highways bodies they do not examine the same stretch of road at regular intervals meaning they cannot capture the same accurate, consistent and chronological HD images of the network garnered by Pothole-spotter. In some areas, surveys are conducted only once every two years.

The ‘Pothole-spotter’ vehicles will be specially-branded to identify them to the public, with the Reliance bus already named ‘SpotHoler’.

The data collected by all the vehicles will be reviewed by Gaist using the very latest analytical techniques and intelligent software. The findings will then be shared with authorities and highways stakeholders across the country.

The project will have a wider reach too – enabling more effective monitoring of gullies for example to proactively reduce the risk of surface water/flooding on the highway network and identifying areas where hedges and trees may be causing an issue for vehicles.

An interim report on the early findings from the Pothole-spotter project will be published in the Autumn.

Potholes are a major problem on UK roads with local councils – responsible for the upkeep of local A, B and C roads – filling around two million each year. Problems contributing to the phenomenon include the rise in heavy-goods vehicles and wetter winters.

**Notes to Editors:**

Social, Environmental, Economic & Solutions – SOENECS Ltd – is an independent research and advisory practice which provides strategic advice and support to the public and private sectors. It specialises in fields including waste management, resource management, climate change and the circular economy.

Gaist Solutions is an award-winning consultancy which specialises in capturing and analysing an unrivalled level of detail about the country’s road network and providing technology solutions across the highways and transportation sectors.

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