

Article- Initiative to Reduce Utility Delays

A. Topic

This article is to introduce an initiative to promote early coordination between utility owners and project designers with the goal of reducing utility relocations and potential project delays.

B. Background/Overview

Historically, avoiding utility conflicts has not been a high priority for project designers and feedback they receive is often after their design is complete. In recent years, numerous projects have been delayed because of utility relocations, sometimes resulting in construction claims in the millions of dollars. A common response from the utility industry points to a lack of manpower as a contributing factor to these delays. The intent of this initiative is to reduce the potential for utility delays by minimizing the amount of utilities to be relocated. In order for the designers to avoid existing utilities (where practical) they will need additional information from the utilities before design begins and increased communication during design.

C. Considerations/Guidance/Discussion

The success of this initiative relies on the cooperation of numerous stakeholders, especially the project manager/prime consultant, utility owners, and utility coordinator. The key steps are outlined as follows:

1. The utility owners come to the utility kickoff meeting, based on 25% plans, with the following information:
 - a. Identification of facilities, not impacted by earthwork, they wish to retain. Do not include facilities to be replaced because of age, size, condition, etc.
 - b. Identify significant (i.e., size, cost, time to relocate, homeland security, etc.) facilities that may be overlooked on plans. Include high value lines and individual appurtenances (vaults, metering stations, etc.).
2. The utility coordinator passes this information to the project manager/prime consultant who then forwards to appropriate designers (drainage, noise/retaining walls, guardrail, structures, sign/signal poles, etc.).
3. The project manager/prime consultant are needed to champion this cause. It may be a little more challenging to design around the existing utilities and it may cost a little more to construct the project. However, properly implemented this will prove its worth by helping us deliver our program on schedule.

4. The utility coordinator facilitates communication between the entire design team and utilities during the development of the R/W plans. Instead of waiting for complete designs, share preliminary designs/concepts with utilities to facilitate the design of their relocating facilities and identification of their PUE needs.

D. Summary/Conclusion

Whether the cost of relocation is borne by the Department or the utility owner, ultimately it is the citizens of North Carolina who pay, whether through taxes or utility bills. When evaluating the economic practicality of designing around an existing utility, the designer should consider the cost of the utility relocation. Additionally, as utility relocations are reduced, so is the potential for costly utility delays, also paid by the taxpayers. *Therefore, to better serve the public and protect the project schedule, where practical it is in the Department's best interest to design around existing utilities.*

E. For Additional Information

Please direct questions, comments, and recommendations for improving this article to Carl Barclay cbarclay@ncdot.gov or 919-707-6982.