

Highways Project Delay Early-Warning Guide

Major project delays rarely begin as one major event. They often develop from smaller warning signs: inconsistent reporting, changing site conditions, recurring compliance issues, security concerns, missed deliveries, rework or communication gaps.

Use this highways project delay Early-warning guide to recognise the signals that deserve closer attention before they develop into wider disruption.

7 Early Warning Signals For Your Highways Project

- Project updates are becoming inconsistent
- Environmental conditions are beginning to affect planned work
- Compliance issues are becoming more frequent
- Minor security events are starting to form a pattern
- Critical equipment or materials are becoming uncertain
- Rework is beginning to increase
- Communication is becoming slower or less reliable



01 | Project Updates Are Becoming Inconsistent

Watch for:

- Different reporting formats between projects
- Information spread across emails, spreadsheets, apps or paper records
- Important updates arriving late
- Managers needing to chase information
- Additional site visits simply to confirm current conditions

What it could indicate:

The project may be losing consistent operational oversight, making it harder for leaders to maintain a reliable, up-to-date view of activity. As a result, important issues, emerging risks or changes on site can go unnoticed for longer.

What to review:

- Reporting frequency
- Information ownership
- Where project records are stored
- Whether sites are reporting consistently
- Whether decision-makers can access current information when required

02 | Environmental Conditions Are Beginning to Affect Planned Work

Watch for:

- Weather repeatedly affecting planned activities
- Noise restrictions changing working hours
- Increasing dust or airborne-contaminant concerns
- Environmental complaints
- Work being adjusted because conditions are approaching project-defined limits

What it could indicate:

Environmental conditions may begin forcing work to be rescheduled, restricted, delayed or temporarily suspended until conditions improve.

What to review:

- Site-specific weather information
- Noise and air-quality readings
- Planned activities most exposed to changing conditions
- Environmental alerts or recorded events
- Whether the programme has sufficient contingency for environmental disruption

03 | Compliance Issues Are Becoming More Frequent

Watch for:

- Repeated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) issues
- Recurring corrective actions
- Safety concerns across different teams or subcontractors
- Additional inspections or investigations
- Environmental or operational controls being applied inconsistently

What it could indicate:

Small compliance failures can develop into incidents, investigations, work restrictions or stoppages that affect programme delivery.

What to review:

- Recent compliance events
- Incident records
- PPE and environmental monitoring information where applicable
- Evidence of corrective action
- Whether the same standards are being applied across every project

04 | Minor Security Events Start to Form a Pattern

Watch for:

- Minor theft
- Perimeter tampering
- Suspicious vehicles repeatedly appearing near the site
- Unauthorised access attempts
- Damage or interference with equipment

What it could indicate:

The article highlights that individual warning indicators can be treated as isolated events when they may actually indicate a developing security problem.

What to review:

- Recent security incidents
- Whether similar activity has occurred more than once
- Recorded footage where available
- Vehicle information where relevant
- Vulnerable areas or assets requiring additional attention

05 | Critical Equipment Are Becoming Uncertain

Watch for:

- Missed or changing delivery dates
- Specialist equipment becoming unavailable
- Equipment breakdowns
- Weather-related plant or material damage
- Key materials not being available when scheduled

What it could indicate:

Availability problems can interrupt activities, disrupt schedules and create knock-on delays for dependent tasks, affecting progress across the project.

What to review:

- Status of critical deliveries
- Availability of specialist plant
- Recent equipment faults or damage
- Contingency arrangements
- Which programme activities depend on those resources

06 | Rework Is Beginning to Increase

Watch for:

- Failed inspections
- Incorrect materials
- Work deviating from the intended plan
- Quality problems
- Tasks having to be repeated
- Teams rushing to recover time already lost

What it could indicate:

Rework consumes additional labour and materials while preventing subsequent project stages from progressing as planned.

What to review:

- Recent inspection outcomes
- Recurring quality concerns
- Causes of work being repeated
- Whether the same issue is appearing across different teams or projects
- Areas where schedule pressure may be affecting working standards

07 | Communication Becoming Slower or Less Reliable

Watch for:

- Field reports arriving late
- Conflicting information from different teams
- Teams working from separate systems
- Important updates being missed
- Managers carrying out additional physical inspections to verify information
- Sign-offs taking longer than expected

What it could indicate:

Poor information flow can make coordination more difficult, slow the sharing of updates and delay decisions that affect project progress.

What to review:

- Who owns each key update
- How information moves between site teams and management
- Whether stakeholders are working from the same information
- Where manual handovers create delays
- Whether project information can be accessed centrally

Next Step | Prepare the Information You Need to Act

If one or more warning signals appear, make sure the following information is available before the issue develops into a wider programme delay:

- **Current programme position:** latest milestones, critical activities and any tasks already at risk of slipping.
- **Recent site updates:** the most up-to-date information from site teams, including changes since the previous review.
- **Environmental records:** relevant weather, noise or air-quality information where conditions may be affecting planned work.
- **Compliance and safety records:** recent incidents, corrective actions, inspections and recurring issues that may affect delivery.
- **Security information:** recent incidents, recorded footage and relevant vehicle information where security concerns are emerging.
- **Plant, material and delivery status:** confirmation of critical deliveries, specialist equipment availability and any known faults or shortages.
- **Rework and quality information:** failed inspections, repeated tasks or recurring quality issues that may be consuming time and resources.
- **Escalation ownership:** a clear owner for each issue, who needs to be informed and what action has been agreed.
- **Evidence location:** where supporting records can be accessed so decisions do not depend on chasing separate teams or systems.