



↑ Tens of thousands of people watch a performance at the festival's iconic Pyramid Stage in 2017 ANDREW ALLCOCK

Ensuring music fans make it to Glastonbury on time

Later this month 135,000 music fans will descend on Worthy Farm for the return of the world famous Glastonbury Festival. Over 50,000 will arrive on public transport including 40,000 by coach and more than 10,000 by train into nearby Castle Cary station, who then board shuttle buses to site. Those arriving by car are directed into one of 50 fields reserved for parking.

Ahead of the festival, 56km of 'clearways' are established around the site to stop motorists from abandoning their vehicles on local roads. Over 560km of diversionary routes – some starting as far as 50km away – will be set up and 100 highway closures enforced. Overseeing the whole traffic management operation is the event's off-site manager Steve Russell-Yarde.

"We open the car parks late on the Tuesday and pedestrians arrive from 8am on Wednesday to spread the arrivals and reduce the pressure on local roads," he says. "When the plan works, there should be no delays, other than at the car parks."

Traffic officers from private company CTM are equipped with powers under the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme to direct vehicles and keep them moving. Motorists who fail to comply are committing an offence. Officers also step in to control road junctions if traffic lights cannot cope with the volume of vehicles.

Steve is grateful that Glastonbury is far removed from the strategic road network. "If the motorways were any closer, it would make my life harder as people would get here more quickly," he says. "As it is they are far enough away and the A roads slow the arriving traffic down, allowing us to direct motorists towards different entrances."

Steve is always looking at the role technology can play in traffic management. But nothing can replace the experience of people on the ground, he adds. "Those who have worked at a large event tend to know instantly what to do; if there is a problem they can react within seconds."

There have been testing times: in 2008 a fire closed the A37 for two days just as festival traffic was arriving, and another year simultaneous accidents on the M4 and M5 meant all traffic was diverted down the A361 which runs adjacent to the site. But Steve says the co-ordinated traffic



↑ Steve Russell-Yarde

management approach has helped reduce delays, adding that there are contingency plans for "pretty much every scenario". What about the weather? "We had a major issue in 2016 when three inches of rain fell 10 days before we opened. Ground conditions in the car parks were very poor, leading to long delays. Since then we have upgraded farm tracks, which has improved access to the car parks. But we are always looking to improve."

While getting people to the festival may be a challenge, helping them home again can be more difficult. "The big pressure is on the Monday when everyone leaves," Steve adds. Car sharing is encouraged and he says each vehicle arriving at the festival carries an average of 2.9 people.

Over the years the number of visitors has grown and with it the proportion arriving by public transport. "We have a very good public transport share, but I wouldn't want to see everyone arrive

by public transport without a major plan for an evacuation strategy," he says. "Coaches are in demand in June with several big sporting events taking place, as well as many schools needing them for trips. Also, if everyone came by coach it would be very hard to get people away quickly if we ever needed to."

Around 1000 ticket holders cycle to the festival. Many leave their bags at one of several drop off points, with vans bringing luggage in to a central location on site. While cycling to the event is encouraged, Steve is careful to avoid routing those on bikes down roads that could be busy with traffic or where local people – familiar with the local roads – may drive too fast.

In future years the festival has the option to increase the number of visitors by 7000, subject to an operational plan review. How well the transport is managed this year will certainly play a major part in whether an increase is granted.

Steve has been looking after traffic at the Glastonbury Festival for over 30 years. He started working as a supervisor and later a manager for an events car parking company. "When I started there was no real co-ordination. Police would redirect traffic without consulting the festival and gate staff were not always in the right place when we needed them.

"So I started to bring things together. When I left my previous employer, Michael Eavis the festival organiser had seen what I had done and gave me the job of off-site manager.

"I don't ever stop thinking about the event. The festival is the best in the world and to be associated with it is brilliant."