

2. ROAD SIGNS AND SIMILAR INFRASTRUCTURE (A845/ED)

Purpose of the report

1. This report outlines the Authority's policy on road signs and other similar transport infrastructure, and briefs Members on work undertaken on road signs and similar infrastructure. Furthermore, it seeks approval for a framework for officers to share certain case work decisions with Members.

Recommendations

2.
 1. **To support the work already carried out by officers on road signs and other similar infrastructure.**
 2. **To approve the proposed framework for involving Members in decisions concerning road sign and similar infrastructure case work.**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

3. Work on road signs and similar infrastructure will contribute to National Park Management Plan Outcome 6, which states: "By 2011 highways, transport infrastructure and services have been improved because they: reduce the adverse environmental impacts of travel on the special qualities of the National Park.". It will also contribute to Outcome 3, which states "By 2011 the natural beauty of landscapes means: there is a clear characterisation of the whole of the landscape and it is conserved and enhanced in accordance with that characterisation." More specifically, it will assist in fulfilling action six, which is to "Reduce unnecessary signage and ensure that all commercial signage avoids reducing the natural beauty of the National Park by influencing Highway Authorities and others with an interest in highways management".

The work will contribute to corporate objective 6.1, which is to "influence decisions on transport infrastructure and traffic management through (i) our land use policies and through (ii) implementing traffic management schemes."

Background

4. Officers were asked to develop this report as a response to some Members' concerns regarding transport infrastructure within the National Park, and a request for a framework for sharing some casework decisions with Members. It should be noted that there is currently no agreed mechanism for sharing certain road sign casework with Members. As a result of this, a paper was taken to the April 2010 Strategic Advisory Group meeting outlining the proposed content of the report, so that group could influence the content of this approach at an early stage.
5. The Authority began to dedicate more officer time towards minimising the impacts of road signage on the National Park in early 2007, in response to a proliferation of new signage on a number of roads within the National Park. These were mainly implemented by Derbyshire County Council, although we have since had similar concerns with other highway authorities within the National Park. The signs being implemented in 2007 were varying combinations of being extremely large, unsympathetically positioned, having yellow or florescent yellow backing boards and having black coloured backs and mounting poles instead of the usual recessive grey, which is less intrusive within the landscape. Please see Appendix 1, sections A, E, C and G respectively for examples of these types of signs. All of these things meant that the majority of the signs were not inline with Derbyshire County

Council's own *Highway Signs Environmental Code of Practice*. In addition a number of large poles, in both height and diameter were implemented on the A515 to hold vehicle activated signs (the ones that 'flash' at oncoming vehicles to warn them of their speed or a hazard). Please see Appendix 1, section B for photos of the poles and sign mounted on one of the poles. The majority of this signage was implemented with the aim of improving safety on roads with poor safety records such as the A515, A623, A57 and the A619. The signs generally warn of hazards such as bends, junctions, cambers, undulations or reinforce the speed limit.

6. Signage Regulations and Guidance

Signage is governed by both regulations, which by their nature need to be adhered to, and guidance, which can be interpreted by the designer or engineer to take account of the local circumstances. Certain signage is required by law, such as signs displaying the speed limit, and these signs are subject to regulations that determine things like the size of the sign and distance of repeater signs. However, the Department for Transport (DfT) makes it clear that any supplementary signage, which is governed by guidance, should be designed and implemented with regard to the environment and surroundings, particularly in sensitive areas such as National Parks. Therefore, designers and engineers should use their professional judgement and should not be over-reliant on guidance (source: DfT Local Transport Note 1/08: Traffic Management and Streetscape).

7. Context of Road Safety

The National Park contains some stunning scenery and landscapes, and the nature of roads which run through this terrain are an important feature of the National Park's character. Owing to the terrain, Peak District roads tend to be narrow, steep and twisting, often enclosed by ancient walls and hedgerows, or on open moorland, and often unfenced. In addition, roads within the National Park carry a mixture of local, visitor and cross-Park traffic, with differing familiarities with the roads and awareness of the dangers. Furthermore, a large number of walkers use the roads, as well as horse riders and cyclists. As a result of these factors, and sometimes driver and rider behaviour, road safety is often an issue. The National Park has a number of roads that are within the top ten most dangerous roads in the country, meaning there is increasing pressure, both at government and local level, to install measures in an attempt to reduce road accidents. – The latest European Road Assessment Programme results, which maps the risk of death or serious injury on A roads between 2005-07, has the A537 and A621 in the 'high risk' category, and the A53 and A57 in the 'medium – high risk' category. The high accident level on the A537 (Cat and Fiddle) has recently led to the implementation of average speed cameras on this road, in an attempt to reduce the accident level. Please see Appendix 1, section D for photos of the cameras.

8. Implementing road safety measures may, however, be to the detriment of the National Park setting, character and valued characteristics. Whilst the Authority should, in principle, aim to support any scheme aimed at improving safety on dangerous roads, care must be taken to ensure that this is not at the expense of the landscape or cultural heritage of the area, which means we are sometimes put in a very difficult position of being unable to support the measure the highway authorities wish to implement. This includes signage measures, as well as larger scale infrastructure. Although it should be remembered that highway authorities are a body that Section 62(2) of the Environment Act 1995 applies to, and as such, they should respect National Park purposes.

9. Alongside implementing signage and infrastructure to reduce accidents, highway authorities and the police also put time and funding into driver, rider, pedestrian and

cyclist education and training. The two safety partnerships that the Authority is involved with (Derbyshire and South Yorkshire) have measures in their action plans such as working with schools on pedestrian training, tackling pedestrian and cycle casualties and adult cycle training. Furthermore, in conjunction with education, enforcement is undertaken, including targeted enforcement on fourteen high motorcycle casualty routes in Derbyshire, and combining enforcement with targeted publicity. The Authority has often tried to influence the police to undertake more enforcement, but unfortunately, this has had little success, and with the current budget cuts, we are even less likely to see an increase in enforcement.

10. Work undertaken on signage since 2007

After much correspondence and some meetings, in May 2007 we developed an agreement regarding signage with Derbyshire County Council that provided the following.

- Derbyshire would install grey backed signs from then onwards.
- Derbyshire would consult us on all road schemes, including signage, before they were implemented.
- All signage would be designed to the minimum size and standards as prescribed by the Department for Transport.
- They would work with us to de-clutter non-A roads and villages.
- They would review their *Highway Signs Environmental Code of Practice* which is no longer current as it does not reflect the new regulations on 'passive resistance' signs that require very tall structures and large poles and vehicle activated signs.

This 'gentleman's' agreement is still in place today, and is used by officers from both authorities. It should be noted that the consultation process on road schemes provides varying benefits for the National Park, depending upon how early in the process we are consulted (the earlier the better), community/political pressure, and the nature/location of the scheme. This means that there are some new schemes that we would describe as 'best practice', whereas others that officers may have strongly objected to on landscape grounds are still implemented. It should be remembered that it is up to the highway authority to determine how much they take account of the Authority's comments. However, highway authorities are a Section 62 body, and therefore need to have due regard to our views and comments.

11. After successfully developing this agreement with Derbyshire County Council, we tried to gain a similar agreement with other highway authorities within the National Park. Unfortunately, this has been only partially successful to date, and due to other work commitments officers have been unable to dedicate the necessary time to negotiate further with the relevant highway authorities. However, developing similar agreements with authorities is a specific action within both the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan and the forthcoming Sustainable Transport Action Plan, so there will be specific officer time dedicated to this action, which will hopefully lead to further agreements being developed in due course. Furthermore, after correspondence with Sheffield City Council regarding implementation of some street lighting just outside the National Park boundary, we have been informed that we will be consulted on all transport infrastructure that may affect the National Park. Please see Appendix 1, section F for photos of the lighting columns.

12. One of the action points on the signage agreement with Derbyshire County Council was for them to update their *Highway Signs Environmental Code of Practice*, which outlines best practice on design and siting of road signs. Although a working group was established in 2008 to review the code of practice, which included traffic engineers, a member of our Transport Policy Team, one of our Landscape Architects and a representative from Friends of the Peak District, the review has

not led to a revised document. Unfortunately, although the group met in 2008 and 2009, and had begun to outline all the points that needed to be included in a revised document, the review has not been completed due to other work pressures at Derbyshire County Council. However, we have confirmation that once other work priorities have passed, they will conclude this review, and a revised document will be agreed and published.

13. The Traffic Signs Policy Review was announced by the Department for Transport in September 2008, with the aim of developing a system of traffic signage to meet the changing requirements of road users, whilst providing effective management of the road network, and minimising environmental impact. A steering group and the following three working groups were established.

- 1) Road User Information
- 2) Enforcement
- 3) Environment

One of the Transport Policy Team represents the English National Park Authorities Association and National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the Environment Working Group. The Review is ongoing, with a series of tranches of research being undertaken by each working group. However, although the new government has prioritised the review, the budget cuts are having a bearing on the review. At the time of publication of this report, subject to the budget being available, the timescales for relevant elements of the Environment group are as follows.

- Review of lighting associated with signage – October 2010.
- Proposals for a communications strategy designed to promote good practice and better design – March 2011.
- Guidance on signs review/auditing for local highway authorities to follow – March 2011.
- Scope possible powers to allow a mechanism for local people and groups to challenge local authorities erection of traffic signs – December 2010.

14. Policy on Road Signs & Similar Infrastructure

As road signs and similar infrastructure impact on a number of different areas of the Authority's work, the Authority's policy is contained within a few documents. However, at the strategic level, they all seek to minimise the amount of transport infrastructure (including road signs), and where it is required, minimise the impacts on landscape, ecology and cultural heritage (primarily, although other areas may also be impacted on).

It should be noted that implementing new signage does not usually require planning permission, as most signs are erected within the highway boundary, and therefore fall within permitted development rights.

Policy T2 of the emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy sets out the strategic planning policy for the design of transport infrastructure within the National Park. This states that *"Transport infrastructure, including roads, bridges, lighting, signing, other street furniture and public transport infrastructure, will be carefully designed and maintained to take full account of the valued characteristics of the National Park, especially local distinctiveness."*

The Local Plan adds detail to this by acknowledging that much investment in transport infrastructure does not require planning permission, but can have a significant effect on the landscape. Therefore; *Under the Environment Act,*

agencies have a duty to use the highest standards of environmental design and materials in transport infrastructure to conserve and enhance the valued characteristics of the area.

The Peak District Landscape Strategy and Action Plan has action 6.3, which is to “Reduce the Landscape Impacts of transport infrastructure, including road furniture and improve safety through working with relevant Highways Authorities or the Highways Agency. Possible resulting measures to achieve this action may be a Road Signage Agreement to uphold National Park Purposes, or an Annual Review with Highway Authorities of problem areas and priorities for action.”

The emerging Sustainable Transport Action Plan has an action relating to road signage, along the lines of reducing the landscape and cultural heritage impacts of new, replacement and existing transport infrastructure, including road furniture. This is very much in line with what is contained in the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan.

15. In terms of what officers use on a day to day basis, in addition to the policy outlined above, the following points are often useful to officers. Officers general stance towards road signs is the fewer signs the better, not only from a visual impact point of view, but also from a signage effectiveness point of view, in line with DfT guidance. Yellow or fluorescent backing boards should be avoided unless absolutely necessary and a case for their use can be made, whilst the backs of signs themselves should be recessive grey to blend in with the skyline or surroundings as best as possible. Signs should be as small as legislation allows, and associated support posts and lighting should also be of sympathetic dimension to complement the sign. Signs should be appropriately situated, preferably with a back drop and so they do not skyline. Due to their harm and inappropriateness, Vehicle Activated Signs will usually be objected to by officers unless there is a particularly strong case for their use.

Proposals

16. Support the recommendation to approve the proposed framework for involving Members with road sign and similar infrastructure case work. This reflects requests by Members, recommendations by officers and is inline with the steer provided by Strategic Advisory Group.
17. The following is officers’ proposal for sharing road sign and similar infrastructure casework with Members. It has been developed by the Director of Strategy & Development, Head of Planning, Head of Environment, Heritage & Recreation Strategy and Transport Policy Manager. It includes formal and informal methods for involving Members, dependent on officer’s professional view on the significance of the impact of the infrastructure on the National Park.
1. Where officers can reach an agreeable solution with the relevant highway authority, so there are minimal impacts of the infrastructure on the National Park, there will be no Member involvement.

It is envisaged that a small number of cases will fall into this category, and can be dealt with solely by officers.

2. Where officers have concerns about, or intend to object, to the proposed signage or infrastructure. Briefing lead Members for transport, cultural heritage and landscape (and any other lead Member that is relevant, but the majority of

cases will involve these three outcome areas) in difficult or contentious schemes.

It is envisaged that the majority of cases will fall into this category, and will informally involve the relevant lead Members. This will ensure that relevant lead Members are aware of the proposed signage or infrastructure, the concerns that officers have with it, and can agree with officers whether due to the significance of the concerns, Members becoming directly involved with the issue would assist the situation. It should be noted that although the majority of cases give rise to officer concerns at the beginning of the consultation process, often the number of concerns have reduced or sometimes been eliminated after discussion and negotiation with the highway authority.

3. Where infrastructure is contrary to National Park policy, and Members have not made a previous decision, 'significant' schemes will be subject to a Member decision. This is similar to how planning applications are dealt with. The Member meeting will either be Authority, or if timescales for a response to the highway authority do not permit this, Planning Committee as it meets more frequently.

It is envisaged that very few cases will require a Member decision, as the types of scheme we are consulted on tend to be of a similar nature. Officers suggest that there are only two such previous cases since 2007 that would have been subject to a Member decision had this framework been in place at the time.

For the third category, Members will need to remember that for the majority of schemes, firstly, we are not the determining body (unlike a planning application), and secondly, most authorities have voluntarily agreed to consult us on the scheme (most highway infrastructure that is within the existing boundary does not require planning permission). Therefore, although the Authority may object to some infrastructure, or request changes to it, it is up to the highway authority to determine how much they take account of the Authority's comments. However, highway authorities are a Section 62 body, and therefore need to have due regard to our views and comments.

In the cases of the second and third categories above, officers will inform any Member that lives within the general area of the signage or infrastructure, so they are aware of the consultation and response that is sent to the highway authority. However, this is for their information only, as they would not be consulted by officers.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

18. **Financial:** None – there is no budget associated with this work, only officer time.
19. **Risk Management:** There are two risks associated with work on road signs and similar infrastructure. Firstly, that should we be able to gain an agreement with all highway authorities to consult the Authority in advance of implementing signage and similar infrastructure, that there may be officer resource implications in terms of workloads. Secondly, that Authority officer comments on consultations are not fully taken account of by the consulting highway authority, and thus inappropriate signage and infrastructure is implemented within the National Park.
20. **Sustainability:** None.
21. **Background papers** (not previously published)
None

Appendices

Appendix 1 contains photographs of examples of signage and similar infrastructure within the National Park to support the report. To assist Members, the photos have been categorised and referred to at appropriate places within the above report.

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

Emily Davies, Transport Policy Manager, 16 September 2010