Traffic Management Policies: Vehicle Activated Signs

Introduction

Vehicle activated signs (VAS) have been developed to address the problem of inappropriate speed and to provide hazard warnings where conventional signing has not been effective. On rural roads, driving too fast for the conditions is more likely to be a factor in accidents than exceeding the speed limit. Encouraging drivers to adjust their speed to suit the conditions is therefore particularly important.

In the UK, a range of rural road safety engineering measures, including VAS, has been developed to encourage drivers to approach hazards such as bends and junctions at a safe speed, and to encourage them to comply with the speed limit.

The intention of this policy is to work with local communities, particularly Town and Parish Councils, to install VAS in locations where there is community concern in respect of road safety. Wherever possible, contributions towards funding VAS will be sought from local Parish and Town Councils where use of VAS has been proposed.

Policy

VAS may be either used as warning signs or speed limit signs in accordance with the criteria listed below. However they should primarily be used for warning signs to reduce the risk of an accident at a hazard. VAS will not normally target all drivers but those exceeding the posted speed limit or a safe speed for the particular hazard.

VAS should be considered at sites that have an accident history associated with inappropriate speed and that have not been satisfactorily remedied by standard signing. Inappropriate speeds might include excessive vehicle speeds on the approach to a hazard, such as a bend or junction.

Where external funding is proposed for the installation of a VAS the site must comply with the VAS criteria. This is to ensure that there is not unnecessary proliferation of VAS, which would reduce their impact and hence their effectiveness in improving road safety.

The operational efficiency of VAS requires regular maintenance, such as cleaning the sign face, removing any obstructing foliage and ensuring that the vehicle detection system is functioning correctly. Therefore the VAS should be inspected approximately every six months.

Criteria

1. The section of road in advance of the VAS must be straight over a reasonable distance to maximise visibility to the sign.
2. There must be sufficient footway or roadside verge to install the sign.
3. The sign should wherever possible not be intrusive to nearby residential properties and early consultation should be sought to seek residents views.
4. There should be little or no vegetation that will block the view of the sign or affect the working of the radar equipment.
5. VAS warning of a hazard should be located between 50 and 100 metres in advance of that hazard.
6. VAS warning of a hazard should be set to operate at the 50th percentile(1) speed measured before installation. However discretion will be used to change this depending on the road conditions.
7. VAS displaying a speed limit should be located between 100 and 200m beyond the start of the posted speed limit sign.
8. VAS displaying a speed limit should be located at sites where the results of traffic surveys show the 85th percentile(2) speeds to be at least 10mph above the posted speed limit. However discretion will be used to lower this threshold if there are compelling road safety reasons.
9. VAS displaying a speed limit should be set to operate at ACPO guidelines on enforcement (i.e. speed limit + 10% + 2mph). However discretion will be used to change this depending on the road conditions.

(1) 50th percentile is the speed at which up to 50 percent of the traffic is travelling.
(2) 85th percentile is the speed at which up to 85 percent of the traffic is travelling.

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