Mobile Speed Activation Signs (MSAS) Guidance Note

Background

Concerns over traffic speed continue to be a significant issue in some areas of Cornwall. MSAS (SpeedVisor-type signs) represent an effective measure at addressing inappropriate speed. MSAS detect the speed of oncoming traffic using a radar device. If a set threshold is exceeded, a sign reminding drivers of the speed limit is triggered. These are temporary (portable, battery powered) interactive signs which have been shown to be effective in reducing speed. This guidance is designed to ensure that MSAS are used safely and effectively on the public highway, and in a way that is consistent across the county.

Historically Cornwall Council has undertaken the purchase, installation and operation of MSAS in accordance with Department for Transport guidance and legislation. Cornwall Council accepts that many town and parish councils (TPCs) are concerned about speeding in their areas and welcomes the initiatives taken by local councils to invest from their own budgets in speed monitoring equipment such as MSAS. As the legal highway authority, we will work with those councils, to support them in their efforts to reduce speeding, and advise them on suitable sites and methods of deployment on the public highway. Where viable and safe, agreement to attach devices to existing infrastructure will be granted (reducing street clutter), but this may not be practical in all locations. In some areas MSAS will support local Speed Watch programmes.

This guidance note provides support for towns and parish councils by outlining the same conditions that Cornwall Council are obliged to follow when installing these devices. MSAS devices can be purchased direct by TPCs or by CC through Community Network Panels, where the ownership and maintenance responsibilities are transferred to TPCs following the initial purchase.

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Commencement

That this guidance comes into operation from August 2018.

Details

All local councils who are considering installing such equipment should contact their highways manager before purchase. To avoid saturation, initially up to 2 MSAS devices may be purchased per TPC area. Use on the highway will be in accordance with the following conditions:

1. Any MSAS device[1] can be considered for approval by Cornwall Council. They will need to be UK approved and certified;

2. All deployment locations and positions (on and over the highway) to be agreed with the Highway & Environment Manager to ensure the safety and suitability of each location, with assistance from the Engineering Design Group Safety Team as required. This will involve any necessary permissions from Highways Electrical before attaching to street columns. A Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) is not required.

3. The following guidelines are outlined to ensure the safe deployment and use of MSAS devices:

   - MSAS may be used in *built-up areas* subject to speed limits of 20mph, 30mph and, occasionally, 40mph limits[2];
   - CC will provide support in setting the minimum speed threshold for activation. This will never be lower than the speed limit itself;
   - It is recommended that signs display the speed limit (by activation), not the actual speed of passing vehicles. This is to avoid 'boy-racer' type behaviour with drivers trying to get 'top score' on the display which was evidenced from previous experience of displaying the actual speed of passing vehicles;
   - MSAS cannot be used where a static Vehicle Activated Speed Sign is already operating in the same direction on the same section of route;
   - MSAS should be located away from junctions and complex road layouts to avoid driver distraction;
   - MSAS should not be used in such close proximity to a speed limit change that would result in the sign activating at vehicles outside the relevant speed limit;
   - To preserve their effectiveness as a speed reduction tool, MSAS should be moved regularly between locations. Deployment periods of between 2-8 weeks have been found to be generally effective, with a similar period elapsing before return. Signs should not be deployed permanently at one location; in such cases, a permanent VAS may be more appropriate;
   - Agreeing the location and installation methodology with your Highway Manager allows safe access by those deploying and maintaining the MSAS;

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[1] Cornwall Council uses Radarlux which also records speed data, which is useful for monitoring purposes.
[2] Deployment in rural areas, even where a 40mph limit applies, is not generally suitable. Higher rural speeds where there is no development could result in loss of control if a driver over-reacts to a sign, particularly at night. This echoes the restrictions on Community Speedwatch. MSAS are directly focused on helping communities, not the more general enforcement of limits, which is for the police.

4. A simple User Agreement (which will include further guidance on deployment) will ask TPCs to record details of all MSAS deployments, including, but not limited to: location; dates; direction; threshold settings. It is also recommended that at least one set of results from each location is supplied to Cornwall Council on request for inclusion on the existing countywide database. Supplying these details to CC enables valuable information to be captured, building a cohesive picture across the County of all MSAS sites. While this speed data may be useful, it will not in itself establish any obligation for further highway works. In most cases, MSAS will be the appropriate measure;

5. The highway authority reserves the right to withdraw consent for specific sites where there is reason to do so, and generally subject to discussion between interested parties. Devices may be removed directly by the highway authority in exceptional circumstances, for example, where they constitute an immediate danger to users of the highway;

6. Calibration and maintenance will need to be carried out in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations. Responsibility for ongoing maintenance and insurance (including insurance for working on the highway) remains with the TPC.

Explanatory note

This guidance will support the Cornwall Road Casualty Reduction Strategy and Cornwall Speed Management Strategy.

Action

That this guidance note be distributed and remain in circulation until superseded/deleted or a future guidance has been determined.

If you have any queries in relation to this guidance please contact the Transport Strategy Team on 0300 1234 222.

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