

BWMA Response to Government consultation on new Traffic Sign regulations

BWMA is a consultee to Department of Transport consultations. As such, we were invited in 2001 to comment on the DTLR's new Traffic Sign Regulations, due to be implemented in 2002. We reproduce below our response in full:

To: Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), London.

Date: November 10th, 2001.

Dear Sirs,

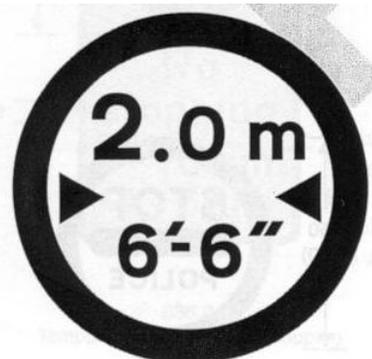
TRAFFIC SIGNS REGULATIONS AND GENERAL DIRECTIONS 2001 - CONSULATION

Our Association is involved in the protection of UK weights and measures and promoting their appropriate use. As such, we would like to comment on the proposal contained within the draft 2001 Traffic Regulations to permit dual imperial-metric vehicle width restriction signs.

We are aware that provision already exists for metric width signs so long as authorities install them alongside, and not in place of, imperial signs. Our association understands that the proposal for dual width signs is therefore to reduce sign "clutter".



Imperial-only width restriction sign



Proposed "dual" width restriction sign

Clear and accurate width and height restriction signs are important to help prevent vehicles striking the sides and ceilings of bridges. BWMA understands that the DTLR's view is that dual metric-imperial signs can help to reduce such accidents, particularly along routes used by Continental lorry drivers.

BWMA is concerned, however, that the proposed design of the new dual width signs (figure 629A) is in conflict with existing national policy that states imperial units are the primary system of measurement on traffic signs. This clash arises because the design of the new sign places feet/inches in a secondary and less prominent position to metric, ie below the metric, and in a smaller type size.

With regards to government policy, BWMA notes that:

- Britain enjoys an exemption from EC directive 89/617 relating to the use of imperial units, including feet and inches, for road and traffic purposes, meaning that there is no pressure on Britain to change its signs by any given date.
- DTLR has indicated to BWMA that it no current plans to change the current arrangements, at least until, "...the majority of drivers have been educated in the metric system", and that "it is considered that the benefits of changing signs will outweigh the very substantial costs".
- The draft 2001 Traffic Regulations do not propose the de-authorisation of imperial-only width/height signs, nor do they to compel the use of dual signs.
- The draft 2001 regulations do not authorise metric-only signs.

At the current time, therefore, and for the foreseeable future, the DTLR regards feet, inches, yards and miles as the primary system for traffic signs. With this policy in place, it is illogical for metric to be more prominent on signs that are purely optional and on which metric may only supplement imperial, not replace it.

In view of the national position, BWMA believes that the proliferation of "metric prominent" signs is likely to lead to confusion, as already been seen in the case of dual height signs (figure 629.2A), where a very similar design is used, for instance:



Dual height restriction sign (November 2001)

In the above picture, while feet and inches are visible, the design of the sign induces drivers to look at the metric first. A result this has been to cause widespread uncertainty as to which is the primary system for height purposes, resulting in many businesses such as petrol stations giving vehicle restrictions in metric only, for instance:



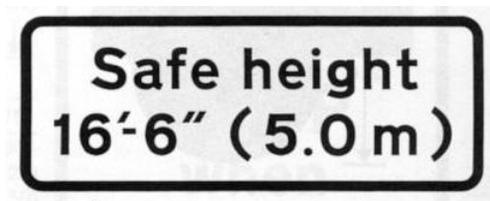
Barrier makes no reference to 6'-6"



No reference to 8'-10"

The DTLR has indicated to BWMA previously that any conversion to metric (should it take place) must happen quickly to prevent accidents. Yet, the use of metric-prominent signs is leading to precisely the opposite scenario: piecemeal and haphazard conversion in the private sector that has no relation to government policy on signs for public roads.

Another source of inconsistency lies within the Regulations themselves, since the proposed dual width and existing height signs also conflict with other diagrams that refer to restrictions, for instance, diagrams 780, 780.1A and 780.2A:



These signs clearly show feet and inches as the primary system since metric is placed afterwards and in brackets. Such an emphasis makes sense in light of the national position and does not mislead motorists as to which is the main system.

Proposal: BWMA believes that the DTLR should reconsider the design of both the new dual width sign (629A) and the existing dual height sign (629.2A). Specifically, we suggest the following:

- i) That the size of the type indicating the number of metres is reduced to be no larger than the imperial.
- ii) That the positioning of the metric and imperial indications is reversed to place the imperial at the top and metric at the bottom.
- iii) That metric is placed in brackets. This will make the relationship between the two systems clear: imperial is primary; metric is additional.

We look forward to hearing the outcome of the consultation in due course.

Yours sincerely, etc...