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Supplementary indications back on EU agenda

On 8 August, BWMA received a letter from the European Commission, announcing that the EC was conducting a “preparatory study for a Commission report on the market conditions relating to and implementation of Council Directive 80/181/EEC”.

An accompanying email said that “... *potential challenges in the use of supplementary indications (non-metric measures), are of particular interest for the study*”.

Supplementary indications is the EC term for imperial, US or other equivalents that may be displayed alongside statutory metric expressions of quantity; the EU was to have prohibited supplementary indications on 1 January 2010, but removed the prohibition after lobbying from a hundred transatlantic industry and trade bodies.

On 24 September, BWMA’s Director had a one-hour interview with a representative of Deloitte Consulting & Advisory, which has been commissioned by the EC to conduct this study, and completed an online survey. On 16 October 2019, he had a telephone conference with the American National Association of Manufacturers, alerting them to the potential threat.

And in response to a question put to it, the UK government’s Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said on 14 October: “*The government position on supplementary indications remains the same. It is committed to continuing to allow the use of imperial units for all existing uses, including as supplementary indications*”.

Deloitte Consulting’s study is expected to report back to the EC by 31 December 2019, and an update will be in the next Yardstick.

Reports of Canada’s imperial death are greatly exaggerated

Peter Schubert has sent in clippings of Canadian newspaper advertisements: laminate and vinyl flooring priced per square foot; freezers and fridges described in cubic feet; television, laptop and tablet monitors described in inches; blueberries and sweetcorn sold in one pint tubs; pork, steak and chicken priced by the pound; and thicknesses of mattress described in inches.

John Gardner, Director

BWMA is a non-profit body that exists to promote parity in law between British and metric units. It enjoys support from across Britain’s political spectrum, from all manner of businesses and the general public. BWMA is financed by subscriptions and donations. Membership is £12 per year. Cheques or postal orders payable to “BWMA”, 29 Chart House Road, Ash Vale, Surrey GU12 5LS

BWMA letter to Rt Hon. Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State, Department for Transport, 24 September 2018

In July 2002, the Department for Transport wrote to county, metropolitan and other councils to summarise the law in relation to imperial and metric units on traffic signs. The note explained that traffic regulations applied to pedestrian distance signs, meaning in effect that pedestrian signs were required to use imperial units for distance. I attach the text of the Department's note for your ease of reference.

Although the legal situation for distance signs remains unchanged, the memory fades, and councils are again reverting to using metric for pedestrian signs. For example, I attach a copy of an article from the Bournemouth *Daily Echo*, 29 September 2016, just come to my attention, in which Bournemouth Council's resort information manager is reported to have said, "*the decision to use metric, not imperial, measurements was made in line with a national trend, which has apparently seen most coastal towns adopt metres and kilometres on seafront signage*".

Any such "national trend" is unlawful: yards and miles are authorised for distance signs, metres and kilometres are not. We would be grateful if the Department for Transport would reissue the guidance with updated legal references. Prevention is better than a cure, and we would much rather non-compliant signage be averted than councils being put to the trouble and expense of replacing them.

Enclosed with BWMA letter:

Department for Transport guidance note, 16 July 2002

To Chief Executives of County Councils, Metropolitan District Councils, London Borough Councils, Unitary Councils and District Councils in England

Dear Chief Executive

THE TRAFFIC SIGNS REGULATIONS AND GENERAL DIRECTIONS 1994 - UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

In view of the recent publicity about a court case involving damage to road works signs that showed distances in metres, you might find it helpful to have the enclosed note summarising

the provisions of the Traffic Signs Regulations in relation to use of imperial and metric units of measurement on traffic signs. I should be grateful if you could bring this to the attention of members of your staff who are involved in the provision of traffic signs.

Yours sincerely, etc. Head of Traffic Management Division

The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994 – Units of Measurement

The Traffic Signs Regulations 1994 (SI 1994 No 1519 Part I) allow signs displaying distances in imperial units only (miles or yards). Any sign which incorporates metric distances is not a traffic sign within the meaning of section 64 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and is not covered by the power to place traffic signs conferred by section 65.

Section 65 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 permits traffic authorities to place traffic signs on or near any road in their area. Section 142 of the same Act defines "road" as any length of highway or of any other road to which the public has access - the Act therefore covers privately owned roads to which the public has access as well as highways maintained at public expense.

Direction 35 of the Traffic Signs General Directions 1994 (SI 1994 No 1519 Part II) permits the use of signs indicating vehicle length or width restrictions in metres but only if the restriction is also shown in feet and inches. Signs indicating a height limit may show feet and inches only (diagram 629.2) or imperial and metric limits together (diagram 629.2A).

Also enclosed with BWMA letter:

Article from Bournemouth *Daily Echo*, 29 September 2016

In a departure from tradition, several signs along Woodland Walk have opted to use metres and kilometres to inform people of the distances to nearby areas including Fisherman's Walk beach, Bournemouth town centre, and Kings Park.

Passers-by accustomed to reading distances in yards and miles have remarked on the "strange" use of the metric system for the signage.

Phil Cook said: "It is a bit silly as we calculate distance in miles in this country. Having the

signs in kilometres does seem a bit strange. When we're driving, we think in terms of miles and, when I'm walking, I think in terms of imperial distances too."



Scott Butcher added: "We've used the imperial system for distances for so long in this country so what's the point in changing that? I think it's strange the signs use kilometres because that's the European way of going about it."

However, Stefan Kleipoedszus, originally from Germany but since a Boscombe resident for 10 years, said he found the new signs easier to understand. "Because I'm from Germany, I actually like these signs in kilometres. Given the fact there's quite a lot of tourists here and, I assume, a lot of language students, it somehow makes sense." He added: "I found it odd when I walked here and saw the sign, but I find it helpful to be honest."

Charmaine Denny, resort information manager for Bournemouth council, said the decision to use metric, not imperial, measurements was made in line with a national trend, which has apparently seen most coastal towns adopt metres and kilometres on seafront signage. "The signs in Woodland Walk were erected in the spring of this year, with the metric measurements used to keep a consistency between these and the way-finding signage. The decision to use metric measurements on wayfinder signage was made at the time of planning the programme to ensure a consistency across the borough signage."

She added: "Historically, imperial measurements have been used across the borough, for example to describe the length of the bay in Bournemouth, which has always been referred to in miles, but there are currently no plans to alter this, in particular for PR purposes."

Reply from Department for Transport, 10 October 2018

Thank you for your letter of 24 September to the Secretary of State. Ministers receive many thousands of items of correspondence each year and I hope you will appreciate that it is not possible for them to reply to each one personally in addition to discharging their other ministerial duties. Your letter was passed to the Traffic and Technology team and I have been asked to reply.

The Department has no plans to reissue the guidance. It is not the role of Department for Transport to police authority compliance on this matter. That is the role of the courts.

While the Government supports a single system of units of measurement in principle, it recognizes that many people in the UK prefer or are more familiar with imperial units and is committed to retaining the existing usages of imperial units for as long as consumers and businesses find it useful. It is for local authorities to decide how their funding is being allocated and this is a factor that Bournemouth Council will have had to consider when deciding how to sign their signs.

Outdoor signs, such as those that were possibly used for the Woodland Walk in Bournemouth, which do not comply with the statutory requirements for traffic signs are controlled under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for administering this legislation.

It is the responsibility of the local highway authority to satisfy themselves that any signs they place or permit have the appropriate statutory cover and I would suggest that you contact Bournemouth Council and any others that you may be aware of with any concerns.

Fiona O'Neill

Further letter from BWMA, 26 October 2018

Thank you for your letter of 10 October 2018, in which you state:

"The Department has no plans to reissue the guidance. It is not the role of Department for Transport to police authority compliance on this matter. That is the role of the courts".

This appears to be confusing two separate types of action; issuing guidance does not constitute policing compliance, nor does it equate to the role of the courts. Guidance is *educational*.

We are quite happy to chase law-breaking councils ourselves, but we ask that the Department for Transport refreshes its previous circular, as it is very clear that local councils are confused in the area of units of measurements and signage, and will benefit from authoritative guidance with updated legislative references.

The Department for Transport website shows that guidance is offered by the Department on a frequent basis, for example:

- “Guidance for English local highway authorities on developing proposals to operate a lane rental scheme”, 27 September 2018
- “How to apply for brown tourist signs on roads that Highways England manage”, updated 5 June 2018
- “On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme guidance for local authorities”, 2 January 2018

We would therefore be grateful if the Department would give urgent further consideration to this matter, and reissue its former guidance on units of measurements with up-to-date legal references.

Further reply from Department for Transport, 26 November 2018

Thank you for your letter to the Department for Transport of 26 October. I appreciate that you have concerns about the level of confusion that local authorities have in the area of units of measurement and signage. However, there have been no changes to the legislation surrounding this issue by DfT therefore we will not be reissuing the guidance.

Let me reiterate that it is the responsibility of the local highway authority to satisfy themselves that any signs they place or permit have the appropriate statutory cover and I would suggest that you contact any council that you may be aware of that are confused on this matter with your concerns.

Fiona O'Neill

BWMA action

On 15 February 2019, BWMA sent the following letter to 1,071 Chief Executives of County Councils, Metropolitan District Councils, London Borough Councils, District Councils, and Town Councils in England and Wales.

Dear Sir or Madam

Pedestrian distance signs - units of measurement

It has come to our attention that some local councils are using metric units of distance (i.e. the metre and kilometre) for pedestrian signs, usually in town centres, near railway and bus stations, or along sea fronts, etc.

We would like to remind councils that pedestrians are regarded in law as traffic, and signs for pedestrians, as well as cyclists and equestrians, are expressly governed by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016 (TSRGD) (Schedule 12).

TSRGD (Schedule 18, Part 3) permits only yards and miles as units of distance on signs; please find attached a page from Department for Transport Circular 01/2016 which summarises permitted expressions of distance and their variations. Signs affected include those for local facilities, leisure facilities and tourist destinations, etc.

We hope this letter is of assistance. When metric signs are unlawfully placed, our Association, a non-government organisation that campaigns for the retention of imperial weights and measures, is obliged to see that they are removed. This is both costly and inconvenient. We would much rather non-compliant signage be averted, and hope this letter increases awareness of the law in this area.

Yours faithfully, etc.

Attached to BWMA's letter was a page from Department for Transport Circular 01/2016, a 101-page document that introduced the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016 (TSRGD), and sent by the DfT to “traffic signs practitioners” and others with responsibility for traffic management in April 2016. The page is reproduced opposite.

Table 3.1 Permitted expressions of distance			
Description	≥ 3 miles	≥ ½ mile & < 3 miles	< ½ mile
Supplementary plates to warning and regulatory signs	Whole numbers to the nearest mile followed by "miles" Used mainly when preceded by "For" or "for"	Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using ¼, ½, ¾ as appropriate) followed by "miles" or "mile"	Distance to the nearest 10 yards followed by "yards" or "yds" Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using "¼ mile" or "½ mile" as appropriate)
Schedules 8 and 11 where a distance may be added or varied	Whole numbers to the nearest mile followed by "miles"	Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using ¼, ½, ¾ as appropriate) followed by "miles" or "mile"	Distance to the nearest 10 yards followed by "yards" or "yds" Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using "¼ mile" or "½ mile" as appropriate)
Distance to junction on map-type, dedicated lane and overhead advance direction signs, and to an exit leading to services	Not applicable	"2", "1¼", "1½", "1½", "1½", "1¼", "1", "¾", "¾" or "½" followed by "m"	"½ m"
Distance alongside a place name destination (other than advance direction signs on motorways)	Whole numbers to the nearest mile Note: On a pedestrian sign "m" follows the distance where the sign also includes a distance in yards	Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using ¼, ½, ¾ as appropriate) Note: On a pedestrian sign "m" follows the distance where the sign also includes a distance in yards	Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using ¼ or ½ as appropriate) Additionally on pedestrian signs: Distance to the nearest 10 yards followed by "yards" or "yds"; where "¼" or "½" is used on a sign that also includes a distance in yards it is followed by "m"
Distance below a place name destination (other than advance direction signs on motorways)	Whole numbers to the nearest mile followed by "miles"	Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using ¼, ½, ¾ as appropriate) followed by "miles" or "mile"	Distance to the nearest 10 yards followed by "yards" or "yds" Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using "¼ mile" or "½ mile" as appropriate)
Local facility, car park, leisure facility and tourist destination signs	Whole numbers to the nearest mile followed by "miles" Note: "m" may be used where the sign also includes a distance in yards	Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using ¼, ½, ¾ as appropriate) followed by "miles" or "mile" Note: "m" may be used where the sign also includes a distance in yards	Distance to the nearest 10 yards followed by "yards" or "yds" Distance to the nearest ¼ mile (using "¼ mile" or "½ mile" as appropriate)

Replies received from local councils

Horsham District Council, 25 Feb 2019: I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 15 February 2019. This has been passed to the relevant departments within Horsham District Council. Sue Weston, PA to Chief Executive & Leader of the Council

Mansfield District Council, 25 Feb 2019: I acknowledge safe receipt of your letter regarding the pedestrian distance signs and your reminder regarding the need to adhere to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016 (TSRGD) (Schedule 12). I have forwarded your letter to my Neighbourhood Services Manager for information. Hayley Barsby, Chief Executive Officer

Waverley Borough Council, 25 Feb 2019: Your correspondence has been passed to myself in the legal services team for consideration and review. I confirm that I have now circulated your helpful letter and attachment to relevant colleagues, together with an extract of the legislation referred to. I am very grateful for you taking the trouble to write and on behalf of colleagues, thank you for raising awareness on this issue. Gillian Carson-Jones, Solicitor

Cumbria County Council, 26 Feb 2019: Thank you for your letter [etc.]. I can confirm that this has now been circulated throughout our Highways and Transport services as a reminder for consideration and review. Belinda Taylor, Information Governance & Complaints Officer

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, 26 Feb 2019: Solihull MBC is aware of the requirements of the Traffic Signs Regulations & General Directions 2016. It tries to ensure all the signs within its jurisdiction comply with the latest regulations. The Council also has a decluttering policy which actively discourages the installation of unnecessary signing and lining to improve the aesthetics of the Borough. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you become aware of any signs within Solihull that may not comply with regulations. The Council will be pleased to review the sign. Thank you for bringing this issue to my attention. Davinder Chohan, Highway Services

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, 26 Feb 2019: I can confirm that London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and London Borough of Wandsworth both comply to the laws set out by the Traffic Signs regulations and General Directions 2016 (TSRGD) (Schedule 12) and confirm that all of the signs in both boroughs do not use metric units of distance on traffic signs. Paul Chadwick, Director of Environment and Community Services

Norwich City Council, 28 Feb 2019: We are fully aware and compliant with the TSRGD 2016 for our highway signage. Kieran Yates, Transport Planner

Essex County Council, 28 Feb 2019: We are aware of the requirements of TSRGD, however I have passed a copy of your correspondence to our design teams by way of reminder. I trust this clarifies our position regarding this matter and thank you for contacting us. Andrew Cook, Director of Highways

Wirral Council, 4 March 2019: I can confirm that Wirral Council are using the correct measurements (miles, yards etc.) for our pedestrian signs. I trust this is of assistance. Eric Robinson, Chief Executive

Conwy County Borough Council, 4 March 2019: I would confirm that I have forwarded your correspondence to our Head of Environment, Roads & Facilities in order that he is aware of the issues you have raised. Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. Iwan Davies, Chief Executive

Lancashire County Council, 5 March 2019: Thank you for your correspondence of 15 February 2019 about the use of units of distance in pedestrian signs used by local councils. We have noted your concerns for only using imperial measurements permitted by the TSRGD 2016. Phil Steed, District Lead Officer, Community Services

Guildford Borough Council, 6 March 2019: Thank you for your letter to the Chief Executive dated 15 February 2019 reminding us of the appropriate units of measurement for pedestrian, cycle and equestrian distance signs. I have brought this matter to the attention of our engineers who will be able to check that the relevant signs comply with the law. Peter O'Connell, Director of Environment, copied to Tim Pilsbury, Transport Projects Manager, Engineering Services

Wallingford Town Council, 11 March 2019: Having checked our local signage we believe, to the best of our knowledge, we only have one sign that we are responsible for that mentions distance and I attach a copy of this sign showing the distance in yards. Barbara, Senior Local Government Officer/Mayors Secretary



Wirral Council, 12 March 2019: I can confirm that apart from approximately 15 fingerposts located on a river front promenade in the Wallasey area of Wirral that have metric units of distance on the ‘fingers’, the remainder of Wirral Council’s pedestrian signs are compliant with the requirements of TSRGD (Schedule 18, Part 3). There is an intention in the near future to replace the existing ‘fingers’ with new containing imperial units of distance. If you require any further information regarding this matter please do not hesitate to contact me. Shaun Brady, Highway Asset Manager.

Porthmadog Town Council, 16eg o Fawrth 2019/16th of March 2019: Your letter dated the 15th of February 2019 was presented for discussion at a recent meeting of Porthmadog Town Council. Porthmadog Town Council note its contents as you try and raise awareness in this area. In future Porthmadog Town Council would appreciate it if you would correspond with them in Welsh or bilingually. Glenda Burke, Clerk/Clerc

Bridgend Town Council, 20 March 2019: You will be pleased to learn that signs within our local area all appear to comply with the normally accepted imperial measurement system and we will continue to be observant in this regard. Our Finance and Planning Chairman - Councillor David Unwin (who is a great supporter of the aims of your association), keeps a watchful eye on these matters on behalf of the Council and would report anything inappropriate for action. We trust this gives you re-assurance for our area. Mrs Leanne Edwards, Town Clerk

Oxfordshire County Council, 8 April 2019: Thank you for your letter regarding units of measurements and their usage on pedestrian distance signs. I can confirm that Oxfordshire County Council do comply with guidelines using imperial measurement. We have shared this information with our colleagues at Oxford City Council who maintain highway network signage in Oxford on our behalf. Bev Hindle, Strategic Director for Communities

Following BWMA’s mailshot, the matter was investigated by Christopher Hope, chief political correspondent at the *Daily Telegraph*, which prompted Transport Secretary Chris Grayling to write to local authorities himself.

Mr Grayling told the *Telegraph*, “Councils are legally obliged to stick to imperial measures. I have written to all local authorities reminding them of the clear and consistent signage we expect to be delivered on our highways.” (“Stop confusing pedestrians with signs in metres, councils told”, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 2019).

Letter from Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport, to local authority chief executives, 18 April 2019

Dear Chief Executive

Distances on Traffic Signs

I am writing to remind you that distances shown on traffic signs on public highways in Great Britain must be in imperial units, i.e. miles, miles and yards, or yards. Metric units are not permitted as a measurement of distance.

The prescribed expressions to indicate distances on traffic signs are set out in Schedule 18 Part 3 of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016, available at:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2016/362/contents/made>

When the regulations were updated in 2016, my Department published complementary guidance in *DfT Circular 01/2016 The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016*. This restates the position that distances must be indicated in imperial units. The Circular is available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523916/DfT-circular-01-2016.pdf

Further guidance on traffic sign design is provided in Chapter 7 of *The Traffic Signs Manual*. This has recently been updated, and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-signs-manual>

I would also like to remind you that as a traffic authority you are responsible for ensuring that traffic signs you erect on your road network comply with legislation. The use of non-prescribed signs on public highways without authorisation might be deemed unlawful, with authorities using them acting beyond their powers. The erection of an unauthorised sign in the highway is an obstruction and the possible consequences of erecting or permitting the erection of obstructions can be severe.

Those responsible could lay themselves open to a claim for damages, for example if an obstruction is the cause of an accident or an injury in a collision, or if it adversely affects a property adjacent to the road by blocking light or impairing visual amenity. Furthermore, the use of unlawful traffic signs might compromise enforcement of statutory provisions and be detrimental to road safety.

Please direct any queries about this to our enquiry inbox at traffic.signs@dft.gov.uk.

With best wishes, Chris

Some chief executives reacted to Mr Grayling's letter in a petulant manner.

Grayling accused of 'micromanaging' over metric system warning, *Local Government Chronicle*, 23 April, 2019

Transport secretary Chris Grayling has blasted some council chiefs for “acting beyond their powers” by opting to use the metric system of kilometres and metres used in European road signs, over the UK's standard imperial units of miles and yards. In the letter he sent last week to council chief executives, which has been seen by LGC, Mr Grayling stated that the use of non-prescribed signs on public highways without authorisation “might be deemed unlawful”, with authorities using them “acting beyond their powers”.

“The erection of an unauthorised sign in the highway is an obstruction and the possible consequences of erecting or permitting the erection of obstructions can be severe,” he said, adding that those responsible could lay themselves open to a claim for damages.

Mr Grayling, who has been embroiled in controversy lately for Crossrail and HS2 delays and the fiasco over ferry operators picked in the event of a no deal Brexit, is known by opposition MPs as ‘failing Grayling’.

One chief executive described the tone of the letter as “micromanaging”, at a time when council resources are currently overstretched due to having to organise EU elections as well as local elections due to Brexit bungling. They said: “Anyone would have thought that the cabinet might be dealing with the burning issues of our time like the social care crisis, rising child poverty or public service funding. It would appear that different priorities keep us awake at night.”

Another chief commented: “This looks purely political to me. There might be some pressure from ERG¹ and this is a reaction to assert the status quo.”

Graeme McDonald, managing director of the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives & Senior Managers, said that Solace is not aware of any significant instances of metric distances being used for traffic signs. “This is not a priority issue for local authority chief executives,” he added.

Mr Grayling's letter comes after The British Weights and Measurements Association made him aware of a small number of new pedestrian route signs using metric measurements, for example new signs in Bournemouth that direct pedestrians in distances measured in metres and kilometres.

Chris Parkes, team leader, traffic management at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council said the council had been made aware that some street signs directing pedestrians around Bournemouth do not

¹ European Research Group, which has a membership of Conservative MPs.

comply with the correct measurements required in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions. He added: “These signs were installed as part of a wayfinding project and we are currently in the process of updating them to comply with the Department of Transport's requirements.”

The timing of this campaign to purge the UK of European-style street signage may not be entirely coincidental, with Brexit weighing on people's minds. A spokesperson for BWMA, Warwick Cairns, told LGC he thought the “unlawful metric pedestrian signs” popping up on road and footpath signs were related to anti-Brexit sentiment. “I think there is an ideological mindset in some councils that the metric system is related to being international and outward looking, and that being European is mixed in with that. It's part of culture wars going on around the world. Sometimes, people override the law to further their take on what they think we should be culturally.”

* * *

Extract from interview with Fulvio Massi of A+M+L Architecture, from *The Independent East End*, Suffolk County, New York, 13 August 2019.

How did studying architecture in Italy translate to the American aesthetic? What were the differences in building materials or architectural details that you found interesting when you came here?

In Italy, the principal structural building materials I was working with were concrete, masonry, and steel, very different from the wood stick frame that is common here. I wasn't familiar with wood construction, so for me, it opened a whole new world. In a way, a common denominator can be found in the cedar shingles — being a modular material, it does have some relation to bricks.

Was it challenging switching from the metric to the imperial system?

The thought of switching from the metric to imperial system was worrisome, but I was surprised how quickly I embraced the feet and inches, as they are intimately related to the human body. Oddly enough, at this point I don't miss the metric system.

* * *

From June 1979, letter to Model Engineer magazine: One of the most infuriating things about the Metric System is the stupid way we are expected to use it. How many people know what a millimetre really is? It is about the size of an average pin-head. Similarly, a millilitre is only a few drops. Who with any sense wants to measure anything in so many pin-heads and drops? What housewife would ask for, say, '350 peas in a packet', or '100 lumps of sugar'? Who but a fool would tell you that the next village was '5,280 yards away', instead of 3 miles? Yet this is just the kind of senseless thing that is being done with the metric system. J. H. Durance.

**“Be a Leader, Not a Liter”;
Letter from James Panero to the Wall
Street Journal, 20 May 2019**

James Panero is cultural critic and executive editor of *The New Criterion*, a New York-based literary magazine. Shortly after his letter was published, James Panero did a four-minute interview on the metric system with Fox presenter Tucker Carlson, 5 June 2019; this discussion is available to watch on Youtube (search for: james panero tucker carlson metric system).

World Metrology Day is Monday. Forgive me if I don't raise a pint - sorry, 473 milliliters - in commemoration. This date is meant to celebrate the International System of Units, otherwise known as the metric system. Against pascals of pressure, the U.S. stands nearly alone in maintaining its own “customary units” of weights and measures. We should stand tall on our own two feet. The metric system has never measured up. It was customary units that calibrated the machinery of the Industrial Revolution and took us 240,000 miles to the moon.

Proponents of the metric system have been metering out contempt since their inhuman invention emerged from the French Revolution. In 1793 France's own customary units, including the *pied du Roi* (king's foot), fell victim to Jacobin Terror. The radicals standardized regional differences and went the extra mile, rationalizing their measures through the blinding logic of Enlightenment thought.

The metric system became a symbol of modernity. More than overturning millennia of custom, the meter also overturned man and his labor as the basis of measurement. Nearly all customary units derive in some way from use. The acre was the amount of land a yoke of oxen could till in a day. The fathom is 6 feet, the span of the arms, useful when pulling up the sounding line of a depth measure. The meter is unfathomable, calculated (imprecisely) as a tiny fraction of the Earth's circumference.

Worse than the abandonment of human measure is the imposition of decimal division. From calendars to clocks, French radicals went all in for 10. That works well for abstract calculations, as with dollars and cents, but not when measuring things in the real world. The Romans counted in 12s, as in the hours on a clock and the inches in a foot. The Babylonians used 60, from which we get minutes, seconds and degrees. A simple system of 8 still exists in our ounces — and in computer bytes. Eight, 12 and 60 divide easily into halves and quarters, even thirds, while a decimal system does not. A third of a meter is roughly 33.33 centimeters, a third of a foot exactly 4 inches.

The abstract inhumanity of the metric system may be newly measured as new bases are adopted to replace “Le Grand K,” a platinum cylinder kept locked away in

France that has been the kilogram standard. The metric kilogram will now be determined through a new fixed agreement of Planck's constant, the length light travels in a vacuum in 1/299,792,458th of a second, and the amount of time it takes a cesium-133 atom to vibrate 9,192,631,770 times. It's so simple!

The U.S. has come close to compulsory metrication more than once. The latest push came out of the 1970s, with metric textbooks, metric road signs, and “The Metric Marvels,” a “Schoolhouse Rock” knockoff. President Reagan ended the effort in 1982.

With the European Union being cut down to size, can we hope for a return to British imperial units, which the U.K. was forced to abandon after it joined? A pint's a pound, the world around, and it beats walking the Planck.

In the Commons: 26 June 2019

Virendra Sharma MP, Labour, Ealing, Southall: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of switching to metric measurements for distance.

Kelly Tolhurst Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy): Metric units are the legal units for all measurement of length other than for road traffic signs, distance and speed measurements where the mile, yard, foot and inch are the primary units of measurement. The use of units of measurement for these purposes is a matter for the Department of Transport.

Decimal Watch: Judge rules that Salisbury District Hospital mistake did not cause 10-year-old's disability, Salisbury Journal, 14 June 2019

A DECIMAL point in the wrong place led to a baby boy being given a massive overdose of a paralysing drug at Salisbury District Hospital. The prescribing blunder meant the boy, who was born 10 weeks premature, received a “tenfold overdose” of the powerful muscle relaxant. Now aged about 10, he is gravely disabled - but the judge's ruling means he will go without a penny in compensation from the NHS. Mrs Justice Yip expressed sympathy for the boy - referred in the case as baby A, but said there was no proven link between the 2008 overdose and his lifelong injuries. The judge said the boy was only a few hours old and in the hospital's special care baby unit when he was given the overdose. “Unfortunately, when the dose was prescribed, a decimal point was put in the wrong place,” she told London's High Court. “That caused him to receive 10 times the recommended dose. The prescription should have been cross-checked, but the error was not identified.” Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust admitted negligence and apologised for the mistake, the judge added.

Metric Muddle

by Beryl Wilkins

Teacher magazine, 1989

School rushed feet first into teaching metric but the outside world is still yards behind ...

Eighteen years have passed since teachers were advised the UK was going metric, but confusion over what to teach continues.

In the teacher's manual of a text book intended for first-year juniors, published in 1971, it says, "A recommendation has been made to adopt the metric system ... However, it is believed some time may elapse before it is fully operative."

Today we still teach a hotch-potch. The notes went on to advise "It is likely that children will continue to meet in their everyday lives certain of the Imperial units to avoid confusion the two systems should not be taught side by side."

This dilemma is difficult to avoid. Text books, work books and maths equipment are based on the metric system while the children's experience out of school is in Imperial units.

The current policy, throughout the age range of primary schools known to me, is to teach only the metric system but to refer to the Imperial where relevant. This seems to work and the duality is accepted by children (they've known nothing else), but there are worrying factors.

The most common difficulty seems to be where the child tries to compare something s/he has come across outside school (described in Imperial units) with something s/he has discovered in the classroom (using the metric system). For instance, my class of seven- and eight-year-olds measured one another and made a chart. Andrew, height one metre 30 centimetres, said next day "My Dad says I shall grow as tall as him."

"How tall is your Dad?"

"Six feet, one inch."

We did a calculation to find out how many centimetres he needed to grow. But until this is done - or a conversion table is used - there is no way the child can visualize an immediate comparison. A similar thing happened in a top infants' class. The pupil was reading to her teacher, "My baby weighs four kilos; he is very

light." The little girl stopped reading and said, "Our baby was eight pounds and four ounces. Is that heavy?"

Where parallel systems are used, they are almost certain to get no more than a vague idea of the one which is least familiar to them. Do we, if we come across the well-known lines "Full fathom five thy father lies ...", visualize anything more than "pretty deep"?

Perhaps for some children, there is no cause for anxiety, but for others the problem is already too much for them to cope with. A colleague who teaches a class of first-year juniors with special needs (not necessarily low IQs) has, after much experience and thought, abandoned the metric system altogether when teaching weight. These children already experience great difficulty with maths language and the only everyday experience they get involving weight is when they go down to the corner shop for three pounds of potatoes, or big sister loses half a stone when she goes on a diet.

Imperial measurements seem to be the natural expression when it comes to creative writing. A seven-year-old describes in his *Underground Adventure* "I go a molehill as big as a pond. It was 17 feet wide and 17 feet long ... it must have been about a hundred and eleven feet deep".

And that from a child who had recently completed a page in a workbook which required him to measure the height of the door, length of the classroom, width of his table and so on, in metres.

Conversations with local tradespeople suggest that not only is the process towards complete metrication at a standstill but, in some cases, there is total reversion to Imperial units. Is there really any justification for teaching in metric when signposts indicate in miles, speed is registered as miles per hour, petrol consumption is calculated at miles per gallon, and milk is delivered in pint bottles?

The compulsory change to decimal currency was swift and complete. Isn't it time a short, sharp shock was applied on behalf of total metrication? Or should the UK scrap the idea altogether?



ACROSS

- 1 Describing the upper classes, the nobility
- 5 UK car company, later the Rover Group
- 7 A test to check roadworthiness of vehicles
- 9 Lbs/square inch; pressure
- 10 Extension for an HTML file; creating Web pages
- 12 Sharing or exchanging information, ideas, news
- 13 Queen of Scots [4,6]
- 18 Lead 21 Opposite of A.D.
- 22 After E.E.C. In or out???
- 23 Citroen, French goddess

DOWN

- 1 Music played quickly, with square steering wheel?
- 2 The twisting of an object due to applied torque.
- 3 Instrument to measure altitude of an aeroplane
- 4 Water at less than 32 degrees
- 6 System & structure of a language / Type of school
- 7 Speed of a vehicle, the wind etc.
- 8 German for East
- 11 100mph, informal
- 13 Shorter than Member of Parliament
- 14 Small balls on metal rods for doing calculations
- 15 6d coin
- 16 Dozen. "d" in a "s"
- 17 Twelfths of a foot
- 19 Between zero and two
- 20 No. of pints in a quart
- 21 Location of a sleeping person or roses

Answers will be in the next Yardstick.

“Sticking with pounds and gallons - Jamaicans still to fully get on board the metric system”, *The Gleaner*, Kingston, Jamaica, 11 December 2018

Decades after the country formally adopted the metric system of measurement, most Jamaicans continue to think and operate in pounds and gallons, the imperial platform. Officials of the Bureau of Standards Jamaica (BSJ) are convinced that it will take even more time for the change to take full effect. The BSJ ensures that products entering the local market, even those from the United States, include metric measurements. But that has not been enough. "It is difficult to tell the shop-keeper at the corner of Wildman Street and Charles Street that he needs to switch from pounds to kilograms because that is what the public understands," said Richard Lawrence, director of the engineering division of the BSJ, during a Gleaner Editors' Forum last week. He noted that in the 1990s, the BSJ launched a sensitisation campaign on metrication, but he argued that it is difficult to change the culture of a people whose major trading partner is not metric. "In terms of the school system, from our primary education level, our children are taught metric, and that continues up to tertiary. But, the cultural shift still is impacted somewhat by the American market," added Lawrence.

The US is Jamaica's main trading partner, with more than 50 per cent of total trade, and one of only three nations in the world where the metric system is not the official system of weights and measures. In the meantime, Garfield Dixon, marketing and public relations manager at BSJ, added that a culture change would require an extensive public education campaign. "It requires teaching the people about the conversion. What is the kilogram equivalent of two pounds, the conversion of a few feet to metres, and so on, so they can get an appreciation of it and start using it comfortably," said Dixon. He added that through the National Metrology Institute, the BSJ wants to educate persons on the science of measurement.

* * *

David Turner discovered mixed-unit wooden fingerpost signs along Centurion Way, following the old railway line between Midhurst and Chichester; for example: "West Dean 200m - West Dean Gardens 2/3 mile".

Stephen Dixon sent in a photograph taken in Thailand, showing that main airport in Bangkok used inches to price luggage: "Size S (below 22") 100THB; Size M (22" to 26") 120THB; Oversize 150THB".

Les rosbifs: in Yardstick 69, we reported on how Active Resistance to Metrication was filmed in action by French documentary makers. The documentary, in French and lasting 1h 15m is available to view at the following password-protected link (the ARM segment is five minutes, and starts at 24m 25s):

<https://vimeo.com/341795646>

The password is *rosbifs*

March 2007 letter from the Brussels-based Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry, representing 1,800 companies, to the European Commission, regarding the Commission's proposal (subsequently suspended) to ban non-metric supplementary indications from 1 January 2010

The introduction of mono EU labelling would require the redesign of millions of SKUs (stock keeping units) in order to separate out the cm and imperial measures. For certain product categories, such as golf clubs, the commonly understood product description would become completely artificial, as the "common and familiar characterisation" is based on imperial measurements. In many cases, this information is part of the product classification, particularly for sports whose major markets are UK and US-driven, for example American football, rugby, baseball, hockey, certain equestrian sports and diving. Enforcing such labelling would also impact all accompanying documents, for example leaflets, catalogues and product instructions, as in most cases the necessary translation to the commonly understood descriptions required. It will be a significant imposition with significant cost ramifications that will ultimately be felt by consumers.

Dual labelling (or multi-country labelling), on the other hand, enables efficient distribution in accordance with natural market forces. One inventory can be used without re-labelling, in order to serve global markets. However if mono labelling were put into force, it would not be possible to move EU product to the US because it would lack imperial labelling and vice versa.

Re-labelling to meet the requirements of other markets is, in many cases, not possible in a way that is attractive to the brand image, as it has to be performed by re-stitching or covering with a sticky label. Even if it is technically possible, it is very tedious and difficult and can sometimes damage the appearance of the product. It is also expensive. In many instances, it is not only the product itself that has to be re-worked but also the packaging that needs to be changed, as it has been damaged or destroyed when opening for re-labelling. Even if stickers are theoretically a solution, there are products for which it is not feasible, as certain information on labels must, by law, remain for the life of the product.

Since the trademark owner has no control over products once they have been released onto the market, products can be placed onto a market with labels that make no sense to the local consumer. This is a disservice to the consumer and not in the interest of the trademark owner or the retailer.

In conclusion, mono labelling is substantial red tape to global trade and business strategy with impact on supply chain, global business strategy, cost to the business as well as disservice and confusion to the consumer.

Alberto S. Bichi, Secretary General

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