

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10 April 2024

An Update on the Vehicle Activated Sign Policy

Recommendation(s)

That Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the update on the vehicle activated sign policy and considers whether it is fulfilling its aim to take an evidence-based approach to vehicle activated sign management, allowing a more effective targeting of highways resources while continuing to support road safety.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In September 2022 Cabinet adopted a new policy covering the provision of new vehicle activated signs (VAS) and the potential removal of redundant VAS in Warwickshire.
- 1.2 The rationale behind this policy was two-fold: to establish a policy position which provides clear evidence-led criteria that need to be met when considering the deployment of new VAS on Warwickshire's highways, and to develop a process which allows for potential removal of non-working VAS which have not had a positive effect on road safety and are not in areas of high numbers of personal injury collisions.
- 1.3 In practice, the policy has enabled better targeting of highways' resources at locations where road safety is a demonstrable risk (based upon appropriate road safety metrics) and reduced the maintenance requirement by removing signs that were not beneficial in terms of improvements to road safety.
- 1.4 VAS are recognised as a useful way of highlighting upcoming road hazards or reminding drivers of speed limits and can have safety benefits at these sites. Prior to having a policy in place, a number of VAS had been deployed in locations where road safety was already good and where there was a low frequency of personal injury collisions, without clear rationale for deployment.
- 1.5 Approximately one in five of the VAS that have installation dates associated with them were deployed at locations where there had been zero personal injury collisions in the preceding decade, with several more at sites with just one slight injury collision. Given the resource pressures in relation to highways, the new policy aimed to be more robust, to provide clarity to interested parties, (such as parish and town councils) and to ensure that appropriate regard continued in relation to actual road safety.

- 1.6 The policy adopted in September 2022 seeks to rationalise the deployment of new VAS in line with the agreed criteria (as set out in the Appendix attached to this report) which require evidence of an actual road safety risk at individual locations prior to installation.
- 1.7 The policy also deals with potential removal of existing VAS. Under the policy, the intent is to review the road safety value of each VAS at the point that it stops working and is outside its warranty period.
- 1.8 The reviews look at whether the location of the sign has seen any decline in personal injury collision score when comparing data from before and after installation. Those that have overseen any reduction at all will be adjudged to have had a beneficial impact on road safety and will be retained and repaired.
- 1.9 A further check establishes whether the site has an on-going problem with personal injury collisions. Non-working signs will be retained and repaired at locations with a personal injury score of five or more in the last five years, regardless of whether there has been a reduction in injury collisions.
- 1.10 In recognition of the potential desire of local communities to retain their signs, these 'redundant' VAS are offered to local bodies such as parish or town councils who may wish to pay for the on-going maintenance costs involved in replacing or repairing the sign. In this way and putting road safety at the heart of the decision-making process, only those non-working VAS which have had no measurable road safety benefit **and** are at low injury collision sites **and** are not wanted by local community bodies will be scheduled for removal.
- 1.11 There is currently no facility within the policy to allow local communities to fund the provision of their own VAS for installation on highway land. There are issues around ownership, liabilities in the event of collisions, statutory compliance and on-going maintenance costs that would need to be resolved before such an approach could be considered. For these reasons County Council Highways officers will continue to manage the deployment of VAS through the existing policy process, retaining installation, repair and removal within WCC operations.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 The policy is working well and seems to be achieving its aims in terms of efficiency. It is not possible, currently, to put a figure on financial savings but officers are confident that savings will accrue as VAS not contributing to road safety are removed.
- 2.2 The current budget for VAS maintenance is £80,000 per annum. Largely as a result of the proliferation of VAS installations across the county from the year 2000 onwards, a substantial proportion of VAS were in need of repair or replacement. It is anticipated that expenditure on VAS will drop in the coming years as the backlog of faulty signs is worked through and the removal of 'redundant' signs reduces the overall maintenance burden.

- 2.3 Officers support the use of a clear and robust policy which allows a consistent approach to be taken across the county in terms of improving road safety. VAS will still be deployed at locations where risk is evident. The removal of non-working redundant signs, together with more signs being returned to operational status as a result, will enhance their overall effectiveness as a road safety tool.

3. Environmental Implications

- 3.1 The environmental implications of the policy are relatively small. The majority of VAS are connected to the electricity network and therefore generate a cost to the Council. However, both the rationalisation of deployment and the removal of 'redundant' signs will help to reduce this cost and the Council's overall carbon footprint.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The policy aims to provide a clear decision-making framework to support robust, safety-based choices that make best use of resources while continuing to protect Warwickshire's communities.
- 4.2 Since the implementation of the policy, there have been several requests for new VAS. Enquirers have been provided with information about the new process and the assessment criteria. The table below shows the number of requests for new VAS (anonymised), the outcome of those requests and the reasoning behind each decision.
- 4.3 There were 13 individual submissions containing requests for a total of 18 new VAS. At all sites, bar one, the PIC score within 200m either side of the proposed location was zero over the preceding three-year period, indicating a very good road safety record and very low recent collision history. The one remaining site had a PIC score of one. At the time of writing, none of the sites has seen an increase in personal injury score since the request for new VAS was declined.

Requests for new VAS	Personal Injury Collision score	Requests approved Y/N	Reason for decision
1a	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
1b	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
2	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
3	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
4	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
5a	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
5b	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
5c	1	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
6	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score"
7	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
8	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
9a	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
9b	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score"
9c	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
10	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
11	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
12	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score
13	0	N	Existing good collision history Low PIC score

4.4 The table below contains the number of non-working VAS which have been assessed for removal, repair or offer to local communities to fund on-going maintenance.

Non-working VAS assessed	Retained for Repair			Identified for Removal	Taken on by Local Community	Scheduled for Removal
	Total	Complete	Outstanding			
44	31	23	8	13	2	11

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Vehicle Activated Sign criteria

Background Papers

None

	Name	Contact Information
Report Author	Jon Rollinson Service Manager – Transport Strategy & Policy	jonrollinson@warwickshire.gov.uk
Director	David Ayton-Hill Director – Economy & Place	davidaytonhill@warwickshire.gov.uk
Executive Director	Mark Ryder Executive Director for Communities	markryder@warwickshire.gov.uk
Portfolio Holder	Jan Matecki Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning	janmatecki@warwickshire.gov.uk

The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): not applicable county wide report

Other members:

Appendix 1

Criteria for the Installation and Management of Vehicle Activated Signs

VAS Criteria

Four criteria have been established: history and nature of personal injury collisions (PIC), speeds, traffic volume and environmental concerns.

All four criteria must be satisfied for a new VAS to be approved.

1. **Personal injury collisions** (reported and taken from Police collision statistics). The site will have a PIC weighted score of at least **five** within **200m** of the proposed VAS location over the preceding **three years**. This timescale aligns with that used for interventions in our Casualty Reduction programme. Only those collisions whose cause may be directly influenced by the installation of a VAS will be included in the PIC count for the site. The weighted score will be applied to collision severity as detailed below:

Severity of PIC	Weighted Score
Slight	1
Serious or Fatal	3

For example, a site with two recorded slight injuries and one serious or fatal collision over the preceding three years would meet this particular criterion, if the causes of all the accidents would be mitigated by a VAS sign, as would a site with one fatal and one serious PIC. A weighted score of five would ensure that the location has a real collision risk associated with it, and not merely a perceived one.

2. **Speeds.** The site will have an 85th percentile speed above ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) limits, i.e. 15% of drivers would be exceeding ACPO levels (= speed limit + 10% + 2mph), through significant periods of the day. Without a recognised speed problem there is little benefit in reinforcing the speed limit. Thresholds are 35mph (in a 30mph limit), 46 (40mph limit), 57 (50mph limit) or 68 (60mph limit).
3. **Traffic Flows.** More than 3000 vehicles per day (24 hour, 2-way flow) will pass through the site. With low traffic flows, associated risk is likely to be reduced.
4. **Environmental Concerns.** The site will have an environmental weighted score of a least **five** within **200m** of the proposed location. The environmental weighting scores are detailed in the table below:

Environmental Concern	Weighted Score
School/College/Nursery/Care Home	3
Community Facilities (Local Shop/Doctors Surgery/Church/Recreation Area/Village hall etc.)	2
Well used formal/informal crossing point(s)	2
Vulnerable users/insufficient footway	2
Busy highway resulting in community severance	1

For example, a village with a school and a well-used crossing point would score 5 and meet this particular criterion (5 points).

Process for the Potential Removal of redundant Vehicle Activated Signs

1. A non-operational VAS is identified.
2. The sign is assessed to establish whether there has been any reduction in PIC score when comparing data from before and after installation. Signs which have seen any reduction at all in PIC score are retained and repaired. VAS which do not have installation dates associated with them, and therefore do not permit the assessment to be carried out, are assumed to have had a positive impact on road safety and retained.
3. Where a VAS has not been shown to reduce PIC score, the location is assessed to establish its collision history over the preceding five years. Sign locations where the collision history is good, that is the PIC score is less than five are identified for removal.
4. Signs which are identified for removal are first offered to local communities such as parish or town councils to determine if they wish to retain the sign and fund its ongoing maintenance or replacement.
5. Only those non-working signs which have not had any measurable road safety benefit, are not in locations with a questionable road safety record and are not wanted by local communities are scheduled for removal.