

Best Value – A Marked Sign of Improvement

Best Value – A Marked Sign of improvement presents the Best Value case for road marking and signing and highlights the role of using both road markings and signage in delivering enhanced road safety, integrated transport planning and community safety in a economic, efficient and effective manner. The report was published as a joint venture between the Road Safety Markings Association and the Association for Road Traffic Safety and Management.

BEST VALUE – A MARKED SIGN OF IMPROVEMENT

This report is designed to assist both those directly involved in Best Value and also those responsible for road safety, integrated transport planning and community safety. The report identifies where road markings and signage can help deliver service enhancements and a proactive response to the requirements of Best Value.

Best Value has the potential to change the culture of local government service provision and procurement and the greatest benefits will accrue to those authorities that are willing to look beyond the immediate and the constraints of how services are currently managed.

The RSMA and ARTSM hope that this report will provide both a starting point and an impetus for those that wish to see road safety enhanced on their networks and seek greater cohesion in local transport. Readers' comments or questions are welcome.

ECONOMIC, EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE THE BEST VALUE CASE FOR ROAD SIGNING AND MARKINGS

Introduction

Implementing the new statutory duty of Best Value will present an on-going challenge to local government officers throughout the country as they search for new ways to continuously improve local services in partnership with others, and to build greater synergy between them.

Best Value will involve nothing less than a cultural change in the thinking of those who define, design and deliver local services. In requiring services to be more responsive to the needs of users, it has the potential to deliver changes in the role and influence of Councillors, officers and the public.

These changes have implications both for private sector contractors and suppliers providing services to local government and for those involved in service procurement, specification and undertaking Best Value Reviews. This document has been prepared to offer guidance to colleagues involved in all these areas on the implications of Best Value and to stimulate discussion on the wider challenges and opportunities that it brings.

It is true to say that road markings and signs, although greatly valued by both service providers and users, are often taken for granted. The new agenda of user responsive service, continuous improvement and value for money, however, will undoubtedly emphasise the relevance of road

markings and signs and position them for a pioneering role in the delivery of a Best Value highways service.

Executive Summary

- Road Markings and Signs have a proven record in delivering economic, efficient and effective solutions to transport problems, particularly for accident reduction and prevention.
- The new Government targets for road casualty reduction will ensure that road safety remains a key transport priority with particular relevance to road markings and signs
- The new local authority duty of Best Value however, combined with the Government policy for Integrated Transport provides the opportunity for a greatly increased role for road markings and signs, with the potential to add value over a much wider range of services including health and community safety.
- Enhancing public consultation, and making services more responsive to the needs of transport and other service users, will inevitably raise the profile of road markings and signs.
- Local authorities will be subject to independent assessment by the Audit Commission making them more accountable for their policies and priorities.

A New Agenda and a New Opportunity

1. From 1 April 2000 the Government placed a new duty of Best Value on local authorities, establishing challenging new arrangements under which they will fund, procure and deliver all of their services.
2. It will require local authorities:-
 - To secure continuous improvement in the exercise of all functions undertaken by the authority, whether statutory or not, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.
 - To ensure that services are responsive to the needs of citizens not the convenience of service providers.
3. There is considerable evidence that road markings and signs are economic, efficient and effective, particularly for accident reduction and prevention, but also for wider traffic management purposes.
4. Road users have always placed a high value on good quality markings and signs. They will now have a stronger influence on priorities and programmes.
5. The new local authority duty of Best Value, combined with the Government's new policies for Integrated Transport, provides the best opportunity ever for the road marking

and signing industry to contribute both to the challenging and exciting new transport agenda and also potentially over a much wider range of services

The Challenge of Best Value

6. Other principles of Best Value include:-

- Ensuring that public services are efficient and of a high quality.
- Ensuring that policy-making is more joined up and strategic, forward looking and non reactive to short-term pressures.
- Using information technology to tailor services to the needs of users.
- Valuing public services and tackling the under representation of minority groups.

7. Local authorities will need to demonstrate Best Value through a new and challenging process involving:-

- Fundamental review of all services every five years
- Publishing a Best Value Performance Plan each year
- Independent assessment by the Audit Commission

8. Local authorities will need to show that for every review their process is:-

- Challenging why and how the service is being provided
- Comparing their performance with others
- Embracing fair competition as a means securing efficient and effective services
- Consulting with local taxpayers, customers and the wider business community

9. The Audit Commission (in England and Wales) will inspect the outcome of best value reviews so that:-

- The public can see whether best value is being delivered
- The authority can check how well its doing
- The Government can see how well policies are working
- Action can be taken where services are failing
- Best practice can be shared

The Best Value agenda also applies in Scotland but at present exclude arrangements for independent inspection by the Accounts Commission.

Best Value for Roads and Transport

10. The principles of Best Value are especially relevant to Roads and Transport. The Government White Paper, 'A New Deal for Transport - Better for Everyone' is quite specific about this:-

- 'We will change the focus of road investment to reflect the needs of all road users, giving top priority to maintaining and managing our existing roads and getting them to work better.'

- 'We will put greater emphasis on listening to transport users - there will be a New Deal for the public transport passenger and a New Deal for the Motorist.'
 - 'We want local people and business to have a real say and real influence over transport. We will expect local authorities when preparing their local transport plans to consult widely and involve their communities in setting priorities for improving transport. In approving local transport plans we will want to be sure that they fully reflect this consultation and that the views of local people have made a difference.'
11. Government policy is based on the twin themes of sustainable and integrated transport which share the key Best Value principles:-
- involving users and the wider community
 - focussing on the long rather than short term
 - improving transport choice and the ease of moving between modes
 - creating a better environment
 - supporting a fairer more inclusive society
12. Local Transport Plans (LTPs) are a crucial part of the process by which authorities will seek to meet their duty of Best Value for their transport functions. The first LTPs were required to be submitted by 31 July 2000 and to set out their authorities plans for delivering local transport services within the overall context of Government policies for transport and Best Value.
13. Once approved by Government, LTPs are unlikely to change during the five years except as a result of a Best Value review. Progress reports will be made each year to DETR and will also feed into the Best Value Performance Plans that authorities will be required to publish these each year.
14. Although the duty of Best Value applies only to roads and transport services delivered by local authorities, the Highways Agency is applying similar principles and priorities. Its strategy for investment is based on:-
- Making road maintenance the first priority.
 - Making better use of the roads, through network control, traffic management measures and safety improvements.
 - Whole life costing, seeking to minimise costs over time taking into account the effects of disruption to traffic.
 - Tackling some of the most serious and pressing problems through a carefully targeted programme of small improvements.

A Wider Role for Road Markings and Signs

15. The combination of Best Value and Integrated Transport Policy provides probably the best opportunity ever to deliver sustainable improvements to our road and transport systems, but this will require the application of economic, efficient and effective solutions. These qualities have long been widely recognised in relation to road markings and signs, but primarily to deliver improvements in road safety.

16. The new Integrated Transport agenda will need the application of similar economic, efficient and effective measures to find solutions over a much wider field of transport activity, including:-

- Encouraging walking, cycling and use of public transport
- Creating better environments in town and countryside
- Helping with economic regeneration
- Making the best use of the network
- Providing access and information for all transport users
- Supporting transport integration

17. The possibilities for innovation in using road markings and signs to deliver Best Value across all these areas are endless, but will require creativity in development, design and marketing. Examples include:-

Re-allocating road space for bus priority schemes to improve reliability

- Marking out routes for walking and cycling
 - Designing creative junctions to improve capacity or re-allocate priorities
 - Moving lane lines to reduce carriageway wear and maintenance costs
 - Edge lining to reduce over-running
 - Signing to project sensitive areas from heavy traffic
 - Helping to calm the effects of traffic in local streets and communities
 - Supporting Clear Zones, Home Zones and Safer Routes to School
- Special signing and markings to help older and visually impaired people

Best Value Maintenance

18. Best Value recognises the need for economic, efficient and effective maintenance and an emphasis on whole life costing, a view that is shared by the Highways Agency.

19. The Code of Good Practice on Highway Maintenance, last published by the Local Authority Associations in 1989, set out preferred arrangements for maintaining road markings and signs within the context of overall maintenance policy to standards appropriate at that time. The Code is presently being reviewed to accord with the new principles of Best Value and is to be republished in the spring of 2001.

20. Regular cleaning and maintenance of road markings and signs is necessary in order to maintain their effectiveness. Highway maintenance policy and standards, including those for signs and markings are increasingly referred to as material considerations in claims for compensation against local authorities following road accidents. Prudent local authorities adopt and clear policies and practices for inspection and treatment related to the Code, and maintain comprehensive records.

21. If there are any remaining doubts about the crucial importance of maintaining road signs and markings in delivering Best Value these should be finally dispelled by the Audit

Commission publication 'Seeing is Believing', issued as guidance to local authorities undertaking Best Value reviews.

22. In setting out how the Commission intends to assess local authorities review processes, the publication uses as a Case Study example a procedure for checking the quality of road markings and signs. What better endorsement could there be of the importance of these items in the Best Value agenda?

Accident Reduction and Prevention Still High Priority

23. Within the wider agenda of Best Value and Integrated Transport, road safety rightly continues to have a high priority, and new challenging casualty reduction targets for 2010 have been set by Government.
24. The previous target for 2000 of reducing all casualties by one third from the average 1981-84 level was achieved in respect of deaths (39% reduction) and serious injuries (45% reduction) but slight injuries and casualties to more vulnerable road users have been more resistant to reduction.
25. The new targets are intended to build upon previous achievements and also to focus more specifically on these key areas. They require, compared to the average of 1994-98:-
 - 40% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents
 - 50% reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured
 - 10% reduction in the number of people slightly injured per 1 00 million vehicle kilometres.
26. Road markings and signs made a considerable contribution towards the achievement of the earlier casualty reduction targets, either as small schemes in their own right or in combination with more comprehensive schemes. Confirmation of this contribution and the very high levels of cost benefit achieved will be found in the records of site monitoring undertaken by all local authorities.
27. More comprehensive evidence of the Best Value in accident reduction provided by road markings and signs can be found in the MOLASSES (Monitoring Local Authority Safety Schemes) Database, established by CSS.

(Then the County Surveyors Society) and maintained on their behalf by the Transport Research Laboratory.
28. Records obtained from thirteen local authorities summarised in this report show that schemes of road markings and signs, either separately or in combination, consistently achieve outstanding levels of effectiveness, eliminating personal injury accidents at an average cost of between +800 +1400 per accident saved.

The Future of Best Value

29. The future will continue to bring new problems and opportunities for local authorities, including:-

- Containing traffic growth
 - Providing for increasing numbers of older drivers
 - Locating and servicing new development
 - Facilitating new technology including increased utility activity on highway
 - Accommodating more diverse lifestyle choices for work and leisure
 - Finding new ways of procuring and delivering services
30. Road Markings and Signs will undoubtedly play a very significant role in delivering the exciting new agenda of Best Value and Integrated Transport. They can also potentially make a very significant contribution in helping local authorities meet the challenges and opportunities of Best Value over much wider areas of service where creative and cost-effective measures are needed.

References

1. A New Deal for Transport - Better for Everyone, DETR 1998
2. Modern Local Government - In Touch with the People, DETR 1998
3. A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England, DETR 1998
4. Local Government Act 1999 Part 1 Best Value, DETR Circular 10/99
5. Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans, DETR 2000
6. Tomorrows Roads - Safer for Everyone, DETR 2000
7. Seeing is Believing, Audit Commission 2000
8. Code of Good Practice for Highway Maintenance, Local Authority Association 1989

EXTRACT FROM 'SEEING IS BELIEVING'

'How the Audit Commission will carry out Best Value Inspections in England'

Reality Checks Case Study 3 from the Field Trials Making the Judgement 'How good is the service'

Example: highways, cycle paths and pavements in a county transport service

The inspector needed some additional information and evidence to allow him to form a judgement about the quality of the service because the Best Value Review offered no more than assertions about the service quality. Nor was there much feedback from customers.

The inspector tailored an existing check, which is designed to use 'participant observation' to validate or otherwise an authority's own assessment of how good these services are, from two perspectives:

- First by experiencing the service as customers do, drawing down on the factors that national market research shows are the main concerns of customers and the public - with a particular focus on whether the service meets the diverse needs of the public from disabled people to cyclists.
- Second, use structured observation to assess how the service compares with established best practice.

A series of pre-planned routes were selected, (the authority were not given the details).

- To cycle from one major location (for example, a train station) to another (the town centre, or a major place of employment), and assess a number of features including:-
 - a) Is it easy to follow the route and find places
 - b) Are the aids to movement well laid out and maintained
 - c) Is the road surface comfortable
 - d) Are cycle facilities well designed, with logical start and finish points

- To drive from one location (town centre) to another (accident and emergency department or nearest trunk route away from the town) and assess the experience against a number of features including
 - a) Is it easy to find places
 - b) Do signs follow one from another
 - c) Are they clear, clean, well sited and easy to read
 - d) Are traffic signals well set up and slick in operation
 - e) Do lane markings agree with the signs
 - f) Is the road surface in good condition

One drive was carried out at night to assess how easy it was to use the road network by night, both in lit and unlit areas

- A Walking check was carried out, focussing on the quality of the network and its ease of use, with some way finding. It also allowed some checking of street furniture. This check covered such questions as;
 - a) Are the footways in good condition with an absence of trips?
 - b) Are road crossings provided?
 - c) How would disabled people or people with prams find their journey?
 - d) Are the drop kerbs flush?
 - e) Are paths kept clear of overhanging vegetation?
 - f) Are town centre paths sufficiently wide to avoid spillage on to the street?
 - g) Do crossings respond quickly to pedestrian demands?

Extract from findings from the field trial

- The principal road network is in poor condition. Much of the white lining on the roads was faded, even on one scheme which was less than one year old when visited

- Many routes were hard to follow, with destinations on the signs changing as the route progressed

- Sign positioning caused confusion with some junctions having no signs at the junction itself
- The general impression gained was that cycling in this town centre is scary and there has been no help at all given to cyclists

REVIEW OF COSMETIC OR CRUCIAL SUMMARY OF INFORMATION FROM MOLASSES DATABASE

All schemes have at least three year before and after records together with complete financial costs. None of them include multiple schemes for example roundabouts and signs etc

Group 1 - Signs Only

Total of 89 schemes recorded from 13 authorities	
Total accidents during before periods	614
Total accidents during after periods	373
Average before period	3.85 years
Average after period	3.58 years
Total accidents per year during before period	160
Total accidents per year during after period	104
Total accidents reduced per year	56
Average percentage change	35
Total cost of schemes	227225
Average cost of schemes	2553
Total accidents saved during after period	200
Average cost per accident saved	1136

Group 2 Markings Only

Total of 48 schemes from 13 authorities	
Total accidents during before periods	664
Total accidents during after periods	419
Average before period	3.38 years
Average after period	3.17 years
Total accidents per year during before period	196
Total accidents per year during after period	132
Total accidents reduced per year	64
Average percentage change	32
Total cost of schemes	287548
Average cost of schemes	5990
Total accidents saved during after period	202
Cost per accident saved during after period	1423

Group 3 Signs and Markings Only

Total of 21 schemes from 6 authorities		
Total accidents during before period	411	
Total accidents during after period	262	
Average before period	3.10 years	
Average after period	3.10 years	
Total accidents per year during before period		133
Total accidents per year during after period	85	
<i>Total accidents reduced per year</i>	48	
Average percentage change	36	
Total cost of schemes	123165	
Average cost of schemes	5866	
Total accidents saved during after period	149	
Cost per accident saved during after period	826	

EXTRACT FROM GUIDANCE ON FULL LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANS

What Should LTPs contain

- Objectives consistent with overarching objectives and which command widespread local support.
- Improve safety for all travellers
- To promote accessibility to everyday facilities for all, especially those without a car
- To contribute to an efficient economy and to support sustainable economic growth in appropriate locations
- To promote integration of all forms of transport and land use planning leading to a better more efficient transport system
- To protect and enhance the built and natural environment
- Analysis of problems and opportunities
- A long term strategy to tackle the problems
- Costed and affordable 5 year implementation programme
- A Set of targets and performance indicators

Best Value and Local Transport Plans

'LTPs will be an important part of the process by which authorities meet their duty of best value for their transport functions. The transport function will be subject to best value reviews over a five-year cycle. LTPs along with the BVRs will feed into BV performance Plans. Authorities will be required to publish these each year so that local people can judge their performance.'

Involving the Public

'Full and effective public participation is an integral part of meeting best value duties. We attach a high priority to effective public involvement in local transport policy and this will be a key factor in our consideration of LTPs.'

'LTPs should include a section that explains how the public was involved in the process of strategy development and how this has influenced the policies in the plan.'

'Maintaining participation once the plan is completed... will also be important. One way of ensuring this could be through the use of user satisfaction surveys.'