

## Devon County Council Traffic Management Fact Sheet

### VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNS (VAS) TMT02



## Devon County Council Traffic Management Team Fact Sheet

# TMT – 02 – Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS)

### INTRODUCTION

VAS have been shown to be effective in reducing vehicles speeds when sited appropriately and can also be an important element of a co-ordinated approach to Speed Management in Communities.

VAS are ideally sited where there is evidence of a speeding problem as deploying them where they are rarely activated is not good value for money. VAS can be used as an enhancement to existing signs when recommended through the SCARF process.

SCARF stands for **Speed Complaint Action Review Forum** which is a joint meeting between Devon County Council Traffic and Road Safety Officers and Devon and Cornwall Constabulary Casualty Reduction Officers where speed complaint sites are assessed and appropriate actions agreed. (See TMT-01 SCARF Process)

### TYPES OF VAS

- **Mains Powered** – these can sometimes be mounted on lamp columns and powered directly from the lamp column itself. If the lamp column is not strong enough to support the sign a separate post would be required. This type of sign would remain in place permanently. Purchase costs will vary depending on specification and supplier. A basic mains powered Speed Warning sign with Slow beneath the roundel would be around £2,800\* VAT if attached to a lamp column. If a separate wide based post and connection are required the costs would be at least £1000 higher and potentially much more if no convenient power supply is available on the same side of the road. Mains powered VAS will typically remain functional for over 5 years and often for as long as 10 years.
- **Mobile VAS** – these would normally be battery powered. Recent improvements to technology mean that, depending on activation level, battery charges can last for up to a month. Costs would be between £1,200\* and £2,000\* per unit plus installation costs.
- **Solar Powered VAS** - these signs can be the correct choice where there is no power available but can be expensive to maintain and are sometime a target of theft of the solar panel. Costs can be around £5,000\*.
- **Speed related VAS** will be configured to activate at the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) enforcement threshold which is 10% + 2mph above the Speed Limit. E.g. for a 30mph Speed Limit, activation level would be 35mph.
- **Speed Indicator Devices (SID's)** are Vehicle Activated Signs which display the speed of the approaching vehicle and may also show a Happy or Unhappy Emoticon. DCC does not

currently approve the use of SID's on the network, other than when supported by a Police presence for educational purposes or as part of a coordinated Community Speed Watch (CSW) deployment. The Police/CSW presence should deter drivers already likely to exceed the speed limit from attempting to register higher speeds. (See TMT-03 Community Speed Watch)

- Details of Type Approved VAS and Manufacturers can be viewed via the TOPAS Product Registration Scheme (<http://www.topasgroup.org.uk/>).

\*Based on 2017 prices

## **DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL FUNDED**

Devon County Council (DCC) has funded a large number of VAS at permanent sites around the County. These will usually have been provided at collision sites either providing enhanced warning of a particular hazard such as a road junction or as an enhancement to existing speed limit signing. DCC continues to maintain these signs but will review the need for the sign and may not replace if the sign costs are beyond reasonable repair.

DCC has an additional 10 battery powered VAS which it deploys at community concern sites for a month at a time in response to recommendations from the SCARF process. The signs are deployed by the County Council's Term Maintenance Contractor and are usually mounted on removable posts set in pre-prepared sockets.

## **PARISH AND COMMUNITY FUNDED VAS IN DEVON**

DCC welcomes approaches from Communities interested in funding and operating their own VAS and has worked with several Parish Council's (PC's) who have funded the purchase of their own VAS.

Purchase and servicing of Mobile VAS is a relatively new initiative which was pioneered with Shaugh Prior Parish Council. The particular concern of the PC was the speed of vehicles across unfenced moorland where horses, cows and sheep roam freely. The PC agreed the sites for the VAS with the County Council (DCC) and the Police, the process of servicing the signs was risk assessed and covered under the PC's Public Liability Insurance.

Other Parish Councils operating their own VAS include, Lifton, Milton Abbot and High Bickington Parish Council's.

Community funded VAS can be considered at sites where there has been a SCARF assessment that VAS are appropriate. The Parish Council's sponsored sites mentioned above were all agreed in this way.

## **SUMMARY**

VAS are considered following a SCARF assessment indicating that VAS are appropriate. The message displayed on the sign needs to be agreed with DCC.

If a VAS is to be mains powered and mounted either on a lamp column or separate post.

1. No setup costs should accrue to DCC
2. The PC will be responsible for insuring the unit against claims for Injury, Accident or Damage. Public Liability Cover in the amount of at least £5m is recommended.

3. It is recommended that the sign should carry an on-site warrantee from the manufacturer for at least 5 years.
4. DCC will remove the sign from site in the event of a collision and make the site safe but would not be responsible for replacement.
5. The PC will be responsible for all maintenance not covered under the manufacturers warrantee, including vandalism.
6. DCC does not currently approve the use of SID's on the network, other than when supported by a Police presence for educational purposes or when associated Community Speed Watch.
7. If the sign or signs are to be mains powered then DCC will fund the cost of the electricity.

n.b. When siting any highway sign, care should be taken to ensure that it can be seen by approaching drivers at an appropriate distance, that it is relevant to the hazard in question and that it is in a position where it can be safely maintained.

This is particularly true of VAS as the vehicle detector needs to have a clear line of sight to the approaching vehicle and the LED lighting on the sign needs to be aimed at the approaching vehicle much more accurately than a conventional static sign which can be seen from a much wider angle. In particular this can present problems if a VAS is sited at the top of a hill or on a bend where there might be limited scope for aiming the sign downwards or to one side.

The County Council as Highway Authority has a duty of care to ensure that all signs placed on the highway network are sited safely and will not present a danger to road users. The location and positioning of VAS must therefore be agreed with the County Council before erection.