

From: Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member – Environment, Highways & Waste
John Burr - Director of Highways & Transportation

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Cabinet Committee

Date: 15th November 2012

Subject: Policy for the use of mirrors on the Highway in Kent

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report proposes the County Council adopts a new policy to allow limited use of traffic mirrors on the public highway at specific locations to assist in the delivery of the key objective of reducing road casualties.

Recommendations: That the Committee endorses the policy set out in the report allowing limited use of traffic mirrors on the public highway and recommends to the Cabinet Member the policy be introduced.

1. Introduction

The County Council for many years has not supported the use of traffic mirrors on the highway despite other Highway Authorities and the Department for Transport (DfT) allowing them in certain circumstances. It is now proposed that the County Council adopts a new policy allowing the limited use of traffic mirrors at specific locations to assist in the delivery of one of our key objectives of reducing road casualties.

2. Financial Implications

If the policy is adopted the County Council would bear the costs of installation and maintenance of a traffic mirror if introduced as a casualty reduction measure. If a Member wishes to fund a mirror via their Member Highway Fund then the cost would be met from their individual allocation. If a member of the public requests a traffic mirror to assist with exiting private property then they would have to fully fund the work including the full investigation, approval and any future maintenance costs.

3 Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

Growth Without Gridlock states road safety as a priority for central and local government. Allowing limited use of traffic mirrors at specific locations will assist in delivery our key objective of reducing road casualties.

4. The Report

The Highways & Transportation department receives enquiries every year requesting the installation of traffic mirrors on the highway to aid motorists at road junctions or private accesses where visibility is restricted due to the alignment of the highway, vegetation, fence, wall or building etc. Currently these requests are turned down on the basis that the placing of a mirror could adversely affect road safety due to:

- Distortion of reflected image, glare from sunlight or headlamps affecting the driver's vision.
- Visibility issues during bad weather (rain, snow, frost).
- Difficulty judging speed of an approaching vehicle from the mirror image.
- Maintenance issues – mirrors could be prone to vandalism and maintenance of their alignment and cleanliness is critical.
- Reliance on the mirror's restricted image may compromise the safety of other road users (such as pedestrians and cyclists) who do not appear in the mirror.

Traffic mirrors are classified as a road traffic sign but they are not currently prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD). Their use on the highway currently requires special authorisation by the Department for Transport (DfT). The DfT applies rigorous criteria when assessing approval for mirrors, taking in to account factors such as the crash record, lack of visibility, and the potential to improve the visibility. They are not used as substitutes for normal good highway practice. The DfT have however, indicated in their recent review of signing policy "Signing the Way" that the new revised TSRGD, due sometime after 2014, will allow the use of mirrors in prescribed conditions without the need for special authorisation.

Whilst the widespread use of mirrors should not be encouraged there are sites when their use may be a benefit to road safety. As the DfT allow them in certain circumstances and are themselves proposing new legislation to remove the need for special authorisation it is therefore proposed the County Council adopts a new proactive policy that allows their limited use. Each site would need to meet with the DfT criteria and would require an independent safety assessment to ensure that existing hazards are not increased by inducing drivers to rely on a mirror and take less care than they normally would. The assessment process would include a review of the safety record and consultation with the police.

The County will only consider traffic mirrors on the public highway where:

- There is a crash history relating to a lack of visibility.
- Visibility for vehicles emerging from the side road is severely restricted.
- A visibility improvement scheme is not feasible.
- Visibility cannot be improved by removing hedges, walls, trees or other obstacles.

- The speed limit on the major road is above 30mph, the introduction thereby being aimed at higher speed roads.
- There are no other reasonable standard highway improvements possible.

To reduce bureaucracy it is not proposed to apply for special authorisation for traffic mirrors provided on behalf of individuals to assist them exiting their private drives as they will be fully aware of potential hazards. However, where a traffic mirror has the potential to be used by multiple drivers who may not be familiar with the location, special authorisation will be sought.

Mirrors may be sited off the highway on private land and that is a matter for the land owner and the person who places the mirror. Planning permission may be required and any applicant should be directed to the local Planning Authority. Should any private mirror overhang a highway maintainable at public expense, then a licence is required from the Highway Authority. Should the County Council ascertain that road safety is being compromised as a result of a private mirror being placed near to the public highway the County Council will use its powers to remove the mirror.

5. Conclusions

Currently the County Council does not allow the placing of traffic mirrors on the public highway despite other highway authorities and the DfT allowing them in certain circumstances. Traffic mirrors can provide a benefit to road safety when used appropriately. It is therefore proposed that the Director of Highways and Transportation be allowed to authorise the use of traffic mirrors on the public highway in Kent providing the site meets the DfT criteria, passes an independent safety assessment and has been the subject of consultation with the Police.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee endorses the policy set out in the report allowing limited use of traffic mirrors on the highway and recommends to the Cabinet Member the policy be introduced.

7. Background Documents

Department for Transport – Signing the Way

<http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/signing-the-way/signing-the-way.pdf>

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