

**Briefing Note regarding request for Totnes Town Council to follow up on the work carried out by Totnes & District Traffic & Transport Forum Steering Group to identify the potential need and benefits of installing Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) in Totnes' public highways and recommend appropriate locations.**

The process applied to carry out this investigation has followed Devon County Council Guidelines. It has now reached the stage for Totnes Council to support the proposed locations so that these can be sent to DCC Highways for approval as suitable and safe locations on the public highway.

**This is a request is for Totnes Town Council to approve the proposed three preferred locations within the Town boundary and prepare to seek quotes and prepare to fund\* and oversee the installation of two VAS that will be rotated cyclically between the three locations (following best practice by DCC that keeps motorists alert to them).**

Further to detailed discussions at T&DTTF (October'24) where a number of possible VAS locations were discussed and proposed (Appendix A), a shortlist of 3-4 preferred locations was considered and agreed by a small group of the Steering Group (Chair, both Deputy Chairs and County Councillor) on 20.11.24 (see Notes of Meeting 20.11.24 below and map of proposed locations in Appendix D), based on DCC advisory notes (Appendix B) and traffic counts of the original list of locations (Appendix C). The debate regarding whether the current VAS sign at the top of Bridgetown Hill, that appears to be right on the parish border between Totnes - Bridgetown and Berry Pomeroy, needs to be determined (see Appendix E).

(\*Funding of £6,000 for two VAS costs was approved for recommendation in the 2025/26 budget by Council Matters on 13.01.25)

Cllr Jacqi Hodgson, Devon County Councillor  
On behalf of T&DTTF

---

## **Notes from meeting held to consider possible Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) locations. 20 November 2024**

Present: GB, JH, AP, LA

### **Background**

At a Forum meeting held 30 October 24, 11 possible locations were dotted on a map of Totnes.

These locations were scheduled in an Appendix to the T&T SG Meeting Notes (Appendix A below).

A small group was subsequently tasked to assess these possible locations, with a view to bringing forward thinking for consideration by the SG.

Important note:

- Initially we are looking for 3 locations, to use 2 VAS in rotation.
- Reducing 11 possible locations down to 3 is no easy matter, and would be very difficult for a large meeting.
- The small group has not made any decisions on this.
- The small group is sharing their analysis to support further consideration and decision making by the large meeting.

## Goal & Criteria

The small group began by considering what is the Goal we're trying to achieve by installing VASs, and concluded:

- Safety
- Support for Active Travel
- Speed reduction / support for 20's Plenty

JH outlined DCC's SCARF process (see Appendix B below) which feeds into potential criteria. The group was wanting smiley face, and ability to set speed at 30 or 20; which would need checking out with DCC as standards / requirements may have changed since Appendix B content.

Two classes of Criteria were identified for assessment of location and/or proposals:

- A) A 'risk assessment' approach – considering vulnerability **and** vehicle numbers, not just one. (eg High vehicle numbers wouldn't necessarily warrant a VAS if there was Low associated vulnerability. Whereas Medium vehicle numbers with High vulnerability would.)
- B) Supporting / reinforcing the introduction of 20mph.

## Options

### A) Using a 'risk assessment' approach

Traffic counts were noted as set out in Appendix C below.

The three priority locations were identified as follows, looking for those which would have the biggest impact:

- Plymouth Road
- Western By-Pass, South of Cistern Street
- Bridgetown Hill, noting that:
  - There is an existing VAS at the top of the hill;
  - Location needs consideration by Bridgetown rep's, including moving the existing VAS so as to protect traffic emerging from Blackpost Lane.

If the 3<sup>rd</sup> location is in Berry Pomeroy\*\*, and therefore something for the Parish Council to pursue then, for Totnes, the following would become the 3<sup>rd</sup> location:

- St Katherine's Way, due to numbers and vulnerability of those using pavements and crossing the road.

### B) Supporting / reinforcing the introduction of 20mph.

Needs input from DCC Officers on the boundaries of 20mph.

The above locations were for TTC consideration.

The following were thought likely to be for consideration by adjoining Parishes:

- Ashburton Rd / Dartington
- Barracks Hill
- Newton Abbot road "30mph ahead"

\*\* See appendix E for comparative location maps.

# Appendix A

## **Forum attendees' suggested VAS locations**

Further to meeting of Totnes & District Forum held 30 October 2024, attendees proposed the following as potential locations for Vehicle Activated Signs.

### Ashburton Road (A385)

- To East of A385/A384 Cider Press Centre roundabout

### Barracks Hill:

- To East of Sawpit Lane junction

### Plymouth Road:

- To East of Punchards Down junction

### Western Bypass (A381):

- To North of Plymouth Road crossing

### Western Bypass (A381)

- South of Cistern Street junction

### Western Bypass (A381)

- South of Kingsbridge Hill junction

### St Katherine's Way

- To East of The Grove junction

### Newton Road (A381)

- To North of The Bourtons (needs clarification to locate position)
- Further North still (needs clarification to locate position)

### Bridgetown Hill (A385)

- To East of Cross Park

### Weston Lane

- To East of St John's School

# Appendix B

## Devon County Council Notes on VAS provided by JH

**From:** Meg Booth <[meg.booth@devon.gov.uk](mailto:meg.booth@devon.gov.uk)>

**Sent:** 21 February 2020 15:28

**To:** members - all <[democracy.membersall@devon.gov.uk](mailto:democracy.membersall@devon.gov.uk)>

**Subject:** VAS signs

Following yesterdays meeting Stuart Hughes has asked that I circulate the attached Fact Sheet on VAS around to you for information.

It is the information we tend to distribute to communities who are interested in VAS so your parishes may already be aware.

It is a couple of years old so some of the prices may not be current, indeed I believe the solar powered units may have come down in price.

### Meg Booth

Chief Officer Highways Infrastructure Development and Waste

Devon County Council. 01392 383000

## 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 **S**peed **C**ompliance **A**ction Review **F**orum 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.

## Appendix C

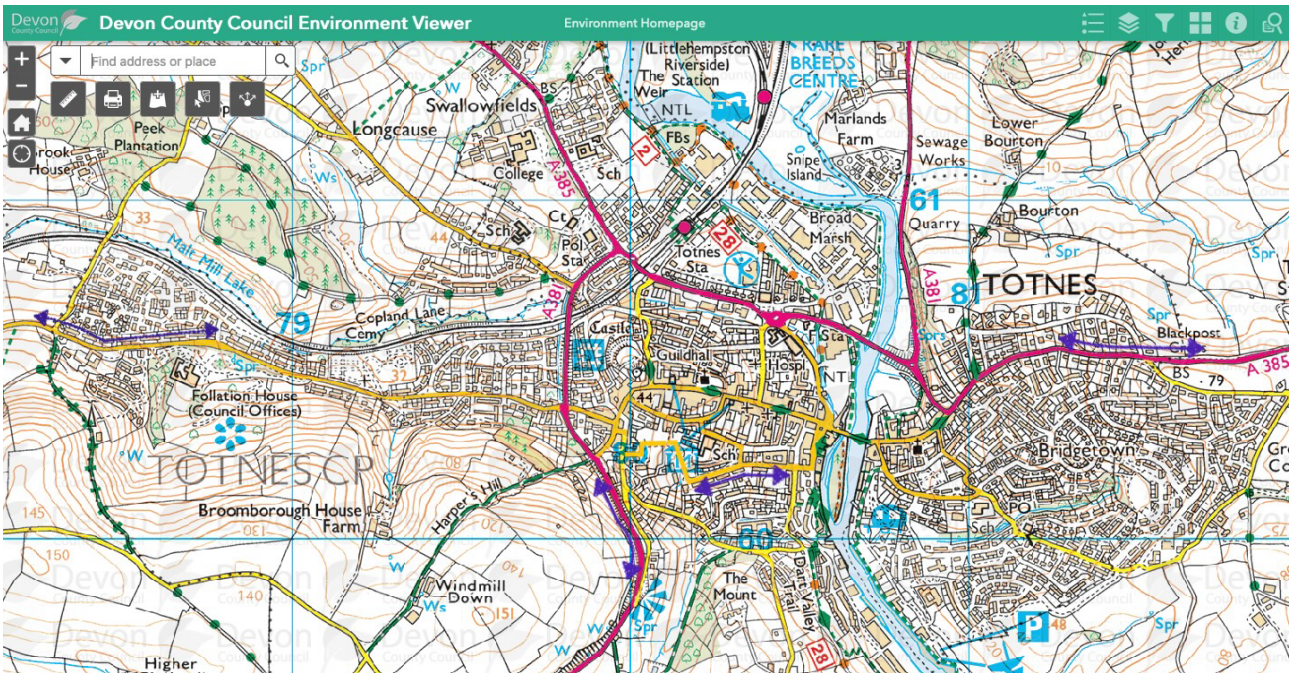
### DfT traffic counts - annual average daily flow in both directions

Location	Count (000's)
Bridgetown Hill	20.0
Station Road	19.4
Bridgetown Hill to Paignton	16.7
Redworth towards Dartington	13.6
Western Bypass, A381 towards Red Post	12.0
Avonwick Blue Post (towards Plymouth Rd)	6.0
St Katherine's Way	4.0
Maudlin	3.0
Pathfields	2.5
High St	0.8
Smithfields	0.8



# Appendix D

The purple lines with arrow heads illustrate the proposed locations for the VAS



# Appendix E

A comparative check to confirm the location of the VAS on Bridgetown Hill. The location of this VAS is shown and photographed on Google street view map (left), compared with the Parish Boundary marked on DEFRA's Magic Map (right) which indicates this VAS (which can be seen as the black box above the Urban Clearway sign – sharing the same pole) is right on the parish boundary.

