



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

**PROPOSED POLICY TO CONTROL MESSAGES ON VARIABLE MESSAGE SIGNS
LVINGSTON**

REPORT BY TRANSPORTATION MANAGER

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for a policy to manage and control the messages used on the Variable Message Signs located at four locations around Livingston Town Centre.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that approval is given to the policy principles identified in this report for the control of messages used on the VMS signs in Livingston.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customer needs.
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Legislative requirements identified in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 as amended.
III Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	Financial: None. Staffing: None. Property: None.
IV Consultations	Environment Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel, 3 December 2009 supported the recommendation. Roads Services. Police.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

As part of the recent extension to the Livingston Town Centre shopping facilities the provision of a number of electronic traffic signs was required.

As well as signing for the car parks four Variable Message Signs (VMS) were erected at locations on key traffic routes approaching the town centre. There are two signs sited on the A899. One is located on the east side of the road, north of the Almond Interchange and the other on the west side of the road just north of Lizzie Bryce roundabout. The other two signs are located on Alderstone Road. One is located on the west side of the road south of the Adambrae Roundabout and the other is located on the east side of the road just north of the Braehead traffic signals. A location plan is attached. The signs provide the facility for four lines of text with 15 characters in each line. The control equipment for the system is located in Roads Services at Whitehill, Bathgate.

At present two default messages are displayed on the signs. These are "Welcome to Livingston Town Centre" and the other displays a "Fair Trade" message. The signs have also been used to advise of delays and major roadworks on Almondvale Boulevard. Road safety messages such as "don't drink and drive" have also been displayed. In addition one event at Inveralmond Community High school has been displayed on the signs.

However, there is an increasing demand to use the signs and it is considered that policy guidance on the messages that will be permitted is required. In particular a growing number of requests to use the VMS signs to provide information on events within Livingston have been made.

The signs were erected as road traffic information signs to help manage traffic movements in and around Livingston town centre. The signs are road traffic signs and their primary function should be to provide road traffic information. Therefore, the use of the VMS for event advertising and notification is not considered to be appropriate.

Therefore, the messages that should take precedence are messages that advise drivers of particular traffic conditions and roadworks around Livingston town centre. Road Services who coordinate all roadworks on the road network would control these messages. This could also include for example, giving advance notice to drivers of car parking levels in the town centre and particular traffic issues associated with the football stadium.

The erection of specific "Welcome" and "Fairtrade" road signs is common and can be seen in other locations. There is a cost associated with the erection of such signs and the continued erection of signs leads to undesirable roadside clutter. The two existing default messages are considered to be appropriate messages since they replace potential permanent road signs that may otherwise have been erected. The use of the VMS for this purpose avoids the cost of erection and maintenance of other signs.

Finally, there will be rare occasions when the signs could be used to request information from the general public about a particular incident that has occurred. The types of incident could be a request for information about a serious road accident or contact details for the police in relation to a missing child search. In such events the police would contact the council for assistance and a one off approval at senior management level would be needed for this type of infrequent occurrence.

Environment Policy Development Scrutiny Panel supported the proposed policy at their meeting on 3 December 2009. Roads Services and the Police have been consulted and support the proposed policy.

E. CONCLUSION

The messages to be displayed on the VMS should be prioritised and restricted as follows.

Priority should be given to messages for advance notification and location of roadworks, roadworks delay, road traffic management and road safety.

The default position should be the "Welcome" and "Fair Trade" messages discussed earlier.

General messages giving informing about or advertising events should not be permitted.

There should be a specific approval mechanism at senior management level to allow the signs to be used in emergencies (usually in conjunction with the police) and for rare one off events where there is seen to be an urgent need to communicate a message for wider public benefit.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None

Appendices/Attachments: One – Location plan.

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