

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

1ST SEPTEMBER 2009

PETITION - REQUEST THAT LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REVOKE ITS POLICY PREVENTING THE USE OF BLIND-SPOT MIRRORS AND LOOK TO INSTALL THEM AT DANGEROUS JUNCTIONS, BENDS AND DRIVEWAYS, IN RURAL AREAS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORTATION AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

Purpose of Report

1. To respond to a petition presented to the 16th April 2009 meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background

2. The Petition was presented by Mr J Orson CC on behalf of lead petitioner Mr A Paphiti. The petition, with 37 signatures, stated "We wish to express our concerns over the safety of roads and junctions in rural areas and feel that cost-effective safety measures such as blind-spot mirrors should be introduced ASAP. We therefore wish Leicestershire County Council to revoke its policy preventing the use of such mirrors and look to install them at dangerous junctions, bends and driveways in rural areas."

Previous Decision

3. The County Council's Policy of not providing mirrors in the highway was re-affirmed by the Transportation and Waste Management Subcommittee at its meeting in March 1998. The Policy was initially established in December 1975 by the Highways Subcommittee.

National Guidance

4. Mirrors are not an approved sign as contained within the Traffic Signs and Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2002. Therefore, they cannot be used on the public highway without special authorisation from the Department for Transport (DfT). Any authorisation by DfT for a mirror on the highway is site specific and will only be given where an improvement scheme is not possible and were the visibility cannot be improved through other measures (e.g. by removing fences, cutting back of hedges or trees). DfT authorisation is initially granted for a 12 month experimental period, permanent authorisation is only granted if benefits and effectiveness of the mirror can be proven.

5. Across the country, county highway authorities do not generally support the use of mirrors on the highway due to the safety issues detailed below, with the use of them only being allowed in exceptional circumstances.

County Policy

6. The County Council has a long held policy not to allow the use of mirrors on the highway. The use of mirrors in the highway is not considered to be in the overall interests of road safety. Even when visibility is severely restricted, it is always considered preferable for a driver or pedestrian to rely on his/her own direct observations in negotiating hazards rather than rely on possibly misleading artificial aids such as mirrors. The Policy takes account of the following safety factors:-
 - The image that a driver sees in the mirror of an approaching vehicle appears to indicate that the vehicle is straight ahead, when it is in fact around a corner;
 - Reflected glare is a danger, particularly when reflected lights of passing vehicles tend to sweep across the vision of a driver waiting in a side road, or access, temporarily dazzling him/her;
 - The image in a mirror may be obscured or distorted by rain, snow, frost or condensation;
 - It is difficult to judge the speed and distances of an approaching vehicle from the reflected image in a mirror;
 - Mirrors are affected by wear and tear and, in certain locations, may be prone to vandalism. Any minor misalignment of a mirror will result in a serious distortion of the image. In some circumstances, misalignment may result in no image of an approaching vehicle whatsoever.
 - The presence of other nearby road users (i.e. pedestrians and cyclists) may be ignored as motorists rely upon the mirror's restricted image, leading to road safety being further compromised.
7. Any reports of locations where safety and/or visibility concerns are raised are routinely investigated, with actions being undertaken when and where appropriate. The measures can range from minor maintenance works (i.e. hedge trimming and grass cutting), additional warning signs and lines, through to full junction redesign.
8. Extreme care and attention is needed by drivers when emerging from places where there is restricted visibility and may involve turning off the car radio, winding down the window and listening for approaching vehicles. It could also involve obtaining assistance in order to guide the driver safely out onto the highway.

Resource Implications

9. None

Conclusions

10. Given the safety concerns, and potential maintenance issues, the use of mirrors in the highway is not considered to be in the overall interests of road safety, and therefore not a cost-effective safety measure.
11. In certain circumstances the use of mirrors could increase the risk to highway users due to drivers over reliance on them; it is always considered preferable for drivers to rely on their own direct observations.

Recommendation

12. That the County Council's Policy of not providing mirrors on the highway to remain unchanged.

Equal Opportunities Implications

None

Circulation Under Local Issues Alert Procedure

Mr J T Orson CC

Crime and Disorder Implications

None

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Background Papers

Petition containing 37 signatures held in Chief Executive's Department.