

This month we tackle the issue of fixing traffic signals to streetlighting columns

Design notes

Public realm design awards are a double-edged sword. Nice if you are around when they are given out. Slightly annoying if someone else gets all the credit that should be yours. But what really makes a winner?

Perhaps no scheme should be considered for an award until five years after it has been completed. In the real world of the tough street, paving and street furniture need to withstand an incredible amount of wear and tear and downright abuse.

So, the challenge is to produce a good-quality street furniture which serves its purpose and looks good for years, not just days and months. As a contributing factor, the less clutter there is, the less the maintenance costs, and the easier it is to clean and sweep footways.

On a typical short stretch of city centre narrow pavement, near a street corner, there may be five posts. They block the view, clutter the pavement, and add to confusion. One technique to eliminate unwanted posts is, where practical, to fix traffic signals to lamp columns. The principle is not new. It has been carried in several places across the country over the last couple of decades. At Milton Keynes, it seemed to be a standard procedure from the days when it was being developed as a prestigious new city.

There have also been isolated examples in Norfolk and Wiltshire where, to overcome the problems of restricted sites, signals have been fixed to lamp columns as a practical expedient, usually when both installations were being renewed at the same time.

But these are rare. Now, with the growing legislative enforcement of rules concerning safety of maintenance personnel, there are concerns that such initiatives should be resolved. The arrangements for handling two distinct electrical systems, each serviced by a separate workforce, in a single column, should be fail-safe.

The main issue concerning location of equipment is that traffic signals need to be precisely positioned in relation to traffic orders, whereas lighting columns can be positioned with greater tolerance.

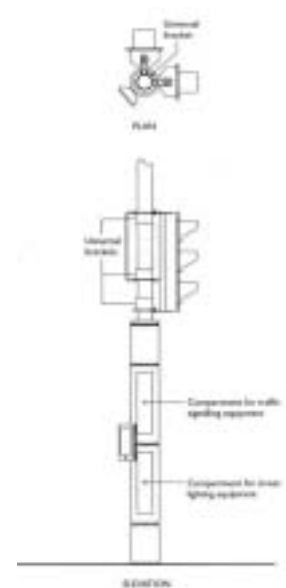
There are managerial, as well as technical issues to be addressed, here. First the installation of both signals and streetlighting need to be considered at the same time, not easy when each might be controlled by a separate budget, timescale and authority. Some management and financial co-ordination is needed.

The two electrical systems: high voltage for the streetlighting, and low voltage for the signals, need to be kept apart. Each needs its own control equipment housed in a separate locked enclosure in the lamp column with its own key and is accessible at all times. Cable runs are also kept separate.

Several styles of dual column are available from a stainless steel-clad column to more budget, off-the-peg designs.

Whichever is selected, it should be robust for its purpose, easily cleaned and maintained, and capable of having graffiti and advertisement stickers removed.

The picture of the cluttered city centre pavement (*top right*) also shows that other matters need attention, and these are certainly within the control of a highway authority. Advertisement 'A' boards are not appropriate in narrow footways, and the surface and maintenance of the footway could be better. Less obstruction on the pavement reduces frustration for able-bodied



Street corners can be a focal point for clutter. With the right managerial practices, a more elegant solution is possible

pedestrians and is certainly a great help to people with disabilities coping with things to walk around or stumble over.

Is all this effort really justified? In the long term, yes. Reducing street clutter benefits all our streets, not just a few street enhancement schemes that might be potential award winners.

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