

This month we take a look at what the traffic signs regulations actually say.

Design notes

There is a growing awareness that streets are about more than traffic. While cyclists can be considered as traffic, there are also pedestrians of all shapes, sizes and abilities, who are trying to pursue various activities on our streets.

People, especially tourists, walk about towns and cities for pleasure. They are not necessarily part of the transport system, although they may be moving as they have a good look at the place.

The appearance and convenience of our streets, especially from the point of view of visitors on foot, is important, and often has a bearing as to how an area is perceived and its economic wellbeing.

Among the many solutions put forward for improving the quality of streets is a call for the Government to change the Traffic Signs Regulations, which are seen as responsible for the huge amounts of street clutter. Yet, careful study of the regulations, as distinct from the ostensibly helpful advice notes, show they can be implemented lawfully with considerably less clutter than is sometimes deemed necessary.

Here are four examples:

- **No entry (sign 616):** This sign is usually required to be placed on each side of the road, but in certain circumstances can be placed on only one side – for instance at a junction where the relevant road is less than five metres wide. Direction 8 (3) (b) (ii). In this case, the width of road refers to the distance between the kerbs.
- **Roundabouts (sign 606):** Turn left signs at roundabouts are not mandatory, although the highway authority must satisfy itself that drivers are not being misled. As the Department for Transport notes: 'In environmentally-sensitive areas, where the direction in which traffic should circulate is so self-evident that no-one is likely to be in any doubt, even if no sign 606 (or sign 515, the chevron) is provided, it might be felt that the sign could safely be omitted. That's lawful.' The roundabout with the obelisk at Seven Dials, London, is one example where signs have been omitted. Drivers have no difficulty in deciding which way they should circulate.
- **Car parking places (sign 661 series):** These signs explain where drivers can park and other parking restrictions. They need not be fixed to separate grey posts. They can be fixed to adjacent railings, walls or structures. While obtaining permission from private owners is a consideration, in some neighbourhoods this has been organised by local residents or amenity groups. The point that the signs might be hidden by parked cars is no excuse for non compliance as they are not intended to be read by drivers while driving. They are expected to find a safe place to stop find the sign and read it.
- **Pedestrian zone (sign 637 series):** These signs are usually needed in city centres to indicate pedestrian areas and parking and waiting restrictions. They can be fixed neatly to walls.

Where the walls have obvious architectural elements, the signs should be fixed and positioned with the same care that a doctor would use with his brass plate. The signs can be fixed so that they appear to be part of the total scene. A likely reason why these lawful and neater arrangements are not carried out is that signs are put up to indicate new traffic arrangements and decisions are usually made on a single issue-by-issue basis. But the regulations can hardly be blamed.

There are ways to carry out practical traffic management programmes



Given notice: (top left): Two 'no entry' signs; when only one is necessary (right); London's Seven Dials roundabout has no signs; and (bottom right and above) parking signs on railings and in pedestrian zones

and, at the same time, enhance the total streetscene and its economic wellbeing. A start can be made in conservation and other 'sensitive' areas – although it is difficult to think of any part of this country that should not be considered sensitive.

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