

This month, **Colin Davis** follows the yellow-lined road, and discovers an alternative way to restrict unwanted on-street parking.

# Design notes

**Y**ellow lines can still cause outrage. Not because of what they do – which is accepted – but because of their physical appearance. To many people, they are an ugly intrusion into an otherwise-harmonious streetscene.

For at least 20 years, there has been a little-known or understood procedure for obtaining Department for Transport permission to omit yellow lines in special restricted zones – usually environmentally-sensitive, historic areas. The lines are replaced with discreet wall signs.

The few zones which exist – in the centres of Bath and Norwich, for example – tend to be quite small. They are places where a driver feels he has entered somewhere quite special, and had better act accordingly.

In the decades since this procedure was introduced, the number of restricted-parking zones has increased dramatically and, with them, the streets of yellow lines. At the same time, the notion that people only care about the appearance of environmentally-sensitive areas is being overtaken by the realisation that there is concern for the appearance of all public areas. And there seems little sense in pumping millions of pounds of regeneration funds into a deprived area to improve the environment if, by ruling that it is not environmentally sensitive, it is blighted with depressing yellow lines.

Fortunately, different kinds of yellow line come within the *Traffic signs regulations and general directions (TSRGD)*. Where necessary, they can be made less obtrusive – the *TSRGD* state that yellow lines can be 50mm wide as well as 100mm. The *Traffic signs manual*, chapter five, advises that ‘in areas regarded as environmentally sensitive, the 50 mm-wide line may be used’ – begging the question of why the 50mm width should not be applied everywhere.

Lines may vary slightly in colour, too. A less vivid shade of yellow, known as primrose, may also be used anywhere – or rather everywhere. This is probably sensible, given that drivers do not park on yellow lines because they cannot see them, but simply because they decide to take a risk.

Recently, an area of more than a dozen residential streets near Glasgow city centre has been designated as a restricted-parking zone. However, in a change to normal practice, the zone is only marked by signs at the point where the yellow lines of the surrounding parking zone come to an abrupt end. In the zone itself, only places where parking or loading is permitted are marked.

The primary advantage of this practice is a predictable improvement in the appearance of the streets but, interestingly, drivers really do respect the new road-marking regime.

Even more compelling to practical engineers are two further facts. First, the annoying physical problem of getting lines decently applied to rough surfaces, such as granite setts or some un-made surfaces, is reduced. Second, costs are reduced – both the initial cost of lining and related maintenance costs. It has been suggested that the cost of such a project is about 20% of the cost of a normal yellow line scheme.

So, do we have a win-win situation – better appearance at less cost? We await similar experiments in England with interest.



Yellow lining can look garish (*top, left*) and is difficult to apply to traditional materials (*top right*). Neatly-applied 50mm primrose-coloured lines can make a difference (*middle*) and a new road-marking regime in a restricted parking zone (*bottom*)