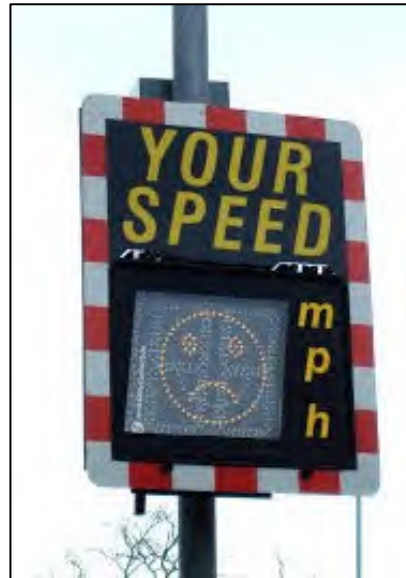


Purchasing mobile (temporary) vehicle activated signs (VAS)



Introduction

Traffic authorities have powers to 'cause or permit' traffic signs and other equipment to be placed on the highway as part of their duties to manage their road networks. Parish councils also have some powers to place traffic signs, provided they obtain prior consent from the traffic authority within their area. These often include signs and devices to remind drivers of the speed limit in place with a view to improving compliance and addressing local concerns about inappropriate speed.

Under [Section 72 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984](#), a parish or community council may, with the permission of the highway authority and subject to any conditions imposed by that authority, provide on or near any road, other than a footpath or bridleway, or may contribute, either wholly or in part, towards the cost of providing on or near any such road, traffic signs indicating:

- (a) a stopping place for public service vehicles
- (b) a warning of the existence of any danger
- (c) the name of the parish or community or of any place in it

In recent years, Highway Authorities have experimented with various types of signs which are triggered by approaching vehicles illuminating an electronic display that provides a warning message. Temporary vehicle activated signs, (or VAS), come in two forms - the speed indicator device (SID) which displays the speed of approaching vehicles, and the

Speed Limit Reminder sign (SLR) which displays the speed limit of the road. Parishes may choose the type they believe most suits their circumstances, including any additional features to collect traffic survey data.

- An SLR provides a clear and unambiguous message in the form of a recognisable regulatory speed limit sign where drivers exceed a set speed. The SLR should only be triggered at a level that represents the threshold for Police enforcement - 10% plus 2mph above the speed limit. For instance, in a 30mph speed limit the SLR is triggered at 35mph.
- A SID displays the actual travel speed of an approaching vehicle which may not be as effective where a driver has not recognised the posted speed limit.

The deployment of SLRs and SIDs is becoming more popular, and parish councils are expressing an interest in purchasing their own, for use at locations where traffic speed is a concern.

This document sets out the process to be followed to implement such a scheme.

The South Gloucestershire scheme

South Gloucestershire Council adopted a policy on the deployment of VAS signs in 2017 - a full copy of which is shown in **Appendix 4** below.

Temporary VAS may be considered at sites where there is public concern about vehicle speeds. The prolonged use of temporary VAS, particularly at sites where 85 percentile traffic speeds are below the level at which police speed enforcement would normally be considered, is not encouraged as this may lessen the overall impact the signs are intended to have. Hence temporary VAS should not be in situ for more than 6 weeks at any chosen site and should not return to monitor a site within 12 weeks.

Provided the parish council has employed the services of a competent person or contractor and has appropriate third-party insurance, they may manage the deployments themselves.

These facilities will be available to parish councils in South Gloucestershire on a self-financing basis. Once established, the management and finance of the SLR / SID will be the responsibility of the parish councils.

Parish councils will be required to enter into a licence agreement with the council requiring them to comply with the regulations for safe and competent working on the highway and third-party insurance, effectively becoming a contractor in terms of liability. The requirements regarding placement periods and location approval should comply with council policy.

The parish council should ensure that the equipment conforms with the regulations set out for the implementation of Vehicle Activated Devices on the highway. TOPAS and ADEPT guidance can be found at the following links:

<https://topasgroup.org.uk/media/SIDs-v-SLR-ADEPT-briefing-paper-September-2021.pdf>
<https://topasgroup.org.uk/media/Guidance-on-the-procurement-of-VAS-SIDS.pdf>

It is recommended that applicants discuss the type of VAS sign they are considering with the council's Road Safety team – contact: strategicroadsafety@southglos.gov.uk.

Organisations may also apply via Avon and Somerset Constabulary for a grant from the Road Safety Fund to purchase a VAS sign. One requirement of the scheme is that the sign specification is agreed with the council first, although there are also other specific criteria that also need to be met: [Apply for a Speed Indication Device](#).

Choosing locations

The following requirements for VAS sign sites should typically be met in order to be approved:

- The posted speed limit must be 20 or 30mph.
- The site(s) must be within the speed limit and the VAS unit must not be placed upon the entry sign to the speed limit.
- There must be adequate forward visibility. In a 20mph speed limit a minimum of 60m, in a 30mph speed limit a minimum of 90m.
- The VAS unit must not obscure visibility of another traffic sign, access, junction or driveway.
- The post on which the VAS unit is to be deployed must be safely accessible and in a good condition.
- The VAS unit must not obstruct a footway, cycle track or verge on which pedestrians have access.
- The VAS unit, including its face, must have at least 450mm clearance from the edge of the carriageway, (or 600mm if sited on a central island).
- Where the VAS unit is sited over a footway then a mounting height of at least 2.3m is required. If sited over a cycle track, then a mounting height of at least 2.4m is required.
- VAS units should not be fixed to existing traffic signposts, or lamp columns. Cast iron or ornate lamp columns, power supply or telephone poles, and private posts must not be used either.
- If a suitable vacant post does not exist for mounting the VAS unit, then the parish should purchase a suitably designed post to mount the VAS unit - the VAS unit supplier should be able to recommend an appropriate post, (this will also need to be approved by the council).
- All proposed sites for VAS units will require council approval and an agreed licence prior to any deployment.
- Applicants should consider whether solar power is an option for the VAS unit, as solar power will reduce the need for frequent battery changes. If so, the chosen location should be away from overhanging trees or buildings to avoid obscuring the solar cells.

Application

The application form can be downloaded from the [speed limits and traffic calming](#) webpage on the council's website.

The parish should complete an application form requesting site approval, so that the council may assess their request. Assessment is essential as all proposed sites need to be checked and approved by the council's Design and Operations Team to ensure the locations are suitable and safe. A non-refundable fee of £343.40 is required upon application, to cover a review of all sites requested.

To submit a request for site approval the following information is required for each location:

- location plan
- image of the location (up to date street-view image or a photograph)
- site address, including road name and a description of the site
- the proposed method of mounting the SLR or SID unit, and the direction it is proposed to face
- parish council contact details

Completed application forms should be returned as follows:

- by email to TechSupportStreetcareBMR@southglos.gov.uk
- by post to the following address:

South Gloucestershire Council
Department of Place
Streetcare and Transport Services
Design and Operations Team
PO Box 1954
Bristol
BS37 0DD

Phone: + 44 (0)1454 865859

The non-refundable payment of £343.40 can be made in the following way:

Online: Visit the [South Gloucestershire Council](#) website to pay using a debit or credit card. Select '**Pay**' then '**Pay Online**'. Then select '**Other / General invoices**', select '**Other Payments**' then '**Design & Operations**' and finally '**Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS)**'.

We will not begin to process your application until we have received the application fee. We will also need a site location plan before we can start processing your application. Please allow at least ten working days for us to process your application – we will aim to contact you within that time.

Once payment has been received, an Engineer will assess each site for suitability. If any site is not approved, the council will work with the parish council to seek an appropriate alternative location. However, the council reserves the right not to approve any site that

does not meet design, legislative, or safety requirements - or fails to comply with the council's VAS policy. If necessary, we will visit site or request a site meeting with you. There are many issues to consider - including land ownership, the extent of the adopted public highway, local traffic speed and volume, plus the number of recorded injury accidents in the area. A design drawing may need to be drafted to present the proposals clearly or in a manner suitable for estimating purposes.

After a request has been assessed, the parish will be advised whether the council agrees in principle to the proposals. If any changes are required or the proposals cannot be taken forward, the council will explain the reasoning and suggest any alternative solution(s), should this be feasible. At this stage the Engineer will also provide an estimate of the design costs required to complete a detailed design, in addition to the cost of the NRSWA searches, (see below).

NRSWA searches

If the estimate is acceptable and agreement is given to proceed, the Engineer will carry out a utility search in the area concerned. If the radius of the search area exceeds 250m then more than one search may be required. The current administration cost of this, (2025/26), is £190.00 per search, which will be charged at the end of the process when the final invoice is raised. The fee is essential to cover a legal requirement under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA) and involves contacting the utility companies in the area concerned to determine the location of any underground / overhead services that may impact upon the request. The utility companies typically take 4 to 5 weeks to respond to enquiries. The results help determine whether or not any post(s) can be installed in the preferred location(s) so that when any excavations take place, they may be carried out safely.

Supply, installation and payment

Once the Engineer has reviewed the NRSWA search results a final, more detailed estimate will be provided, to include the costs of supply and installation in addition to the previously agreed costs for design time and the NRSWA search. If the Parish has already received a specification or quotation direct from a supplier, the Engineer will be able to review this and consider whether any changes are required.

Supply / installation of posts / sign(s) by South Gloucestershire Council

South Gloucestershire Council can arrange all or part of the service, offering possible cost savings or design improvements. In this case, supply and installation of all works to deploy the VAS unit(s) will be payable by the parish including the purchase cost of the VAS unit(s), and any associated equipment, (some manufacturers supply handheld devices used to download speed data from the sign). If agreeable, the parish should confirm acceptance of the estimate and the council will then issue an invoice for that amount. A licence agreement will then be drafted, (see below). The various methods of paying the invoice are clearly shown on the invoice itself.

Supply / installation of posts / sign(s) by another contractor

If this is the preferred option, or the estimate provided by the Engineer is not accepted, the council will print off all the NRSWA search results and send it to the parish along with a design drawing / specification plus any conditions. Also sent will be a list of contractors that have provided evidence to the council that they have £10m of public liability insurance and have the appropriate accreditation to work on the highway. The parish may choose to use a contractor not on the list provided they meet the same criteria, as a qualified Streetworks Accredited contractor. The parish will be invoiced at this stage for any design costs incurred, plus the cost of the NRSWA search.

To carry out work in the public highway any external contractor must apply to the council for a Section 50 Licence under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA) - there is a fee payable, and applications can be submitted via the council's [apply for a Section 50 road opening licence](#) webpage.

In order for the council to comply with its statutory duty, all applications must be submitted at least one month in advance of the proposed works start date. In exceptional circumstances, a shorter period may be agreed in conjunction with any affected undertakers. (Please note the Section 50 fee is not payable if a parish chooses to use the council as a contractor). Any installation carried out by an external contractor must be approved by the council before a licence agreement can be drawn up, (see below).

Licence Agreement

Before engaging South Gloucestershire Council, or any other contractor, to install the sign(s) / post(s), the Parish must first enter into a licence agreement with the council under Section 72 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Although the parish may pay for the supply and installation of the VAS sign and post(s), there are no legislative powers for parish councils under the Highways Act to erect these signs on the highway. The council as the highway authority is however empowered to consent to their use on the highway at approved sites and subject to the parish council entering into a licence agreement - Section 72 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 covers this activity.

A copy of the licence agreement will be drafted and sent to the parish for signature and return. The council's Asset Management Team will send the licence to the contact details given on the original application form. There is no charge for the granting of the licence.

No VAS sign may be installed at any location prior to the date of the licence, which must be signed and returned before any works on site can be authorised.

Deployment and moving signs

Deployment of the sign(s) can only take place after the signing of the licence agreement and full payment of any fees or invoices listed above. Once the licence agreement has been signed and dated by both parties, then the parish may commence deployments.

Deployment constitutes a 6-week presence of the sign at any chosen site – with no return at that site within 12 weeks – in accordance with South Gloucestershire Council policy.

Parish councils are expected to agree an annual programme for deployment and are asked to send a copy of the annual programme to the council, which will be forwarded to and retained by the Road Safety team. (Any changes to the annual programme should also be submitted to the council).

It is recommended that the parish engages the services of South Gloucestershire Council's Street Lighting team in order to move the signs between sites and carry out any other associated activities - such as battery charging / replacement and downloading of data. This service can be quoted for prior to signature of the licence agreement so there is confidence between parties that adequate arrangements are in place. If the parish wishes to carry this out themselves, they should refer to **Appendix 1: Notes for guidance for moving Speed Limit Reminder and Speed Indicator Devices**.

Future maintenance

Applicants funding the introduction of new measures within the public highway are responsible for their future maintenance. The sign(s) / post(s) will need to be identifiable as an asset for which a third party is responsible – rather than being a South Gloucestershire council asset maintainable at public expense. This is done via the licence agreement, along with any 'as-built' drawings being retained by the council, so allowing the asset(s) to be recorded on the council's asset management record as being the responsibility of the parish.

Once installed, the future maintenance of the sign(s) / post(s) will be the responsibility of the parish. Where the installation was carried out by an external contractor, if within 12 months any remedial works need to be carried out due to poor workmanship, or because the work has been carried out outside the specification, the Parish will be informed of what actions are required – the parish will be liable for any costs associated with this.

The parish is responsible for all maintenance and replacement costs should the VAS sign(s) or posts not function correctly, become lost or stolen, vandalised or other similar occurrence that prevents its use. It is recommended that all equipment is clearly marked / labelled with ownership and contact details.

Note that the licence issued under Section 72 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 will remain valid for a maximum period of 5 years - at the expiry of 5 years a new licence must be applied for. The parish will be responsible for any costs incurred following the termination of the programme or licence agreement to reinstate the highway, (eg: the removal of posts and making good of the surface).

Appendix 1: Guidance for moving Speed Limit Reminder or Speed Indicator Devices

These guidance notes are designed to assist parish councils when moving the speed limit reminder signs under Licence Agreement, and to draw attention to some of the points that must be considered.

It is not possible to cover every eventuality, so if you have concerns you should contact South Gloucestershire Council for advice.

Things you and your operative must consider when moving signs:

There is always risk associated with working on the public highway and you must ensure that you minimise this risk to both you and to others using the highway. Consider the process required to setup and remove your device.

Ensure that you are physically able to conduct the task as it involves lifting and carrying.

Ensure you have the correct Personal Protective Equipment such as a high visibility jacket and trousers, safety boots, hard hat and gloves, plus eye protection, if necessary, plus any other safety equipment.

Ensure your vehicle can be parked off the highway.

Ensure that enough clear sight lines are available for motorists to see what you are doing. You should take account of weather conditions and time of day.

Ensure that you have the necessary temporary traffic management, signing and guarding, in place. Temporary traffic management is a legal requirement and the 'red book – safety at Streetworks' must be followed.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/321056/safety-at-streetworks.pdf

In designing your temporary traffic management layout, you should consider if it is clear to other road users that work is taking place.

Do you have the necessary access equipment to remove / re-fit the speed limit reminder sign? If you propose to use a step ladder, do you have a level and firm base upon which to place it? Alternative access equipment is available and should be considered if the conditions for safe use of stepladders are not met. Are you familiar and comfortable with the procedure for removing / refitting the SLR or SID?

You should undertake a risk assessment for the erection and removal of the sign and identify the control measures to be taken to minimise risk to the operative and all road users. The risks to be considered must include as a minimum:

- Operative falling, being struck by a vehicle or injured through lifting.

- Member of public injured by road traffic incident associated with the works.

You should produce a method statement for the safe installation and removal of the sign. The operator(s) must be competent to perform the operation according to the method statement.

Ensure that you or your operatives have minimised the risk. Always ask for further advice if you are uncertain.

Legal requirements when fitting/removing speed limit reminder signs

Have you placed the signing and guarding correctly and in accordance with the red book 'safety at Streetworks' for other road users to understand what is going on?

Are you wearing the correct personal protective clothing?

Have you placed your vehicle off the highway?

Do you have the correct insurance for both the vehicle to be used for this purpose and for yourself to be carrying out the task?

Have you taken all appropriate steps to minimise the risk to yourself and other road users when carrying out this task? Can pedestrians safely pass without stepping into the road?

At all locations, any vehicles associated with the installation or removal of the apparatus must be removed from site to a suitable location to ensure clear lines of sight – a clear footway / carriageway should always be maintained during the operation.

Failure to comply with the licence agreement may result in its termination.

Appendix 2: Summary of fees payable

Fee (£)	What is the fee for?	When is it payable?	How is the fee paid?
£343.40	Initial assessment of the request - each site will be checked for suitability.	Upon application	Online by applicant
£190.00	Administration charge: Utility searches required under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA)	Prior to start of works on site	Final invoice issued by SGC
Estimate	Cost of Engineer's design time to prepare detailed design	Prior to start of works on site	Final invoice issued by SGC
Estimate	Cost of supply and installation work	Prior to start of works on site	Final invoice issued by SGC

Appendix 3: Deployment programme (example)

Location	Install date	Removal date	Earliest return date
Site 1 – Church Road	Monday 6 March 2023	Monday 17 April 2023	Monday 10 July 2023
Site 2 – High Street			
Site 3 – New Road			

Temporary VAS should not be in situ for more than 6 weeks at the chosen site and should not return to monitor a site within 12 weeks.

Appendix 4: South Gloucestershire Council VAS Policy

Permanent VAS Eligibility Criteria

1. Permanent VAS may be considered only when there is an injury accident problem associated with inappropriate speed that has not been satisfactorily remedied by standard signing.
2. In addition, for permanent vehicle activated **speed reminder** signs, 85 percentile traffic speeds must be demonstrated to be at the level at which police speed enforcement would usually be considered.

Permanent VAS Deployment Guidelines

1. VAS should be mounted at a minimum height of 2.4m where pedestrian or cycle movements take place and a minimum of 2.0m where no pedestrian or cycle movements take place.
2. The distance between the edge of the carriageway and the edge of the sign face nearest the carriageway should be no less than 450mm.
3. VAS should be positioned so as not to obstruct visibility from side roads or accesses.
4. VAS should not obscure existing signage.
5. VAS require a straight road on the approach, free of obstruction to allow the radar to accurately assess vehicle speeds.
6. VAS should not be sited close to the speed limit terminal point.
7. The sign should not be visually intrusive from windows of adjoining properties.
8. The sign should not overhang the existing highway boundary without the landowners consent.
9. VAS should be compliant with the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD 2016).
10. Any signage associated with roadworks required to erect a VAS should accord with the Traffic Signs Manual Chapter 8.
11. The method of powering VAS (i.e. mains, solar etc.) should take into account factors such as environmental, budget, location etc.

Temporary VAS Eligibility Criteria

1. Temporary VAS may be considered at sites where there is public concern about vehicle speeds.
2. The prolonged use of temporary VAS, particularly at sites where 85 percentile traffic speeds are below the level at which police speed enforcement would normally be considered, is not encouraged as this may lessen the overall impact that the signs are intended to have. Hence the temporary VAS should not be in situ for more than 6 weeks at the chosen site and should not return to monitor a site within 12 weeks.

Temporary VAS Deployment Guidelines

In addition to the above deployment guidelines for permanent VAS, the following applies to temporary VAS:

1. VAS cannot be fixed to telegraph poles or concrete street lighting columns. No ladders, step ladders or other aids should be leant against a lighting column or post as the additional weight may cause them to fall over.

Funding of VAS by third parties

In addition to the above, the following must be borne in mind by third parties (e.g. parish/town councils) considering VAS purchase for use on South Gloucestershire's highways:

1. The purchaser(s) would need to apply to the council for a Section 50 Road Opening Licence, where works are required within the highway.
2. Permission must be sought beforehand from this Authority for erecting any such facility on existing street furniture/publicly adopted highway/grass verges, etc.
3. The purchaser must provide evidence that a speeding problem exists before a permanent VAS can be considered (i.e. 85% percentile traffic speeds to be at a level where police enforcement would usually be considered).
4. The purchaser(s) must accept all responsibility for the VAS (including erection and any downloading/data retrieval).
5. If mains power is required, the purchaser(s) would need to arrange for a metered supply.
6. Public liability insurance must be taken out before any such purchase is considered.
7. The complete responsibility must be accepted by the purchaser(s) for all future maintenance.
8. The purchaser(s) would have to invest in their own method of downloading the data, together with its analysis and storage.
9. Data downloaded from the VAS must be made available to South Gloucestershire Council, on request.

Appendix 5: Summary process for VAS application

