

Briefing Note for Water End Councillor Call For Action Task Group meeting on Tuesday, 23rd March, 2010.

Trial Highway Schemes.

Although accurate predictions can often be made about the effects of introducing a new traffic management or highway improvement scheme, there is always a degree of uncertainty about how road users will respond to the change and what the overall result will be. It is therefore attractive to consider introducing such schemes on a trial basis, with a view to being able to respond quickly to any unforeseen problems or outcomes, and avoid the cost and difficulties associated with altering permanent works. However, there are a number of factors that can make the implementation of a scheme on a trial basis an impractical proposition. For example: -

- Practicality – some schemes simply do not lend themselves to a trial scheme being set up. For example, proposals which require carriageway widening, and perhaps underground services being moved as a consequence, can really only be implemented with the intention of the work being permanent.
- Realism – it may be very difficult to accurately represent a permanent scheme in temporary materials. For example, there may be problems with the physical size and appearance of temporary barriers, cones etc., which may result in road users responding to the trial layout in different ways compared to the permanent solution.
- Durability – schemes can have different short, medium, and long term effects as road users become more familiar with them. Retaining trial schemes for long periods can lead to maintenance problems and possible safety issues because the temporary measures tend not to be as durable or vandal resistant as permanent works. Therefore trial schemes are usually best suited to assessing just short-term effects of small-scale projects.
- Timescale – the process of implementing a trial scheme, followed by a suitable period of monitoring and evaluation, may take many months. This could present problems if the availability of funding to implement a permanent scheme is time limited.
- Costs – it may be expensive to set up the scheme in a temporary way. For example, it may be necessary to purchase materials and equipment that would not be suitable for retention in a permanent scheme, and it may be necessary to remove existing highway features to provide the necessary space for the trial measures to be installed. These could add up to a significant extra cost compared to implementing a permanent scheme straight away.

For these reasons, the implementation of schemes on a trial basis does not commonly take place. It is more usual to construct the measures in a permanent manner and accept the risk that there may be a need for some additional expense if subsequent monitoring highlights any problems that need remedial action. Such risks are also minimised through careful design drawing on experience from elsewhere, the use of computer modelling based prediction tools, and checking procedures such as Road Safety Audits.