

BIRMINGHAM BOX MANAGED MOTORWAYS PHASES 1 & 2

REPORT OF CONSULTATION ON GANTRY SIGNING AT MURDOCK WAY, WALSALL, ADJACENT M6 MOTORWAY

Executive summary

Following a complaint from some residents living at Murdock Way, Walsall, the Highways Agency undertook a consultation process on possible changes to Advance Direction Signing (ADS) options on the gantry nearest Bentley Lane adjacent to Murdock Way.

A consultation exercise was held with the residents of Murdock Way and properties in Crompton Close which are near the motorway, between 17th November 2010 and 13th January 2011 inviting residents to express a view on a number of signing options. The consultation attracted **three** responses reflecting the view of residents from **seven** properties. This represents a **low response rate of approximately seven per cent of consultation packs** issued. The Highways Agency also held a drop-in session but no residents attended.

The responses fell into three categories:

- One response representing five properties stating none of the options was acceptable
- One written response stating a preference for Option 4 (T sign)
- And one verbal comment during a telephone conversation stating a preference for Option 4 (T sign).

The first response from residents who initially complained about the gantry and signing stated that none of the options shown in the consultation were acceptable to them. They require no signs to be visible at all from their properties. The Agency cannot achieve this and retain road safety at this location.

One option (Option 4) included removal of the existing gantry with reduced signing located on a new post in the motorway verge. Whilst the complainants have dismissed this option, it is likely to be the least visually intrusive option achievable because the gantry would be removed. It would therefore be the option most likely to be acceptable to the majority of residents. Also it is the only option which any residents have expressed a preference for.

Therefore the recommendation is that the Agency should proceed with the option which gives the least visual intrusion at Murdock Way. This is Option 4, the new verge mounted post and sign.

Background

The Agency has worked closely with residents and Councillors throughout the scheme to mitigate the effects of the project where possible, including providing planting and fencing and amending gantry signs and signals layouts to reduce visual intrusion.

Some residents of Murdock Way, Walsall, made an initial complaint about a lack of consultation and visual intrusion caused by a gantry installed as part of the M6 J8- J10A Managed Motorway scheme near to their properties. The Highways Agency has regularly communicated with these complainants to investigate opportunities to mitigate the visual impact, including:

- Reducing the sign height on the gantry by 3.5 metres.
- Extensive mitigation planting at Murdock Way.
- An environmental fence further along Murdock Way and
- A screen fence close to another property.

The complainants however have remained concerned about the visual intrusion of this gantry and have pursued a formal complaint through the Highways Agency's complaint procedure.

The consultation

On 17th November 2010 the Highways Agency launched a consultation process on possible changes to Advance Direction Signing (ADS) options on the gantry near Murdock Way and opposite Crompton Close. The consultation papers were delivered to properties in Murdock Way and properties in Crompton Close which are close to the motorway (a total of 42 properties). Responses to the consultation were requested by 13th January 2011.

The purpose of the consultation was to ascertain the views of, and the strength of feeling by the residents who may be affected by visual impact of the signing near Murdock Way/Crompton Close.

Five options were shown in the consultation pack, these being the current sign design (which includes a significant reduction in ADS dimensions from the initial proposals) and Options numbered 1 to 4. Options 1, 2 and 3 involved reduced levels and size of ADS on the existing gantry. Option 4 involved removal of the existing gantry and an ADS mounted on a new vertical 'T frame' on the existing gantry foundation. Options 3 and 4 required relocation of some forward-direction signing to a gantry further downstream. This sign cannot be repositioned for technical reasons and would not be included in Options 1 to 4.

Recipients were asked to indicate preference for an option, either returning the preference form in a stamped addressed envelope, by email to the project in box, or in person at a consultation exhibition.

During the consultation period the project team held drop-in exhibition sessions at Walsall Council Chamber to give residents the opportunity to discuss the options. All properties involved in the consultation received a letter advising the drop-in sessions and an offer of separate appointments if the proposed dates were not convenient.

Responses to the consultation

The closing date for submissions on the consultation was 13th January 2011. The project team received three responses:

- One response, representing five properties, stated that none of the options was acceptable and that no signage was acceptable at that location (as this single response was representing four properties this has been given a weighting of four responses). The purpose and intention of the Options was to reduce the visual impact of the signs. However, it is clear from the comments made that any visibility of signing is unacceptable to the respondents. A signage arrangement which would not be visible at all from properties in Murdock Way whilst retaining road safety for motorists at this location is not possible. All of the options canvassed with the residents involve some visual impact.
- One written response favouring Option 4 (which is the new T frame post to replace gantry).
- One verbal comment favouring Option 4.

No residents came to the drop-ins or requested individual appointments (as offered in the consultation). No other correspondence or representations were received.

Decision on consultation

The low level of response indicates that, there is no strong feeling by the majority of residents of Murdock Way about the existing gantry. This is reinforced by the fact that no residents attended drop in sessions or pursued individual appointments.

However there is clearly strong feeling by the respondents who do not regard any signage as acceptable. It is noted that these respondents also occupy some of the properties closest to the sign. Whilst these respondents have expressed a clear view that no option was acceptable it is clear from their response visual intrusion is their main concern.

It is therefore possible to treat these respondents in two ways:

- Exclude their response from consideration of which option to choose given they did not express a preference of an option or,

- Note, that whilst respecting the respondents view that no option is acceptable, that visual intrusion is an important factor for these respondents.

In this case it is considered the latter approach should be taken since not to do could result in an option being selected that was more visually intrusive.

The signage at this location is necessary to provide timely information to road users approaching junction 10 and the sign must be located in a position which enables it to be visible from the southbound carriageway.

The options put forward in the consultation (Options 1 to 4) each offer varying degrees of information and convenience for road users as they approach junction 10

Compared with the original proposal, Options 1 and 2 would provide a reduced level of ahead and diverge information and would not be consistent with signing arrangements on the rest of the scheme. Options 3 and 4 contain diverge information, but not ahead destination information. There was no preference from the residents, for options 1, 2 and 3, consequently it would not be appropriate to take these options forward.

Option 4 (T-frame post) provides the minimum information requirement needed for road users but involves the least visual impact for local residents.

In balancing the need of road users against the representations received during the consultation from local residents the Agency has concluded that the option which minimises visual intrusion would be adopted. This is option 4

Conclusion

Taking due regard of the comments received in response to this consultation, the Transport Minister has agreed that the Highways Agency should proceed with the implementation of Option 4 (removal of the existing gantry and a new verge mounted post and sign). This is the least visually intrusive of the options and the only one for which residents have expressed a preference.