

North Yorkshire Council

Environment Executive Members

27 May 2026

Review of Temporary Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) Protocol

Report of the Assistant Director – Highways and Infrastructure

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek a decision on whether to permit local communities to install Speed Indication Devices (SIDs) on the highway or continue with the current Speed Limit Reminder (SLR) option only as set out in the existing Temporary Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) Protocol.
- 1.2 To provide the Executive Member for Highways and Transportation with detail around the current process, the design of the existing sign and to consider the potential merits of SIDs as third party owned temporary devices.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The roll out of the Temporary VAS Protocol was approved by the Corporate Director in consultation with BES Executive Members on the 30 January 2015. This allowed local communities the opportunity to rent VAS from the Council to address local speeding concerns. The VAS were owned, deployed, rotated and maintained by the Council.
- 2.2 On 25 September 2018, the Executive considered a VAS review report by the Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (TEEOSC) and approved the findings and recommendation to allow parishes to purchase and maintain their own VAS for deployment on the highway.
- 2.3 Within the report, the TEEOSC recognised the importance of providing consistency in the design of the VAS across the county and for this reason, they recommended the Council should rule out devices being supplied to parishes that are not prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2016. This included SIDs and the use of emojis (smiley/sad face symbols). The TEEOSC considered that consistent design across the county could mean that motorists are more likely to see the Speed Limit Reminder (SLR) type VAS as 'official' and thereby take more notice of them.
- 2.4 To meet the anticipated interest from communities to finance and manage their own vehicle activated signs, a report was produced for Executive, and the current process was approved on 26 March 2019. Within the approved report, it was stated that temporary VAS must be the SLR type, displaying the speed limit and a SLOW DOWN message. It was also stated that SIDs will not be approved for use as members raised concerns that these signs could encourage some motorists intentionally registering higher speeds.
- 2.5 The scheme was rolled out on 01 April 2019 and remains the process for installing temporary VAS on the network.
- 2.6 Currently, there are 272 temporary SLR type VAS deployed on the network that are located within 174 local communities. These signs comply with the Temporary VAS Protocol, and they are maintained by the appropriate parish or town council.

2.7 The Temporary VAS Protocol has been a very popular scheme, and enquiries continue to be received from local communities on a weekly basis.

3.0 REQUEST FOR CHANGE

3.1 There has been parish council interest over the last 12 months in support of North Yorkshire Council reconsidering its current protocol governing the use and trialling of SIDs across the county. The Council has received correspondence from several communities requesting the necessary change to the Temporary VAS Protocol, given claims that SIDs provide a 30% reduction in personal injury collisions.

3.3 Research by the Traffic Engineering team suggests that this figure relates to SIDs with Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and is taken from Transport for London and Suffolk County Council who have been using SIDs with ANPR for several years.

4.0 SPEED LIMIT REMINDER (SLR) VAS IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

4.1 SLRs display a 20, 30 or 40mph speed limit with a SLOW DOWN message to reinforce the permanent speed limit. The approved manufacturers either design the speed limit and SLOW DOWN message to illuminate at the same time, or they display the speed limit and SLOW DOWN message alternately, so the sign is intermingled. The participants have a choice between the two designs based on personal preference.

4.2 The SLRs can be mains supplied, solar powered or battery operated, but the power supply can be determined by any site constraints.

4.3 Currently, the most expensive option available, a solar powered SLR with a post, costs up to £5500+VAT and this cost is funded by the local community. There is no cost to NYC apart from the officer time involved in identifying suitable locations for the SLR, ordering posts and providing ongoing assistance whenever required.

4.4 The SLRs are activated when the built-in radar detects a vehicle exceeding a set threshold speed. This is generally 1-2 mph above the posted speed limit, and the activation prompts the speeding motorist to reduce their speed accordingly.

4.5 SLRs are officially classed as traffic signs because they display an option prescribed in the Traffic Sign Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2016.

4.6 Based on a study undertaken in the county several years ago, when 'before' and 'during' speeds were collected, the SLRs can be effective at reducing speeds by up to 10%, but generally a reduction of 5% is more realistic.

4.7 Generally, communities receive an excellent service from the approved SLR manufacturers and to our knowledge, only one parish council has expressed any concerns to the Council about the service they received and only one has had any concerns about the quality of the equipment they had installed.

4.8 Given the success of the Temporary VAS Protocol, SLRs that are not fixed in one position should continue to be an option for communities to address their local speeding concerns. Permanent VAS (signs fixed in one position) should continue to be funded by the Council to address locations with a speed related collision history.

5.0 SPEED INDICATOR DEVICES (SIDs)

- 5.1 SIDs are not prescribed as traffic signs in the TSRGD 2016, but they are widely used in London and by many authorities in the country to help raise awareness of speeding, particularly at community concern sites. There are thousands of SIDs on the highway across the UK and many are installed in our neighbouring authorities.
- 5.2 A SID is activated in the same way as an SLR VAS but displays the motorist's measured speed together with a corresponding message and/or a facial image. These devices are typically activated by all vehicles rather than just those exceeding the speed limit. Unlike SLRs, SIDs do not display the speed limit sign and do not tell the driver any more than is already displayed on a speedometer, albeit they may additionally show a face smiling or frowning/sad expression.
- 5.3 SIDs should more appropriately be classed as temporary information boards and not traffic signs and can be purchased at approximately 50% of the cost of a solar powered SLR and post.

6.0 SIDs WITH AUTOMATIC NUMBER PLATE RECOGNITION (ANPR)

- 6.1 SIDs with ANPR display the speed at the time each driver/rider passes the device, much the same as a standard SID, but they also take a photograph of approaching vehicles that exceed the threshold. The information can be downloaded by an authority and then sent to the police to process and issue warning letters. The combination of ANPR and SID functionalities with warning letters has proven to be very effective in places such as Suffolk.
- 6.2 In 2022 Suffolk County Council commissioned a study on the effectiveness of their temporary SLR sites compared to sites that have SIDs with ANPR in Suffolk.
- 6.3 In summary, local residents in Suffolk thought SIDs with ANPR were slightly more effective than SLRs, but they did not consider them to have a stronger effect on reducing the number of speeding drivers. Residents still viewed SLRs as a relevant intervention by prompting drivers about their speed.
- 6.4 When comparing the two sign types, the study found that there were no significant differences in average or 85th percentile speed, or the proportions of vehicles in each speed bin.

7.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES

- 7.1 In anticipation of this report, the Traffic Engineering team contacted two SID manufacturers in January 2026 to gain their opinion on the use of SIDs on the highway, and they were helpful in providing feedback.
- 7.2 Both manufacturers understood that SIDs are not prescribed in the TSRGD, but they believe that SIDs intended for temporary use, meet the necessary legislation and have the relevant certification, can be installed on the public highway and are legal. They recommend to their customers that these signs are designed to be temporary and moved around.
- 7.3 When questioning the legality of these signs on the highway, one SID manufacturer again confirmed that SIDs can be used on public roads in a temporary capacity whereas SLRs can be used as a permanent installation. They went on to say, 'maybe to give you more confidence, the SLRs are a better route to go down.'

- 7.4 The Department for Transport (DfT) has been clear for many years that SIDs should not be used as an alternative to prescribed speed limit signing. In January 2026, the Traffic Engineering team contacted the 'Authorisations Requests' email address of the DfT regarding the potential use of SIDs as an alternative to SLRs. They responded in writing to confirm, 'Speed Indicator Devices are not prescribed as traffic signs in the TSRGD 2016, and we have not given an authorisation for their use. We would advise on using Speed Limit Reminders.'
- 7.5 The DfT also provided reasons for not approving SIDs and they include the following:
- do not tell the driver any more than is already displayed on their speedometer.
 - do not tell the driver what the speed limit is on that stretch of road.
 - the use of a smiley face or sad face is not approved.
 - some drivers may accelerate and wish to see their top speed displayed.
- 7.6 The DfT said that care should be taken to ensure the use of a SID does not mislead or confuse road users as to the posted speed limit on road or affect the legality of any enforcement undertaken.
- 7.7 The DfT recommended seeking our own legal advice before considering SIDs and they suggested contacting the Home Office before potentially using SIDs with ANPR for enforcement purposes.

8.0 UNAUTHORISED SIDs in NORTH YORKSHIRE

- 8.1 Since the introduction of the Temporary VAS Protocol over 7 years ago, there has been a significant amount of correspondence from local communities and road safety groups requesting a SID instead of a SLR, mainly due to the difference in the cost and preference for the actual vehicle speed to be displayed.
- 8.2 Consequently, there have been occasions when local communities have chosen to ignore NYC advice and have purchased their own SID for installation in private land. Only recently, two communities have and introduced their own SID on the highway.
- 8.3 Non-approved signs on the highway are generally moved by the owners, but as a result of SIDs in private land, the legal position is that under Section 69 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Council can ask the owner or occupier of any land on which there is a SID, that is used for the guidance of road users, to remove it. If the owner or occupier fails to comply, the Council can remove the SID and recover the cost involved from the owner or occupier. This is a discretionary power that the Council has, so far, not used.
- 8.4 The failure to enforce this power and remove unauthorised SIDs from private land has generated a significant number of requests from other communities asking if they can introduce their own SID in private land rather than purchase a SLR.
- 8.5 When the Traffic Engineering team are aware of an unauthorised SID in private land or an intention to purchase a SID to install in private land, a letter or email is sent out advising the owner or occupier of the Council's discretionary powers and asks them to remove the SID forthwith or not to purchase a SID for this purpose. This has had some success and has stopped many SIDs being introduced. Nevertheless, there remain two communities that continue to deploy SIDs outside the highway boundary.

9.0 PROS AND CONS OF PERMITTING SIDs

9.1 Pros:

- they would be a cheaper alternative for local communities with speeding concerns to consider and it's likely that communities who hold off purchasing a SLR because of the higher cost, would instead be able to purchase a SID
- the number of VAS on the network that are aimed at reducing vehicle speeds in urban areas would significantly increase and this could improve road safety in general
- the actual speedometer display is preferred by some communities

9.2 Cons:

- there would be a mix of signs available to purchase with no consistency in design or message to road users.
- the option to now purchase a SID after 7 years of saying 'no' to interested communities would be disappointing to the 174 participants that have already purchased a SLR in accordance with the Temporary VAS Protocol and met the required costs
- goes against DfT advice and the Council would effectively be permitting an unauthorised sign on the highway
- SIDs do not remind road users of the current speed limit
- the use of a smiley or sad face is not approved

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

10.1 The alternative option of using a SID has been considered and the recommendation is not to introduce them in North Yorkshire.

11.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Based on the recommendation, there are no financial implications. Temporary SLRs will continue to be an option for local communities with no financial implications for the Council.

12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 Based on the recommendation, there are no new legal implications for the Council. Communities will continue to sign a legal agreement that sets out their obligations before they can participate in the scheme.

13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The implications have been considered by undertaking an assessment as shown in Appendix A. There are no implications.

14.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The implications have been considered by undertaking an assessment as shown in Appendix B. There are no implications.

15.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 Reasons for recommendations are noted as:

- the previous Executive decision
- clear feedback from the DfT detailed in this report
- 174 communities have complied with the existing requirements in the Protocol which works well
- there is no evidence to suggest that non-approved SIDS reduce vehicle speeds more than the currently approved SLRs

16.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 It is recommended the Corporate Director – Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Highways and Transportation agrees that:

- i. SIDs are not permitted on the highway and there should be no change to the Temporary VAS Protocol
- ii. the VAS available to the local communities in North Yorkshire should continue to be of a consistent approved SLR design.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix B – Climate Change Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

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