

PROJECT SPECIFIC GUIDELINES - VARIABLE MESSAGING SIGNS

The Department of Justice conducted a review of road safety issues relating to Variable Message Signs (VMS) use. Based on the findings of the review, guidelines have been developed to assist applicants of the TAC's Community Road Safety Grants Program to use VMS safely and effectively.

Applicants using Community Road Safety Grants funding to purchase a VMS will need to follow these guidelines when placing their VMS:

Safe placement

1. VMS need to be placed far enough from the road so that they are not a hazard to vehicles that may run off the road. Depending on the speed zone, there are different VicRoads requirements for how far from the road edge line a VMS should be placed. On 100 km/h rural roads this is 9 metres. Check with the local VicRoads office for the requirement on the roads where you intend to place VMS.
2. VMS should never be placed on the tip of a curve where there is a heightened risk of a run off road incident.
3. Choose a location where the sign can be installed and removed safely. For example, not so close after a visual blockage or a bend such that oncoming traffic does not have time to react safely to a slow moving delivery/pickup vehicle.
4. Avoid placing the VMS at a location where it might distract drivers from a potential road hazard. For example do not place opposite a driveway or bridge etc., where particular driver attention is required.

Site selection

1. A VMS is most effective at a site where a significant proportion of the traffic exceeds the limit. In effect, they act to draw down average vehicle speeds to that of the prevailing limit. Applicants should choose locations with a history of speeding. Local police will most likely be able to direct you to such sites.
2. Generally choose sites where the VMS can be seen from a good distance. However, care should be taken to avoid situations where local residences are inconvenienced, given that VMS can be quite bright, especially at night.

Rotation

1. The impact on local drivers may wear off over time. As such it is recommended that at least three to four locations be selected and that the VMS be rotated through these locations on a two week schedule. This is separate to locating the VMS at identified unique events such as roads works or festivals when circumstances suggest heightened risk for certain periods.
2. Using the VMS together with police enforcement will give added effect if the displayed message is appropriate (see message section below).

Messages

1. In general messages should be short and clear. This is particularly important in higher speed zones as drivers have less time to read messages. Applicants should aim to not use more than 12 characters per line, and not more than three lines. Rotating screens can assist in displaying longer messages if required.

For example, a suggested speed reduction message in a rural 100 km/h zone displayed over two screens with a two second rotation between screens is:

HIGH
RISK
AREA

OBSERVE
SPEED
LIMIT

If a VMS is used in areas where police or mobile camera enforcement occurs, applicants might consider using the following message displayed over two screens with a two second rotation:

HIGH
RISK
AREA

POLICE
ENFORCING
SPEED

The aim of the above two speed message suggestions is to clearly link a higher risk location with a desired behaviour change, specifically a reduction in speeding. A similar logic should be applied to other identified risk areas such as bends or locations with blind spots. It is important to justify to drivers the request you are making.

2. If the message is a speed feedback (typically used in lower speed urban environments such as school zones) configure the VMS to only display speeds up to 7 to 10 km/h over the limit, at which point a simple message such as "TOO FAST" displays. This discourages attempts to set "records" etc.
3. Try to place the VMS close to a permanent speed limit sign to emphasise the speeding detected. It is best not to use speed feedback modes in higher speed zones (80 km/h and higher) as they often don't operate in time to adequately alert drivers.

Following these guidelines will assist applicants to promote safer road behaviour in their community and encourage the best possible community-based road safety outcomes. Applicants can also access the Victorian Community Road Safety Partnership Program's 'Not So Fast' package available on the VicRoads website.

The State Government planning policy (particularly relating to demographic changes and impacts on road safety).

1. ABS Census data to help identify 'at risk' cohorts in your area.

Other factors that can speed up the process and encourage positive results

1. A clearly nominated project manager with authority to keep plans on track.
2. Plans which combined long term 'aspirational' goals (to inspire and mobilise communities) with 'functional' goals (practical, measurable and achievable within a specified period).
3. Ensuring the road safety strategy is included in 'whole of Council' planning e.g. Council Plan, City Plan, Community Safety Plan, Community Wellbeing Plan.
4. A comprehensive evaluation plan which included:
 - Clear road safety strategy deliverables and deadlines (KPIs).
 - CrashStats/data review to measure change in accident numbers/casualties.
 - Annual household/attitude surveys to measure impact of the Strategy.
 - Monitoring attendances at road safety related activities and events.
 - Satisfaction surveys administered at road safety activities and events.
 - Road safety audits including pre/post-tests to chart behaviour change.

These guidelines provide comprehensive suggestions and examples for achieving meaningful and successful outcomes for local government and community applicants creating Road Safety Strategies. They will also assist the TAC to ensure that Road Safety Strategies are being funded for areas where they will be most beneficial.

The Victorian Community Road Safety Partnership Program also has a range of guidelines to support community road safety at www.vicroads.vic.gov.au, search for VCRSPP.