

TCAP1007 Wayfinding New Variable Message Sign displays (free text signs) in Stockport Town Centre

Report of the Corporate Director for Place Management and Regeneration

1. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1.1 This report details the proposed removal of the remaining car park VMS displays in Stockport town centre, their replacement with static car park directional signs and the installation of more versatile “free text” VMS displays on key radial routes into the town centre.
- 1.2 Proposed locations of the new VMS displays are currently being discussed and assessed by TfGM who will be responsible for the future maintenance of these new assets including new car park counters (where a need is identified to upgrade in each car park). All new VMS assets will be the property of Stockport Council.
- 1.3 The Council will also have full control over messaging (via a web-based system) on all the proposed VMS displays including two existing free text type displays on the A6 outside St George’s church and on Great Portwood Street outside Asda.

2. INFORMATION

- 2.1 As part of the Town Centre Access Plan (TCAP), a budget of approximately £350,000 has been allocated to VMS Wayfinding improvements. This included a full review of vehicle routing, signage, road classification, and other guidance mechanisms the public use when visiting the Town Centre. The existing VMS car park system was installed in 2002 with additional displays installed in 2005-7 at the time Tesco was built. Existing VMS installations are linked to detection equipment in car parks and show destinations and directions to car parks with “live” parking space availability. The signs were installed and are maintained by TfGM however the majority are reaching the end of their lifespan and they are becoming unreliable and costly to maintain.
- 2.2 Of the 25 original signs installed; 7 were removed due to TCAP works and of the remaining 18 displays, 8 are broken or faulty, leaving 10 functional signs.
- 2.3 The Council researched various options for removal and upgrade including :
 - i. Continue maintaining the existing VMS displays. This is considered to be not viable given their age and costly maintenance requirements.
 - ii. Removal of existing VMS displays and replacement with 25 new VMS displays of similar technology. Whilst still available such signs can communicate car park information only which is considered to be a wasted opportunity and would cost over £500k in installation costs;
 - iii. Removal of existing without replacement. This was considered a lost opportunity to improve communication of information to travelling public;

Or, the recommended option,

- iv. Removal of existing displays and replacement with fixed signs giving directions to car parks along with a more sophisticated and versatile “free text” system on key radial routes approaching the town centre. This will allow more time for drivers to make decisions about car parking and other informative messages.

2.4 The new free text VMS displays can provide car parking information plus a whole range of other strategic information; including (but not limited to):

- diversion / roadworks information
- suggested alternative routes
- events - suitable travel modes/car parks to use etc
- congestion warnings/ M60 travel updates

2.5 The new VMS role-out presents a significant opportunity to communicate with the travelling public and provide up-to-date information to both new visitors and regular commuters about traffic / parking but also other messages about forthcoming events to support wider regeneration activities in the town.

2.6 A number of the old VMS signs were removed and replaced with static directional car park signs as part of TCAP schemes completed on St Marys Way, Travis Brow, King Street West, Heaton Lane, A6 Wellington Road North/South, Great Egerton Street (as part of Redrock), Hempshaw Lane, Hall Street and Knightsbridge. As part of the new VMS role out it is the Council’s intension to remove all remaining /aging VMS displays and replace them with static car park directional signs.

2.1 Where necessary existing car park counters which send live data to the VMS displays will be upgraded to reduce ongoing maintenance costs of these aging assets. The counters will also, potentially, be able to supply information about parking availability on line to users of the Council website.

2.2 In addition to the new VMS role out and upgrade the Council intends to take ownership of the two existing TfGM displays located on Great Portwood Street outside Asda and the VMS outside St George’s church on A6 Wellington Road South (messaging on both displays is currently controlled by TfGM but in future the Council will take full control of messaging).

Existing VMS (6 lines of text) on A6 Wellington Road South, NB outside St George’s Church:



Existing VMS on Great Portwood Street:



2.7 Subject to available budget up to eleven additional free text VMS displays are proposed on some or all of the following key radial routes into the town centre. Priority will be given to sites on A roads as follows, with TCAP anticipated to fund 7 signs:

- 1) A6 Wellington Road North, SB.
- 2) A5145 Travis Brow, EB.
- 3) A560 Crookilley Way, WB.
- 4) A5102 Bramhall Lane, NB.
- 5) A6188 Tiviot Way, SB.
- 6) A626 Hall Street, WB.
- 7) A560 Stockport Road, EB.

Reserve sites:

- 8) A5145 Didsbury Road, EB.
- 9) Mercian Way, EB.
- 10) Newbridge Lane, WB.
- 11) Lancashire Hill, SB.

2.8 Each VMS display will have either 4 lines of free text (16 characters long) or 6 lines of text. They will be set to sign the main car parks

3. FUNDING

3.1 The costs associated with making the proposed VMS displays and upgrades to car park counters will be met by funding received for the Town Centre Access Plan (TCAP).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The Corporate Director for Place Management and Regeneration requests members comment on this report and recommend the Cabinet Member for Economy and Regeneration approves the removal of all remaining outdated VMS displays, replacement with fixed signage, replacement of car park counters and approves the installation of new VMS displays described above and at locations shown on the

attached plan with exact locations and final numbers of signs subject to available budget and final assessment for the feasibility of installation.

Background Papers

There are none.

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information please contact Nick Whelan on telephone number Tel: 0161 474 4907 or alternatively email nick.whelan@stockport.gov.uk