

XXX

Dear XXX

Freedom of Information Act - Request for disclosure

Further to my letters of 12 and 26 May, I am writing to confirm that the Department has now completed its search for the information you requested in your 20 April letter. I wish to advise you that some of the information cannot be disclosed for the reasons given in this letter. The position on your 19 questions is as follows:-

1- 4 and 6: The position is as explained in my 12 May letter – these relate to documents and files that are more than 30 years old and have been placed in the National Archives.

5. Any subsequent estimates, including updated estimates, of the cost of changeover;

7. Any up-to-date estimates of the cost of converting road signage to metric units, including the basis for such estimates, distinguishing distance signage from speed limit signage;

8. Any estimates of the number of distance signs and (itemised separately) of speed limit signs (including repeater signs) in the UK

An estimate was made in January 1989, which is attached.

We have not made any recent estimate of the costs of converting speed limit and distance signs from miles to kilometres, although an estimate was made of the numbers of speed limit signs on roads in England in 1992 as part of a research project to develop a methodology for making an inventory of signs on English roads generally.

The number of speed limit signs in England was estimated in 1992 as:

Start of speed limit other than the national speed limit (ie showing numerals) - 120,000
Derestriction / national speed limit applies signs, showing a black diagonal band on a white disc – 67,000
Repeater signs – 104,000.

The survey did not disaggregate between repeater signs showing numerals and repeater “national speed limit applies” signs. There were also a handful of other signs such as minimum speed. The total number of speed limit signs will have increased since 1992,

The sample inventory made in 1992/93 did not identify the numbers of directional signs showing distances or distance plates used with warning signs.

9. Any background papers leading to the decision to request the European Commission and Council of Ministers to agree to a derogation permitting the UK to postpone metrication of road signage “until a date to be fixed by the Member State”.

This information would be extremely difficult and very time consuming to try to collate. The Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with the request (including finding, reading and sorting the information) would exceed the appropriate limit. The appropriate limit for central government is set at £600. In reliance on section 12 (exemption where costs of compliance exceed £600) of the Act I must, therefore, refuse your request.

10. Any background papers leading to the decisions (however many times revisited) not to fix this date

To comply with your request would exceed £600. In reliance on section 12 (exemption where costs of compliance exceed £600) of the Act I must, therefore, refuse your request.

11. Any legal advice received on whether (a) it is legal (within the terms of Direction 80/181/EEC) to postpone indefinitely the fixing of this date, and (b) what considerations are properly relevant to deciding when to fix this date (ie NOT what the date should be but when it should be fixed)

As the complaint by the UKMA Director to the EU Commission relates to the implementation of EU legislation, and could lead to formal legal proceedings, it would not be in the public interest to disclose the legal advice we have received on the merits of the complaint. I am therefore refusing your request, under section 42 of the Act, relating to legal professional privilege and the provision of legal advice.

12. Estimates of the number of UK resident drivers who have and have not received education in metric units at various dates in the past and projections of such estimates for the next five years

We do not have such estimates.

13. Estimates of the numbers of UK resident drivers who have received no formal education in imperial units at various dates in the past and projections of such estimates for the next five years

We do not have such estimates.

14. Estimates of the number of UK resident drivers who drive abroad in countries whose road signage is metric (latest 3 years available) and future projections (which will need to include the Irish Republic)

We do not have such estimates.

15. Estimates of the number of drivers who are resident in countries with metric road signage and who drive in the UK (latest 3 years available) and future projections (which will need to include the Irish Republic

We do not have such estimates.

16. Any evidence which the Department may have that conversion to metric road signage in the UK would pose a problem for road safety, and any contrary evidence

We do not have such evidence.

17. Any contingency plan which the Department may have for converting to metric road signage, including details of method and possible timescale

We do not have such a document.

18. Any estimates of the abortive costs of continuing to erect new imperial road signage which will need to be replaced or removed when the UK eventually does fix a date for adopting metric road signage

We do not have such estimates.

19. Any conclusions which DfT officials may have drawn from their observation of the recent changeover to metric speed limits and road signage in the Republic of Ireland

It is too soon to assess the effects of the changeover in ROI, and that it will be difficult to distinguish between the effects of metricating and the effects of reducing 91% of speed limits.

Conclusion

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. The information given above may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

I apologise for sending this reply a day later than promised. If you are unhappy with the way the Department has handled your request or with the decisions made in relation to your request you may complain by writing to me at the above address. Please see attached details of DfT's complaints procedure and your right to complain to the Information Commissioner.

Also, if you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number F1405 in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

XXX

Your right to complain to DfT and the Information Commissioner

You have the right to complain about the way in which your request for information was handled and/or about the decision not to disclose all or part of the information requested. In addition a complaint can be made that DfT has not complied with its FOI publication scheme.

Your complaint will be acknowledged and you will be advised of a target date by which to expect a response. Initially your complaint will be re-considered by the official who dealt with your request for information. If, after careful consideration, that official decides that his/her decision was correct, your complaint will automatically be referred to a senior independent official who will conduct a further review. You will be advised of the outcome of your complaint and if a decision is taken to disclose information originally withheld this will be done as soon as possible.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF