



## New push made on highways issue

TWO years after we published the case to modernise Britain's road measurements in the report *Metric Roads Ahead*, UKMA has once again returned to the issue.

The Highways Agency, which is responsible for England's motorway and trunk road network, has launched a public consultation on what it calls the Roadside Facilities Policy Review. The aim of the review is to look at the need to update policy areas regarding roadside facilities such as motorway service areas.

Although measurements are not a central area for discussion, UKMA identified a number of areas for improvement which we submitted. These included a further effort to end the use of "m" as an abbreviation for mile, which is contrary to the internationally recognised abbreviation for metre; a proposal to change references of 56 mph speed limiters for lorries to 90 km/h; further corrections to abbreviations such as "kg" instead of "kgs" and "m<sup>2</sup>" instead of "m2" for square metres - the unit of measurement which the Highways Agency has already accepted for service area planning matters.

While these measures only go a slight way towards the UKMA's goal of eventual full metrication of the road system, our 1000-plus word submission, backed up with extensive links to relevant metric-related legislation, continues to keep the metric issue alive within government and it can only be hoped that little by little change will come about.

### INSIDE

*Northern Ireland road news... Page 2*

*Chairman's New Year Message... Page 3*

*New advice on Imperial descriptions... Back page*

### Beer lovers face an Imperial obstacle in PM's backyard

IT probably seemed like a good idea at the time.

When a German twinning association decided to provide some hospitality to their Scottish hosts, little did they realise that by holding a traditional Bavarian Music and Beer festival in a local park, they would be falling foul of Britain's antiquated Weights and Measures law. But that's what happened last year when visitors from Ingolstadt visited their twin town of Kirkcaldy in Fife.

As the chairman of the twinning association told UKMA: "Last time we had some problems with the measurement department, because we were selling the Bavarian beer in the typical Bavarian glasses, which are in the metric measurement. We were told to use the imperial system for future occasions.



"We believe the Bavarian beer should be sold in the typical glasses (eg for the Weissbier you need a special type of glass) and we are already in contact with glass producing companies in Germany - but it is really difficult (and as well very expensive) to produce Bavarian-style glasses with the imperial measurement."

The story has an added angle because Kirkcaldy is in the constituency of the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. While UKMA is making efforts to raise the issue and highlight just how ridiculous our measurement laws are, discussion between committee members led to the following proposals for a short-term solution

*Continued overpage*

Have your say! Visit our blog at: [www.metricviews.org.uk](http://www.metricviews.org.uk)

## Beer lovers' imperial obstacle *Cont'd from Page 1*

The law does not actually require draught beer to be dispensed in a pint glass. It can be delivered in any size of glass as long as automatic measuring equipment is used that can measure an exact half pint. So one could therefore serve 3 x ½ pint (= 852 ml) in a 1 litre Stein, then offer to top up to one litre at no extra charge (but presumably one could adjust the price per ½ pint to reflect this). For example, if there was a charge of say, £6 per litre, one could actually price the beer at £4.00 per pint (or £2.00 per ½ pint), dispense 1½ pints for the advertised price of £6, and give away the extra 148 ml at no extra charge. There is no reason why this could not be advertised as "order 1½ pints, and get a free top up to one litre.

Of course to do this, one would have to hire or borrow the appropriate measuring equipment, which would have to be stamped as accurate by the Trading Standards Department of the district council.

However, one way to avoid having to use automatic measuring equipment would be to pour the beer initially into pint or half pint glasses, and then decant it into a Bavarian Stein. Bottled beer (as distinct from draught) can of course be poured into any size of glass.

UKMA wish the twinning association all the best in their festival which is being held next July.

---

---

## Were we right to identify metric sign?

IN the last edition of *UKMA News* we published a photo of an illegal metric sign that road contractors had put up alongside a trunk road in Staffordshire. It warned drivers of a road closure 2 km ahead.

But one supporter criticised the decision to identify its location arguing that by doing so, we could have played into the imperialists' hands and caused a presumably sympathetic contractor or local highways officer a spot of bother.

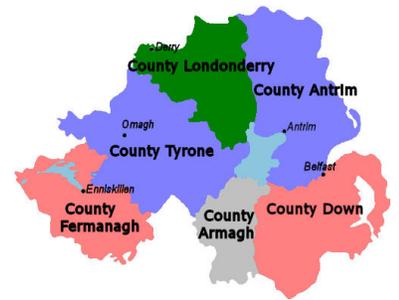
It's an interesting thought and comes down to the question: "Is any publicity, good publicity?" On the one hand thousands of motorists probably saw the sign and thought nothing of it. On the other hand, a bit of fuss would have seen the issue raised at a local, if not regional level, therefore providing an opportunity for us to get our message across. And sadly that's not an opportunity that arises too often.

In the event, the sign was removed. It appears its removal had nothing to do with Imperialist angst though. The road was simply re-opened.

---

---

## Few signs of change in Northern Ireland



EFFORTS by UKMA to see road metrication issues for Northern Ireland devolved from Westminster to the Stormont assembly have received a setback.

It had been hoped that the authorities in the province could be persuaded to take the issue forward, least not because the province is the only part of the UK to share a lengthy land border with a metric country. The Irish Republic switched its highways to metric signage three years ago.

But in a letter from the Northern Ireland Roads Service, while it says that responsibility for road signs matters is a devolved issue, the government has decided that metrication is a matter of national interest and hence the responsibility of the UK government, and that the UK government has no plans currently to metricate roads signs.

It goes on: "The conversion of all road signs here would incur a significant capital cost as all existing signs would need to be retrofitted or replaced. Roads Service considers these costs would be disproportionate to any overall benefit to be derived from the change."

Acknowledging road safety concerns that could have arisen following the Republic's switch to metric signs in 2005, the Roads Service said that warning signs had been erected at the border advising of the change but that safety concerns had so far appeared "unfounded".

Whether or not it's safe, for motorists travelling between two towns in the Republic, Butlers Bridge and Clones, the confusion is all too evident. The main road between the towns criss-crosses the border with Northern Ireland six times in about 15 km, with speed limits changing between km/h and mph just as frequently.

# Our Chairman's New Year Message

Dear member

It would be idle to pretend that 2007 has been a successful year for the UK Metric Association. Although we have launched some new initiatives and developed others, we are really struggling to make headway against the hostility of much of the media, the cynical indifference of the Government and – as we have most recently learnt – the timidity and intellectual weakness of the European Commission.

The decision of the Commission (now endorsed without debate by the European Parliament) to recommend that “supplementary indications” should be authorised indefinitely was undoubtedly a major setback and a propaganda success for our opponents. The biggest danger for our campaign now is that people will assume that the issue of which measurement units we use in the UK is now finally settled (i.e. “one country, two systems”) and that we therefore need not talk about it any more. Our immediate task therefore is to keep the issue alive.

## **Consultation on reviewing weights and measures legislation**

Fortunately, there will be an early opportunity to raise the issue again in the first few months of 2008. I refer to the consultation paper recently issued by the National Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML) on its review of weights and measures legislation. This paper raises fundamental questions about the purpose and need for state regulation of weights and measures, implying perhaps that deregulation is on the agenda. Significantly, the fundamental issue of which weights and measures we should be using does not receive a mention.

I would therefore urge members to download the consultation paper from the NWML website <http://www.nwml.gov.uk/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=83> and to make their own submission to this Government agency. Probably, it would be best to copy your submission to the two relevant Secretaries of State (John Denham, Secretary for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and John Hutton, Secretary

for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. For some reason, responsibility for consumer protection is split between these two Departments). Also send a copy to your MP asking him/her to forward it to the Secretaries of State (letters from MPs are more likely to be read by Ministers).

I am sure I do not need to advise members what to say, but one point that I would personally stress is that weights and measures are not simply a matter for these two Departments. They affect Education, Transport, DEFRA and indeed the whole government machine. We should keep pointing this out and emphasise the need for “joined up government”.

## **Committee awayday**

Partly as a result of the setbacks referred to above, the committee have decided that we need a general and detailed review of UKMA's activities and programme – including communication, the role of our websites, blog, newsletter and internal forum, the style guide, media relations, and the next steps on road sign conversion. The Committee normally “meets” by telephone conference call, but on this occasion we have decided that we need to meet in person in Birmingham on a Saturday in January. There will be a modest cost, but we feel that this will be worthwhile if it results in better planning and implementation of our campaign.

## **Seasonal greetings**

Finally, may I wish all members a successful New Year - both in their personal lives and in their work for the campaign.

Best wishes

Robin Paice  
Chairman



**UKMA wish all members a successful New Year**

# Government advice on Imperial units for floorspace was wrong

LACORS (the Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services) has confirmed its earlier advice that, where office floorspace is let per unit of floorspace, that unit must be metric. In doing so, it implicitly says that previous Government advice on this matter is wrong and/or misleading.

MetricViews (which is UKMA's own blog and can be found at [www.metricviews.org.uk](http://www.metricviews.org.uk)) has previously reported that LACORS originally gave this advice to an individual local authority as long ago as 2004. However, some trading standards officers in other local authorities were reluctant to follow this advice without full authentication from LACORS.

UKMA has now received a letter from LACORS on headed notepaper confirming the previous advice. Using this letter it will now be possible to challenge estate agents who advertise office rents "per sq ft" rather than "per m<sup>2</sup>." It may also be possible to challenge newspapers and magazines and hoarding owners who allow their advertising space to be used for illegal advertisements. And obviously trading standards officers should be informed.

The key passage of the LACORS letter reads as follows:

"If a transaction relating to land or floorspace is a transaction by reference to quantity, such that the units of measurement are in use for trade (as opposed to a transaction by specification), it is LACORS' view that the transaction is regulated by the Weights and Measures Act 1985" (i.e. metric units must be used)."

This clearly contradicts Government advice that the legislation does not apply to services or to land.

It is hoped to upload a copy of the letter to the UKMA website. In the meantime, electronic copies can be obtained from [chair@metric.org.uk](mailto:chair@metric.org.uk).

*A date for your diary!*

UKMA AGM and Annual Meeting  
Saturday 5 July, in London

*Full details to follow nearer the time*

**Have your say at UKMA's blog**  
[www.metricviews.org.uk](http://www.metricviews.org.uk)

SINCE UKMA's blog was launched, just about every topic relating to metrication issues has been brought up, analysed, discussed and even argued over.

Why not log-on and join the Metric debate?

Recent blog entries have included:

## **Speeding - It's all in the mind**

*January 7th, 2008*

The US web site [www.metrication.us](http://www.metrication.us) has an amusing story about a speeding Irish driver whose fine was reduced when he convinced the Judge that his speed in km/h sounded higher than it was...

## **Are imperial feet "natural" units ?**

*January 1st, 2008*

With the slow transition to metric in the UK, a lot of myths have emerged regarding metric and imperial. With a New Year it is an appropriate time to examine some of these myths starting with the claim that imperial feet are 'natural' units...

## **UK speed limits go metric on 1 January**

*December 28th, 2007*

UKMA issued the following news release at 18:05 on 28 December...

## **Guyana shows the way**

*December 21st, 2007*

MetricViews has come across an interesting letter in a newspaper published in Georgetown, Guyana. Extracts are reprinted below (acknowledgements to Stabroek News). The UK authorities could learn from the determined approach to metric conversion adopted by this former British colony...

## **How Others See Us - An Australian View**

*December 8th, 2007*

UKMA occasionally receives letters from visitors to the UK expressing amazement at our dysfunctional muddle of measurement units...

See these articles and more in full, and add your own comments at: [www.metricviews.org.uk](http://www.metricviews.org.uk)