

possible alternative programmes and seeking views on the merits of each from all points of view. He would meanwhile discuss the wider implications of the proposals with his colleagues.

An extract from the letter of consultation is at doc. ^{Appendix B} 8/1. From their replies (summarised at doc. ^{Appendix A} 8/2) it is clear that in general the representative organisations do not oppose the proposed metrication of traffic signs and the general view is that the changeover should be completed as soon as possible, though the local authorities are concerned at the cost.

DECISION NEEDED NOW

The intention to introduce metric speed limits was announced as far back as March this year. Representative organisations were advised in May that the Department was considering the implications for other traffic signs. Many new signs in this category are being erected and delay might mean extensive alteration to many of them. A decision is required, therefore, on the principle of whether metric units should be shown on traffic signs other than speed limit signs.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST

It can be argued that there would be a hostile public reaction to the cost and inconvenience of the proposed change on the grounds that considerable expenditure should not be incurred merely to alter the system which will not benefit motorists generally in this country. Metric traffic signs would not help exports, nor do they relate to a tangible commodity where new measurements would rapidly become familiar by individual experience. Speed limits involve only a few numerals and are easier to understand but it can be argued that the conversion of directional and other signs should be delayed for several years in order to allow the public to get more experience of the metric system first.

On the other hand it is fair to say that if metrication is to be adopted generally for its benefits in trade, commerce and education, it is difficult to justify any long term exception in the field of road traffic. In the long term this could only appear quite anomalous and confusing to a new generation brought up to think metric. An announcement has already been made about the intention to introduce metric speed limits and a decision is awaited on the other signs; the conversion of other traffic signs would be a logical development, indeed, it would be illogical to show metric speed limits and retain imperial road distances.

A public decision against metrication of traffic signs now might well be regarded as a breach in the Government's metrication policy as a whole. When the previous Minister put his speed limit policy proposals to HAC in February the Committee