

Guy Dangerfield
Head of Strategy
Transport Focus
Albany House
Ground Floor West
86 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EA

Duncan Smith
Executive Director of Operations
Atlantic House
Birchwood Boulevard
Warrington
WA3 7WD
Tel: 07769 248828

17 November 2022

Dear Guy

Signs on the National Highways network

I am writing further to my acknowledgement of your letter dated 17 June 2022 regarding signs on the National Highways network and was pleased to read that my team have been providing you with regular updates on the work being done to discharge the commitments I made in my letter of 17 February 2022.

The “Inspections – A Customer View” programme is a particularly challenging but important piece of work, as it has at its core something that I am passionate about, namely “*delivering the basics consistently*”.

I know that in his role as the Interim Customer Service Director for Operation, Andy Butterfield has the same view and that he is working with his team to ensure that best practice is shared, and we bring regions with us in making our operation more customer centric.

Turning specifically to your letter, I believe there are two specific threads which I have taken the liberty of summarising as:

1. Identification of where signs have been missing for a long time
2. Cleanliness of signs

Dealing with each in turn if I may.

Missing signs

I am aware that one strand of the “Inspections – A Customer View” programme focuses on understanding the age of the oldest sign defect and that we feed back to you every quarter on the progress we are making. I have to say I was surprised that there are a handful of defects outstanding from 2016/17 but I know the regions are currently establishing if these are indeed jobs yet to be completed or it is the data that needs to be cleansed. I am keeping a keen eye on this.

At your meeting with Andy and Phil Treacher in September, we explained that we were exploring how technology might help us to identify where signs might have disappeared at a point in the past.

I am pleased to say that we have established that it is technically possible to automatically compare 2 existing data sets, bringing together the last “Laser Imaging, Detection and Ranging” (LIDAR) images and the asset information held by CONFIRM, which knows where the roadside assets are meant to be.

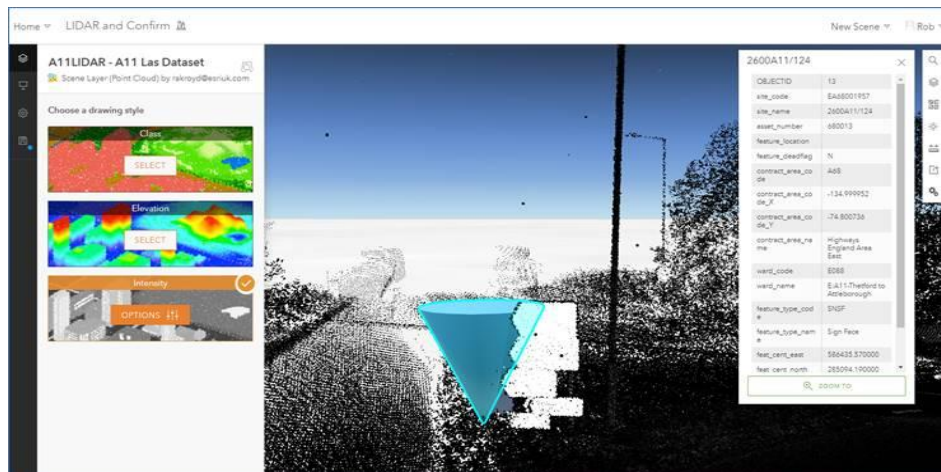
To test this we used the location you highlighted on the A11 at Thetford, Mundford Road roundabout.



From CONFIRM we extracted the asset information for that site and it shows that we do indeed have signs there.

site_code	site_name	asset_number	ward_name	feature_type_name	feat_cent_east	feat_cent_north
EA68001957	2600A11/124	680001	E:A11-Thetford to Attleborough	Sign Face	586419.12	285107.85
EA68001957	2600A11/124	680002	E:A11-Thetford to Attleborough	Sign Face	586396.75	285150.41
EA68001957	2600A11/124	680003	E:A11-Thetford to Attleborough	Sign Face	586417.25	285107.22
EA68001957	2600A11/124	680004	E:A11-Thetford to Attleborough	Sign Face	586430.75	285124.03

We then obtained the latest LIDAR images and overlaid the location information. As you can see in the image below, the vehicle did pick up that the signs were there when it last passed.



You will, I am sure, have identified that whilst this methodology could help us establish where some assets might have gone missing, there is a great reliance on the age of the LIDAR images. I've been informed that the oldest data is from 2015/2016 and the latest from 2018/2020.

We would look to initially compare these 2 datasets and pick up any changes that have happened in the passing of time, before then comparing everything against the CONFIRM asset information.

We are working with our colleagues in Digital Services as we couldn't commence any exercise to compare the datasets until the LIDAR has been loaded into our Spatial Portal, something we are expecting to happen during Q4 of this year.

In your letter you have suggested that we might want to conduct a comprehensive road by road audit to cross reference asset locations from CONFIRM but additionally to establish if the correct sequencing of signs approaching junctions is in place.

Whilst I understand what you are suggesting, this would be a significant commitment and not something that I'd be able to deliver given the tight opex challenge we face to the end of RIS2.

However, what I would like to suggest is that we work together to scope out how we could conduct a mini-audit, focusing on a particular route and establish to what extent:

1. Signs that should be there, aren't – they have never been installed
2. Signs should be there but aren't – they have been removed
3. We are compliant with the correct sequencing of signs – they are in the wrong place

This audit would provide you with assurance/re-assurance and would provide me with an indication if this is a significant problem where I might need to consider Designated Funds to address it.

Cleanliness of signs

If I can firstly provide you with clarity on the frequency that we clean signs and how GM701 aligns to CM125.

I have tried to explain this in layman's terms so apologies if you feel I am taking you through things that you are already aware of.

The start of the Traffic sign clearing section requires the Company to clean the sign face at a frequency that is directly linked to our knowledge of how quickly a particular location gets dirty or overgrown.

CM125 provides me with a recommendation that the cleaning frequency ought to be 3 years **but** GM701 then gives me the flexibility to go to 4 years at location x and 2 years at location y because we know location x is a "cleaner" area and location y is really busy and dirty with lots of trees nearby.

For location x, regions have to complete a safety risk assessment because they've moved from the recommended 3-year cycle and colleagues in the Maintenance Requirements Team within Safety, Engineering and Standards (SES) Directorate review these plans annually.

I trust that this explanation helps.

Turning to your final ask, focusing on how we validate that all Regions are achieving the required frequency across the whole of their signs estate.

As explained in the previous paragraphs, the cleaning schedule of signs is determined by their particular location so there isn't one standard but it is likely the majority are cleaned every 3 years.

The forward programme of works is set at the start of each year. Our M&R partners deliver against these plans and we closely monitor this, as payments are only made when the works specified in the programme are completed.

Delivery is evidenced a number of ways, from a photograph being uploaded to CONFIRM through the undertaking of an analysis of planned works against what is recorded in CONFIRM as complete and asking Inspectors to run a particular route and report if signs have been cleaned.

I trust the contents of this note provides you with the information you requested and I would again like to thank you for the time you've taken to provide this feedback and look forward to working with you developing the scope for the planned mini-audit of signs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Duncan Smith', written in a cursive style.

Duncan Smith
Executive Director of Operations