

Roadside posters to improve driving

A road safety campaign displaying roadside posters with 'watching eyes' in key locations, based on insights from behavioural sciences.

First published
27 March 2023

Updated
17 July 2024

Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Public order offences Roads policing
Organisation	Sussex Police
Contact	Stephen O'Connell
Email address	stephen.oconnell@sussex.police.uk
Region	South East
Partners	Community safety partnership Fire and rescue service Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	October 2019
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities

Aim

The aims of this initiative are to:

- reduce the number of casualties on the roads
- improve those driver and rider behaviours that put them and others at risk
- improve road safety

Description

The Wealden district has one of the worst road safety records in the region. According to one source the district is the fifth most dangerous area for young male drivers. Local and national research points to 'fear of being caught' by the police as a major controlling factor for driving behaviour.

This project involves the use of roadside posters designed using insights from the behavioural sciences. The way messages are presented can have a big influence on our decision-making.

Poster design

The posters include a police officer's eyes indicating to the reader that they may be being watched, to encourage them to behave more virtuously.

The poster also includes other design features that ensure the reader knows that it is a police-related sign. The wording on the first design produced states, 'Check your speed before we do'.

Further posters using the same design principles now address other road safety related behaviours, such as:

- seatbelt wearing
- drinking and driving
- not using mobile phones while driving

As of May 2024 new designs are regularly added.

Pilot testing

Pilot testing of the posters was extremely encouraging. We are rolling out the project across a much larger area in:

- locations with a known crash history
- places of community concern about road safety
- areas where there are active speedwatch groups

Required resources

The resources required are:

- the cost of printing and designing the posters (this project is happy for any force to use our design but the force logo would need changing)
- finding an agency or organisation to put up the posters in agreed locations – in this case the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

Evaluation

The district council is leading the impact evaluation, as part of the community safety partnership. The evaluation is based on before and after measures.

The pilot study involved three parts.

1. Firstly, we took data from covert roadside monitoring devices used for planning purposes and managed by the County Council. Using this data, we identified stretches of roads in 30mph, 40mph and 50mph areas with a poor record of compliance. Posters were put up either side of

the monitoring devices for a period of time. This allowed us to collect data and compare it with the historic data for the site.

2. Secondly, we put the posters up in two active Speedwatch areas. This allowed us to compare the numbers of vehicles reported for speeding before and after we put up and took down the signs.
3. Thirdly, we sent out a self-completed questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of the posters. We had more than 1,300 responses.

All three tests provided encouraging results.

Overall impact

The campaign is fully implemented. It has now been adopted by other forces as part of the behavioural insights nudge in driver behaviour. Two are now being added to the police drone enforcement campaign. This will look at motorcycle white line offences and number plate issues as well as off-road, in conjunction with the British Horse Society's 'think horse' campaign.

The signs have the ability as a Sussex Highways approved design to change the messages in the centre to fit in with the campaign ethos, without becoming a driver distraction with numerous posters at the roadside. The impact has been positive, getting educational messages out at the roadside thus reducing the number of killed or seriously injured.

The communities where the posters are on display seem to like them, as it's a visible way to demonstrate that action is being taken to improve road safety.

This intervention continues to support the work of the road safety team including local parish, town and city councils where the force have received reports of anti-social driving including speed issues. In all places where the force have deployed these signs drivers have remarked that it draws their attention to the message and influences their driving behaviour.

In communities where they have been erected residents have felt that not only have they made a difference they feel re-assured that the force are taking the issue seriously and monitoring the issues raised.

Learning

The poster locations need to be mapped for maintenance purposes, so they can be cleaned, refreshed and changed on a regular basis.

These signs need to be strategically placed to suit the issue being addressed. Placement should be based on data and residential complaint and a robust method of install and removal practice under the temporary sign guidelines as this can be overlooked. Adding a sticker to the back of the sign giving contact details and install date to road contractors proved a useful addition as they were being removed unnecessarily.

There also needs to be a degree of enforcement carried out in the areas where the posters are on display, so that road users realise they do not represent an empty threat. Displaying them in areas where there are active speedwatch groups does overcome this issue. We have had discussions about traffic police using a mobile version of the signs that can be put up when campaigns are in progress.

To ensure that under the temporary sign legislation they are taken down and rotated within the three month period. To add brass eyelets to the corex signs a being in a coastal area the poor weather allows the industrial cable ties to tear through unless the eyelets are installed. These are best used in areas where the data suggests there is an issue, also where community speedwatch groups are most active.

Best available evidence

Currently, the [crime reduction toolkit](#) does not include best-available evidence on the use of roadside posters to improve driving. It does include the best-available evidence on a number of prevention-based interventions to reduce driving-related crime, such as:

- [increased patrols to reduce drink driving](#)
- [drink-driving school-based programmes](#)
- [drink-driving media campaigns](#)
- [speed cameras](#)
- [red light cameras](#)

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.

Tags

Roads policing