

# MIN-4008 Bilingual signs

9 November 2022

Provide advice on whether Waka Kotahi can develop a proposal that will allow councils to choose to use bilingual signs if they wish to, and information on how signs may be implemented by road controlling authorities.

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## **Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's response:**

Waka Kotahi does not recommend councils have the option to choose to use bilingual signs if they wish to for the reasons outlined below.

### ***Research and international case studies point to the importance of standardisation***

Research undertaken at the beginning of this project found that standardisation is one of the key cognitive ergonomic principles that support effective comprehension of traffic signage. Inconsistency can cause confusion to those viewing the signage, potentially increasing their reaction times and distraction levels [the research note can found here: <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/assets/resources/research/research-notes/005/005-bilingual-traffic-signage.pdf>]. We closely observed several jurisdictions that use bilingual traffic signs, and in the Welsh system they moved away from a locally-led approach to a centralised one to ensure standardisation.

### ***Uniformity and consistency are central to the TCD Rule objective***

The Traffic Control Devices Rule 2004 objective is explicit that traffic control devices (including traffic signs) must be safe, and an important part of achieving this is by designing traffic signs in a way that is uniform and consistently applied (Section 1.3 of the Rule).

Providing the ability for road controlling authorities (RCAs) to have different options to convey the same message would not support this objective. Uniformity and consistency have been central to our design considerations in the proposals.

### ***Some discretion is provided for within the current proposals***

The proposed Rule prescribes the format (and in some cases the specific words) that must be used on the signs. The proposed Rule does not require RCAs to display bilingual localities on every destination and wayfinding sign. There is some discretion for RCAs to determine the extent to which these signs are made bilingual as the proposed Rule does not specify the text to be used, only the format of each sign. Signs featuring localities can continue to be single language if the RCA chooses, but where localities are presented in two languages, the format prescribed in the draft Rule must be followed.

The proposed Rule specifies the words to be used for the third family of signs (General Advisory and Permanent Warning). RCAs therefore do not have discretion to choose any other wording for these signs.

***There is flexibility as to how RCAs implement the new signs***

RCAs can implement bilingual signs over time - as and when signs are needed on the network (i.e. there is no obligation to replace all signs on the network at a given date). RCAs that want to move faster can replace traffic signs earlier should they wish to.

***RCAs were supportive of Kura Schools signs and this implementation approach***

Waka Kotahi received submissions from three RCAs during public consultation on the Kura School proposals. None expressed a desire for an option to choose an English-only sign. All the RCAs supported the implementation of bilingual signs, provided they be implemented over time with previous signs phased out.

***Additional time required to amend the proposal in this way***

Given the prescriptive nature of the Rule, adapting the proposals to allow RCAs to have the option of single language signs would require careful re-drafting of the proposed Rule. This work has not yet been considered and may be complex, so it is difficult to estimate how long it might take to prepare a revised proposal for this option.

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