

## **MfS vs DMRB**



**This provocative title attracted a capacity crowd from a variety of professions from all over England to IHE's first debate on 20 January. Alan Young, WSP, one of the Manual's authors, and Steve Proctor, TMS, editor of IHT's RSA guidelines, entering into the spirit of the debate, lead off with some provocative observations.**

**The second debate on 20 October was organised with Leeds City Council, with Stuart Reid, MVA contributor to MfS research and Phil Cook, TMS, a leading road safety auditor.**

**Richard Fitter, Director of Entran Ltd, ably steered the discussion on both occasions.**

**Summaries of the two debates follows:**

### **A. Summary of January 2009 debate**

Audience straw polls elicited that:

- Only a third knew about LTN 1/08 which adds to the MfS guidance. Awareness of other allied documents and research was also low.
- Few used the SSD formula instead of following the table. Research in the south west confirmed that engineering judgement is not being applied to streets outside the comfort zone of <200 vph where MfS clearly applies or DMRB standard roads, as "Guidance" is too often interpreted as "rules to be followed".

- Similarly, practitioners were reluctant to accept MfS outside lightly trafficked streets.
- Placemaking based on the function of a street is still not a priority

Stopping Sight Distances (SSDs) tended to dominate the discussion. **Alan Young** tried to distinguish the applicability of TRL 661 and TRL 332 research which he felt lay behind many engineers' reluctance to extend the use of MfS guidance. **Steve Proctor** illustrated the difficulty of applying a formula, never mind an illustrative table, when human factors can vary widely.

There was general agreement that more research on driver perceptions and the spread of acceptable reaction times was called for.

## Notes of the discussion

*Disclaimer: This is not a verbatim record. Apologies for any misinterpretation or misattribution. Please go to 'Comments' to make any corrections.*

### 1. Case Studies

Leigh	APP/N4250/A.08/2080757
Rochdale	APP/P4225/A/07/2040/756/NWF
Peterborough	Hempsted IHT Award Winner 2008

<http://www.iht.org/en/events/index.cfm/iht-awards-2008> (SCROLL DOWN)

### 2. Speakers' Presentations

#### R Fitter

MfS and DMRB cover the extremes of the range of streets but most roads fall in the middle.  
There is a need for an agreed form evidence base from which to make decisions as the attitude to risk of designers and local authorities has been a key factor in adoption.

#### Alan Young

Urged engineers to look at individual sites and apply their judgement to individual sites. (Steve Proctor also argued for detailed interrogation of accident records at specific sites).

He stressed the difference between the two key TRL reports which form the evidence base

- (4.1) TRL 661
- (7.5.3) TRL 332

The later uses a simulated trunk road environment. Research used for SSDs is based on reaction time and rate of deceleration. SSD formula does not include volume of traffic or type of road.

Cannot conclude from the research that SSD table (7.1) restricts MfS to streets <200rph.

### **Steve Proctor**

Questioned the research base, in particular the SSD formula (7.5.3)  $(vt+v^2/2d)$  which includes a variable (t) with a strong human element that cannot be strictly quantified. There is a range of behaviour, car types and environments.

## **3. Audience Straw Polls**

Majority considered MfS had improved the design of new developments. MfS was accepted by the majority for lightly trafficked streets, streets < 20mph and mixed use streets.

60% accepted MfS for local distributor roads.

A majority thought MfS should be limited to streets with <200vph.

Only 30% agreed that "most streets have a place function".

Only 2 authorities had used the SSD formula (including West Sussex).

Only 30% were aware of additional design guidance eg. LTN 1/08.

**Danielle Shadbolt (Pinnacle)** reported her university research in the south west - "guidance" was not understood and was usually interpreted as "rules to follow".

## **4. Where are we now**

### **David Groves, Cornwall**

Pleaded for MfS to be extended than publishing a 'gap' document. The function of the street should be the determinant. Move away from "lightly trafficked" to ask "what is the purpose of this street".

**Gereint Killa, DfT**

When MfS was published DfT limited its applicability to the evidence base then available but accepted that now, with more experience, additional guidance was inevitable. Hence had commissioned the IHT guide and hoped to be able to issue interim guidance before it was published.

In response to pleas for 'not more guidance', he said "it is not possible to 'extend MfS'. The 'gap roads' are not 'streets' in an MfS sense.

**Chris Saunders, Reading**

Do not apply MfS to trunk roads even in 30 mph zones. Apply DMRB to all classified roads.

**AY:** need more research on streets >30 mph but how can we capture data on application of SSD's?

**Nick Stillwell, Stillwell Partnership**

Would be helpful to have more research or guidance on SSDs across different situations to assist in applying the formula.

**Andy Yeomanson, Leicestershire**

Focus on SSDs is a red herring. Are plenty of existing sub-standard junctions. TRL research confirms that accidents are not a function of Y distance.

**David Groves, Cornwall CC**

Research please on width of roads/paths and NRSWA needs.

**5. Function Not SSDs****John Dalton, (?)**

Designers need to recognise are no set answers – there is a spread of options. More research please on behaviour and design options.

**Barry Sellers, Wandsworth**

Must look at how people use public spaces.

**Louise Duggan, CABI**

Endorsed the centrality of function. "We want attractive streets people can use with enjoyment and dignity". Top priority was to get professionals working together. Engineers and planners must develop a concordat. LA guidance must build in a team approach.

## 6. Developers & LAs

### **Wei Yang, David Lock**

LA guidance is out of date. LAs want commuted sums for variations. Adoption officers are inflexible

### **Kenn Tidy/James Turner, Bracknell Forest**

Developers/consultants are cherry picking MfS – claiming the SSD and parking improvements offered but ignoring the 'difficult bits' – drainage and street lights.

Pre-application engagement fees are justified.

The development team approach does help in bringing forward schemes but developers are impatient and do not themselves adopt an holistic approach.

### **Richard Fitter, Econ**

Suggested the advance payment code under the Highways Act be got rid of.

**AY:** Suggested LAs levy a charge, refundable if, after inspection, the road is fit for purpose. Responsibility for unadopted roads should be written into house deeds and the road signed as 'unadopted',

**Judith Walker**  
**Secretary/CEO**

**INSTITUTE OF HIGHWAY ENGINEERS**