

Roads Circular 1/94  
(Department of Transport)

Circular 34/94  
(Welsh Office)

Joint Circular from the

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Dear Sir

### **MOTORWAY SERVICE AREAS**

1. Circular Roads 4/88 gives advice on the control of development on trunk roads. This Circular supplements that advice so far as the development of motorway service areas is concerned. Further advice on the considerations which local planning authorities should take into account when considering planning applications for service areas on motorways and trunk roads is given in Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 "Transport" (PPG13).
2. Government policy until 1992 was to promote the development of MSAs providing a standard range of minimum requirements on Department of Transport-owned sites at intervals of around thirty miles while operators in Wales have provided single sites on private land at intervals of around fifteen miles. A network of MSAs has been provided on this basis on most motorways though, in England, there are still routes with exceptional gaps in services.
3. In August 1992 the Government announced that in future the private sector should take the initiative in identifying and acquiring MSA sites and seeking planning consent from local planning authorities for these schemes as for any other development.
4. However, the Departments will continue to have interests in MSAs in relation to motorway safety and traffic management. They will wish to see a balance struck between, on the one hand, the necessary provision of opportunities for motorway travellers to stop and obtain essential services at reasonable intervals; and on the other, the avoidance of unnecessary traffic movements on and off the motorway. This guidance is issued so that potential developers and local planning authorities may have regard to the Departments' policy accordingly.

### **SPACING**

5. The Departments will generally not expect to provide signs or (in respect of sites not accessed from an existing motorway junction) to allow access to the motorway for any services development less than fifteen miles from the nearest existing MSA (or MSA site with planning consent and for which signing has been agreed). Exceptions to this minimum interval may be agreed, for example, where existing sites are a little less than thirty miles apart and additional services are proposed roughly half way between them. Where a new MSA is proposed less than fifteen miles from an existing MSA (or MSA site for which signing has been agreed), the Departments will consider the case for signing, but the shorter the gap the stronger the case for an exception to the normal fifteen mile interval will need to be. The Departments will not, in any event, expect to sign more than one additional site between any two existing "thirty mile" MSAs.

6. This minimum spacing between sites should not be taken to mean that the Departments see a need for MSAs every fifteen miles regardless of local circumstances. Their only prescriptive view is that, for safety and traffic management reasons, drivers should not have to travel for long distances without finding services on the motorway (whether accessed directly or via a junction). Intervals between existing services have not been much more than thirty miles. That remains a desirable general aim from the transport point of view. It cannot be a hard and fast rule, particularly in areas in planning restraint. Local planning authorities should take into account the need for and road safety benefits of MSAs; and the greater the distance between existing facilities and a new proposal, the more weight should be placed on the needs of motorway users.

## **PARKING**

7. MSAs contribute to road safety by allowing drivers regular opportunities to rest in the course of their journeys. These safety benefits will be lost unless measures are taken to ensure that all sites have sufficient parking capacity to cater for the demands placed on them by motorists needing only to stop and rest as well as those making use of other MSA facilities. In order to qualify for signing from the motorway, therefore, an MSA developer will be expected to demonstrate that he can provide parking for:-

- cars: 0.5% of the light vehicle annual average daily traffic flow fifteen years after opening;
- HGVs: 0.35% of the heavy vehicle annual average daily traffic flow fifteen years after opening;
- coaches: 0.1% of the heavy vehicle annual average daily traffic flow fifteen years after opening.

8. Advice on predicted traffic flows is available from Regional Network Management Divisions of the Highways Agency or the Highways Directorate of the Welsh Office.

9. Developers need not necessarily provide the full fifteen year parking levels as soon as the site opens, but will be expected to build up to the final provision in suitable stages over the fifteen year period.

## **OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

10. In addition the parking quantities specified above, the Departments will require MSA operators to provide from the outset at least a standard range of minimum facilities. MSAs which do not meet the minimum requirements will not be signed nor, in the case of sites not reached by way of an existing junction, will they be allowed to take access from the motorway. The minimum requirements are that MSA operators should ensure that:-

- free short term parking for all types of vehicle, free toilets (in sufficient quantity to cater reasonably for the traffic flow on the motorway) and a picnic area are available, and fuel is on sale, 24 hours a day every day of the year;
- access is allowed for up to two hours for those carrying out emergency repairs to broken down vehicles;
- all facilities are available to disabled people; and
- there is no sale or consumption of alcohol on the site.

11. Enforcement of these minimum standards will be achieved through a formal signs agreement between the relevant Department and the MSA operator under which signs from the motorway to the MSA will be permitted and maintained so long as the operator continues to meet the minimum requirements in full. Before entering into signs agreements the Departments will need to be satisfied that planning permission has been obtained, that the proposed MSA is capable of meeting all the minimum requirements and that it is acceptable in traffic, safety and spacing terms.

## ACCESS TO MOTORWAYS

12. While it will in future be for the private sector to initiate MSA proposals, the Departments will maintain their strict policy of restricting access to the motorway to junctions with other roads, MSAs and maintenance compounds. They will not therefore agree to the provision of accesses to the motorway from private developments other than MSAs which meet the standard range of minimum requirements; nor will they permit the development of activities within MSA sites which are unconnected with motorists' use of the road and which would therefore lead to the site becoming a destination in its own right. The Departments will be prepared where necessary to direct refusal of planning applications which would conflict with this principle. To ensure that this policy is maintained it is important that the Departments are kept informed of proposals affecting existing and proposed MSAs. Local planning authorities are therefore requested to consult the relevant Regional Network Management Divisions of the Highways Agency, or the Highways Directorate of the Welsh Office, where development is proposed of service facilities wholly or partly within 400 metres of the boundary of a motorway. They should consult similarly wherever development is proposed for an area exceeding 2 hectares which includes the provision of fuel and refreshments and lies within 1 kilometre of a motorway junction.

13. The Departments will also be concerned to ensure that MSAs do not come to be used as routes from the motorway through to other nearby developments; that is, as all purpose motorway junctions. At sites accessed direct from the motorway, therefore, the Departments will be reluctant to agree to the provision of rear access roads connecting to the local road network. Where such accesses may be agreed, the Departments will expect to require developers to enter into arrangements to ensure their use is restricted to staff, deliveries and the emergency services. Other onward access will not be countenanced.

14. In considering issues affecting the motorway itself, traffic flow and safety considerations are of great importance and good visibility is essential. Any access provided direct to a motorway would need to conform fully to the Departments' standards. At all MSAs, it will be particularly important to avoid the risk of congestion or slowing on the main carriageway. Advice on these aspects should be sought from the relevant Regional Network Management Division of the Highways Agency, or the Highways Directorate of the Welsh Office.

15. The full cost of any access provided direct to a motorway, or direct to a trunk road at or near a motorway junction, including those elements of the works within the motorway or trunk road boundary, will fall to be met by the developer by means of an agreement with the Secretary of State under Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980. Advice on this is provided in Circular Roads 6/91 and Welsh Office Circular 65/91.

Department of Transport

Welsh Office

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