



Street Pride

Key issues for Department for Transport

Civic Voice is the new national charity for the civic movement. We work to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. We promote civic pride and we talk civic sense. We speak up for civic societies and local communities across England. We believe everyone has the right to live somewhere they can be proud of. Civic Voice launched in April 2010 and has already been joined by over 250 civic societies with more than 61,000 members. Civic societies continue to join at the rate of more than two a day.

The state of the public realm has a central influence on our quality of life. It is the human habitat where we all live our public lives. Civic Voice is concerned that too much of our public realm is becoming ever more degraded and supports action to improve its quality and to empower people to take a more active role in shaping the future of their local area. The street is one of the most important areas of public realm. Its role in place-making as well as movement remains under recognised.

We support the Coalition Government's commitment to a "*radical distribution of power*" more locally and the commitment that "*Wherever possible we want people to call the shots over the decisions that affect their lives*" and to create a "*Big Society matched by big citizens*". We also welcome the commitment to "*improve our quality of life and well-being*". We recognise the Government's commitment to localism, active citizens and budgetary constraint requires a change in the role of the state. We support the development of a "smart state" where the key roles are to:

- Establish a level of *expectation* for policy outcomes
- Provide and encourage the necessary *evidence* base
- Grant necessary *powers*
- Provide *incentives* for action
- Offer *support* for implementation

This note identifies some key measures for the Department for Transport (DfT) in fulfilling these roles in relation to improvement of the street environment and management of traffic. It draws on the direct experience of local voluntary civic societies.

Street clutter

Clutter free streets cost less and are worth more. It is DfT policy that "*the excessive or insensitive use of traffic signs and other street furniture has a negative impact on the success of the street as a place*" and that "*Designers should start from a position of having no signs, and to introduce them only where they service a clear function.*" Yet a walk through virtually any urban centre or residential area in England reveals a plethora of street clutter. This degrades and undermines local pride and sense of place, reduces business confidence and places unnecessary extra burdens on local highway authority maintenance budgets.

Civic Voice's Street Pride campaign is working with more than 75 local groups to survey and encourage action to remove street clutter. It is a national issue requiring local action and we believe DfT has an important responsibility to champion and provide the necessary framework for changing local behaviour and culture:

- ☛ *Provide national leadership* – make an early, public statement emphasising the importance the Government places on the value of clutter free streets, shared space and high quality public realm
- ☛ *A duty to keep streets clutter free* – place a responsibility on local authorities and private owners to keep places clear of street clutter similar to that which already exists for litter – it would be down to local action to determine the best way to fulfil this responsibility
- ☛ *Transparent action* – support a greater customer focus in the way street clutter is handled and problems addressed – e.g.
 - extending the role of social media (e.g. www.fixmystreet.com) in reporting action
 - one stop shops for handling public reporting
 - an expectation on local authorities to respond to requests to remove clutter within 30 days
 - specified budgets to address street clutter in forward plans
- ☛ *Strengthen skills* – working with the professions and other agencies to require those responsible for street furniture to have the necessary design skills and qualifications to understand the impact of their work on the quality of place.

This action will restore pride in our streets, reduce public sector costs and provide a major commercial uplift for business.

Managing traffic

Cars take over too many streets in England where people should have priority. Too much action to address traffic is piecemeal or moves problems on elsewhere. Civic societies report a need to:

- ☛ Introduce 20mph zones for residential neighbourhoods as the norm and support community speed watch schemes and shared space schemes
- ☛ Improve co-ordination between county, district and town/parish councils – with opportunities for more localised powers working in partnership with local community groups
- ☛ Recognise the better value for money from small scale integrated investment measures in evaluating transport appraisals
- ☛ Strengthen and support the capability of highways and transport officials to engage effectively with local communities, engaging communities and empowering them to take a more active role.

Supporting local action

The Coalition Government's overarching commitment to creating a Big Society matched by big citizens has important implications for DfT. We encourage DfT to:

- ☛ Engage publicly in a deliberative debate over the options and implications of different funding choices at an early stage in the forthcoming Spending Review
- ☛ Build incentives and support for developing and sharing good practice between localities into the mainstream of DfT working, drawing on the lessons of the Urban Challenge Fund and the scope for partnership working with other agencies (e.g. IDeA, CAbE) and ngos
- ☛ Develop and apply the "Total Place" initiative to "place" itself – providing an integrated approach to spending that achieves more with less.

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