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A GROUNDED ANSWER TO STREET CLUTTER

Britain’s most historic cities and biggest festivals could cut sign clutter at a stroke by adopting simple join-the-dots, colour-coded route marks for visitors, says the Road Safety Markings Association (RSMA).

New marking technology means permanent or temporary markings can be laid for just a few hundred pounds; replacing unsightly forests of signs and providing clear information on roads and pavement instead.

While permanent markings provide attractive alternative signage for tourist attractions, temporary markings, using a resin that can be softened with a mild detergent and then removed with a low-pressure water spray, are ideal for one-off events such as summer festivals and shows. The temporary markings meet the requirements of the Environment Agency, and waste can be allowed into rainwater drains.

“It is time we addressed the proliferation of road signs and signposts throughout the UK, particularly in our historic towns and cities and picturesque villages. Just look at an average-sized city like Sheffield, for example, which has an astounding 28,000 street signs and 18,000 items of street furniture, says George Lee, national director of the RSMA.

“The UK remains firmly in the world’s top 10 tourist destinations, while the slow economy continues to make ‘staycations’ and ‘daycations’ attractive for Britons. On top of this, there are hundreds of music festivals – from the Edinburgh Festival vying with the World Pipe Band Championships over in Glasgow; and
with music spanning all tastes from bluegrass and opera to hard rock. All too often, planners and event organisers opt for the conventional sign on a pole to direct visitors, leading to cluttered, confusing signage and obstacles at every turn,” says Lee.

“Road – or pavement or bike lane - markings can be made temporary, such as for the London Marathon* last month, which were laid the night before the run, and removal completed within eight hours of the finish,” says Lee.

“The RSMA believes that more tourist attractions and routes could be effectively marked in towns and cities, so that visitors can reach all the top sights following unobtrusive tracks, either laid down to last, or for short-lived events. It really should be as easy as joining the dots,” he adds.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England has long pressed for a reduction in the number of signs. Commenting on the ingress of signage, the CPRE’s senior transport campaigner, Ralph Smyth points out that: “A sign added here and a sign there over time can become a forest of traffic signs. Strong policies against cluttered streetscapes and landscapes need to be backed up by clutter audits to assess the problem. With public spending limited and the public calling for action, it makes sense to encourage community groups to assess and address the problem in the local areas they know best.”

* RSMA members Wilson & Scott have, for the last 29 years, used around 100 litres of blue paint to mark the London Marathon, and last year, 45 kilometres of blue line for the three London Olympic 2012 Marathons.