TRANSPORT
SCOTLAND
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

Guidance on the use of Bilingual Traffic signs in Scotland

Gaelic - English

Introduction

Gaelic is a language which is indigenous to Scotland and a recognised aspect of Scotland's heritage and current cultural life. The Scottish Government is taking steps to create a secure future for Gaelic in Scotland and recognises the importance of creating opportunities for the practical use of Gaelic including its presence on road signs.

Background

In 2002 Transport Scotland established a rationale for introducing bilingual road signs on trunk roads that pass through communities where Gaelic is spoken and which lead to west coast ferry ports. This was included in an agreement with The Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council to ensure continuity and consistency with the connecting local roads in the area. As a result, bilingual direction signing has been provided on the A82 trunk road from Tarbet to Inverness and those trunk roads leading to the ports at Kennacraig, Oban, Mallaig, Uig and Ullapool, i.e. the A83, A85, A830, A87 /A887 and A835 respectively.

Current Policy

The Scottish Government policy on the use of bilingual signing was extended in 2012 to include the A9. This policy is being implemented on the basis of opportunities created by programmed improvement works, including the A9 Dualling, or planned maintenance. It aligns with the Scottish Government's Gaelic Language Plan, last updated in 2016. This provides an affordable and cost effective way of extending the bilingual signs coverage on the network within available funds.

While Scottish Government policy applies only to the trunk road network (including slip roads and connector roads) for which Scottish Ministers are the Roads Authority, individual councils can determine their own policies for the use of Gaelic destinations on signs on their local roads as appropriate.

Statutory provisions

The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016 (TSRGD) regulates the use of Gaelic for all non-motorway directional signs, route confirmatory signs, boundary signs and tourist signs.

Design requirements

All traffic signs should follow the established sign design principles set out in the Traffic Signs Manual (TSM). The TSM in its current form is incomplete, in relation to the design of directional signs. In the absence of a complete Chapter 2 to the TSM, guidance on the layout and content of direction signs and advance direction signs in the UK is contained in Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/94.

Relevant documents relating to the design of directional signs, and addressed within this document, include:

- LTN 1/94 The Design and Use of Directional Informatory Signs
- TSM Chapter 7 - The Design of Traffic Signs

TSM Chapter 7, published in 2019, includes guidance on bilingual signing in Scotland in Section 15.

Supplementary design guidance

Directional signing incorporating bilingual signage should align with the guidance in LTN 1/94 and TSM, subject to the supplementary information presented below.

Sign face design (Traffic Signs Manual Chapter 7)

The following points (a) to (g) are included in TSM Chapter 7 (2019) sub-section 15.5 and are provided here (with supplementary illustrations) for ease of reference by designers:

a) For primary route directional signs with dark green backgrounds and tourist signs with brown backgrounds, the Gaelic destination will be formed of yellow letters in the Transport Medium alphabet, placed above the English destination which will be in white.

b) For non-primary route directional signs with white backgrounds the Gaelic destination will be formed of dark green letters in the Transport Heavy alphabet, placed above the English destination which will be in black.
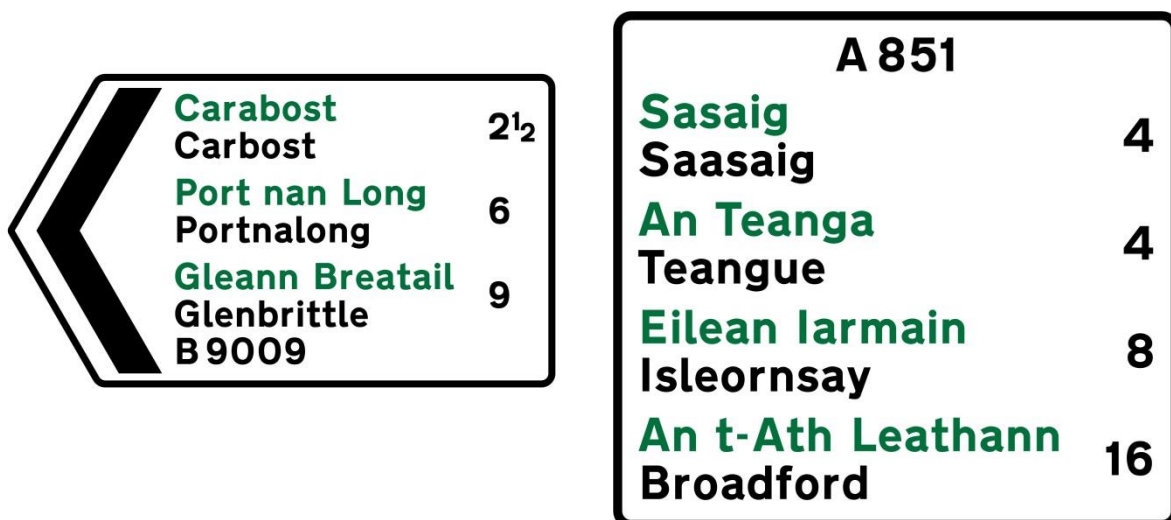
c) Where the Gaelic and English spellings of the destination are identical, the English can be omitted.

d) Where there is no Gaelic form of a place-name, no Gaelic translation of the English form should be used on the sign.

e) Where a capital letter in a Gaelic legend contains an accent and that legend occupies the top line of a sign, the normal 2.5 stroke width spacing between the top of the tile and the border will be increased to 3 stroke widths.

f) In a bilingual pair of destinations (i.e. the same destination in Gaelic and English) the top edge of the English tile will normally butt against the lower edge of the Gaelic tile. This bilingual pair of destinations can be considered as a single destination block and can share an associated route number.

g) Further matched bilingual pair blocks should normally be vertically separated from the block above by a gap of 2 stroke widths between the bottom of the upper tile and the top of the lower tile. Where any capital letter in the Gaelic legend contains an accent, the gap between tiles should be increased to 3 stroke widths.

The additional point (h) and note below are supplementary to those included in TSM Chapter 7.

h) Similarly, where bilingual pair blocks lie vertically adjacent to a destination without a bilingual translation, a minimum gap of two stroke widths should be provided between the bilingual pair and the other destination. Wherever a bilingual pair is signed, all destinations signed in the same direction (regardless of whether they include translations) should be separated by a minimum gap of two stroke widths.

Note: Further to point (c), and in accordance with TSRGD, where the Gaelic and English spellings of the destination are identical, the Gaelic version may be omitted and the English version displayed, where this is considered to improve the layout and legibility of the sign.

Destinations to be signed

LTN 1/94 sets out the number of destinations or the number of lines of legend (dependent on the sign type) at various locations within the document. The following advice relates to how this should be varied where bilingual signage is used.

LTN 1/94 paragraph 4.3.1 sets out the maximum number of destinations to be included on an advance direction sign (assuming no bilingual translations), with a recommended maximum of six. This includes map and stack type signs.

Where bilingual translations are incorporated on an advance direction sign, the recommended maximum number of destinations should be four. In difficult circumstances consideration may be given to extending this to five (particularly

where some destinations are not identified as bilingual), but this absolute maximum shall not be exceeded.

LTN 1/94 paragraph 4.3.6 states that the number of lines of legend (including any symbols) on a single flag type direction sign should not exceed six.

Where bilingual translations are incorporated on a flag type direction sign this may be extended to a maximum of eight, and the maximum number of non-Gaelic lines (including destinations, symbols and route numbers) should be five. The maximum number of Gaelic lines of text (destinations only) should be four.

LTN 1/94 paragraph 4.3.8 states that the total number of destinations, including regional destinations, shown on a non-motorway route confirmatory sign should not normally exceed six.

Where bilingual translations are incorporated on a non-motorway route confirmatory sign this should be reduced to a maximum of five.

LTN 1/94 paragraph 4.3.1 states that where two or more destinations from the same category are indicated along the same route then the furthest destination will generally be at the top. This principle should generally stand, but consideration to varying the order in which destinations appear may be considered, if this allows the information to be presented more clearly.

It is emphasised that the designer should ensure that sign faces are clear, accurate and comprehensible to road users, in accordance with the relevant guidance and the principles outlined in this document. The following issues should be given particular consideration by designers.

- Inconsistent use of bilingual translations, which may arise from locations having no Gaelic translation or having the same name in both languages, has potential to increase the complexity of the sign face information, and the amount of information presented should be considered in this context.

- Some location names, particularly in the Gaelic language, are long and have potential to extend to more than one line. This has potential to increase the complexity of the sign face information, and the amount of information presented should be considered in this context.

- The selection of destinations to be signed should be carefully considered, particularly where existing junctions are being consolidated. It is an important principle that excessive information should not compromise the clarity of a sign face. It is noted that other signing options are available where it is deemed essential for multiple destinations to be signed, in accordance with LTN 1/94.

- In accordance with LTN 1/94, consistency in the destinations included on subsequent signs (often of different type) is essential.

- The value for X-height should be in accordance with LTN 1/94. This identifies a desirable X-height, and allows a reduction where space is limited.

For further information on Gaelic signing, please contact
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