

NOT JUST ANY DATA UPLOAD

The team at Waterman Aspen discuss the importance and the challenge of the Digital Traffic Regulation Orders (D-TRO) agenda

Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) are not usually the first thing people think about when they talk about future mobility.

Yet they sit behind some of the most visible decisions on the highway network: speed limits, one-way streets, parking restrictions, loading bays, road closures and event traffic management.

Digital Traffic Regulation Orders (D-TROs) are about bringing that information into a standard, machine-readable format. The aim is to make that data easier to share, integrate and use in services such as sat nav routing, road closure information, enforcement systems and, in time, connected and automated vehicles. Many authorities have supported the principle of D-TROs, but this support has not yet been matched by a dedicated budget. And going digital is not as simple as buying a system and pressing 'publish'.

Craig Williams, Anthony Wilton and Joe Clabour from Waterman Aspen are currently working on secondment with local authority clients, supporting TRO work from the inside. They all agree that D-TROs are not simply another data exercise but are a practical response to challenges local authorities know well: ageing records, inconsistent systems, limited staff capacity and a legal process that has not always kept pace with how people use the network. They share their views on what D-TROs mean in practice for local authorities.

When the record and the road do not match

Traditional TROs are often written in long legal schedules that describe restrictions using fixed points, measurements and directions.

Craig Williams, principal highways engineer, gives the example of double yellow lines. A paper order might say the lines run from one specific point on a road to another, but when officers check the street, the markings may start or end somewhere slightly different.

Anthony Wilton, principal engineer, says this kind of mismatch is not



unusual. Utility works, resurfacing, missing signs, new developments and historic changes can all mean that what is on site no longer perfectly reflects the order.

'I can't imagine any local authority having 100% where the road markings are perfect and the signs are all correct,' he says.

That is one of the first realities of D-TROs: digital data is only valuable if it is reliable. Publishing inaccurate information faster does not solve the problem. It can simply make the problem more visible.

The added value of going digital

Despite those challenges, the case for digital is strong. At the moment,

members of the public often have to contact the council to understand the restrictions on their street. That can trigger manual searches, Freedom of Information-style processes and staff time that could be better used elsewhere.

Mr Wilton sees one of the biggest benefits in public access. A map-based system means someone can look up a street and see restrictions visually, rather than trying to interpret a written schedule. It also helps legal teams by enabling standard clauses and mapped restrictions to be reused more efficiently.

Mr Williams points to the wider goal: consistency. At present, different authorities hold and publish TRO information in different ways. Some are

still heavily paper-based, others have partial mapping systems and some have parking restrictions digitised but not moving traffic orders or speed limits.

D-TROs create a route towards a common standard, so information about a temporary road closure, one-way street or loading restriction can eventually be used more easily by third parties and journey planning tools.

D-TROs can help create a network that is easier to understand, maintain and use.

The challenges: funding, capacity and skills

The problem is the transition. Local authorities are already under pressure, and TRO teams are a niche resource. Mr Williams says experienced TRO officers are difficult to recruit, partly because the work is specialised, process-driven and often exposed to public pressure.

Mr Wilton is clear that many councils do not have the internal capacity to do this on top of their day job. The work is significant: reviewing old orders, checking what is on the street, identifying missing signs or worn lines, deciding whether to consolidate, procuring or configuring software; training staff and managing consultation.

Mr Clarbour, associate transport planner, adds that funding concerns are not only national. There are local and regional questions too: who pays for the licence in two or three years' time, which department carries the cost and what happens when initial project funding ends? That is why D-TROs should not be treated as a one-off data upload.

Resetting TRO management

D-TROs will not remove the legal discipline from TRO work. They will not remove objections or the need for careful judgment. But they can reduce duplication, improve transparency and give authorities a stronger foundation for future transport services.

Secondments can play a useful role as a way of easing immediate pressure and supporting statutory work while building the digital processes, audit trails and staff confidence needed for the next stage.

The opportunity is to treat D-TROs not as another unfunded requirement, but as a chance to reset how TRO information is managed.

Those authorities that start with their data, their risks and their users will be best placed if, or when, the mandate arrives. ●



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