

24 April 2026

Dear

Request for Information - ATISN 26823

Further to your request for information of 24 March. You asked for information about the Variable Message Signs on the M4. Specifically, you wanted to know:

1. The written policy, guidance document, or operational procedure that governs the selection of language (Welsh, English, or bilingual) on Variable Message Signs (VMS) on the motorway and trunk road network in Wales. This includes any document setting out the three-point system described to me by the South Wales Trunk Road Agent on 24 March 2026, namely: (a) the first VMS after each junction must display Welsh, (b) bilingual display where space allows, and (c) Welsh-only display where space is constrained.
2. Any memorandum of understanding, agreement, formal correspondence, or ministerial direction between the Welsh Government, Traffic Wales, and/or the South Wales Trunk Road Agent regarding Welsh language requirements specifically for VMS.
3. The date on which the policy described in point 1 was adopted, and by whom it was formally approved.
4. Any risk assessment, safety analysis, or impact assessment conducted on the use of monolingual Welsh VMS for safety-critical messages (such as road closures, lane closures, or diversions) on the M4 or any other Welsh motorway.
5. Any analysis or consideration of the proportion of road users able to read Welsh when determining VMS language policy on the M4.
6. VMS message logs for the M4 eastbound between Junction 49 (Pont Abraham) and Junction 23 (M48) on 21 March 2026, showing what messages were displayed on each VMS board and in which language.
7. The number of complaints received in the past 24 months regarding monolingual Welsh VMS messages on the Welsh motorway and trunk road network.
8. Any recorded incidents or near-misses where a road user is reported to have missed safety-critical information due to a VMS message being displayed only in Welsh.

Our Response

The Welsh Government holds some of the information you requested.

1, 2, & 3 - Since devolution, a law has been passed in Wales (Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011) which confirms that the Welsh language has official status in Wales. It also makes provision about promoting the use of the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. As part of this, the Measure introduces a system of duties, known as Welsh Language Standards. A number of bodies in Wales are under duties to provide services to the public in Welsh. These bodies include the Welsh Ministers and local authorities, and the standards include duties in relation to signs (including road signs).

The use of bilingual signs in Wales became a requirement under the Welsh (Language (Wales) Measure 2011 which became effective in April 2012 and a Welsh Language commissioner was created at the same time. Under the Commissioner's standards in respect to traffic signage they state;

- **61.** When you erect a new sign or renew a sign (including temporary signs), any text displayed on the sign must be displayed in Welsh (whether on the same sign as you display corresponding English language text or on a separate sign); and if the same text is displayed in Welsh and in English, you must not treat the Welsh language text less favourably than the English language text.
- **62.** When you erect a new sign or renew a sign (including temporary signs) which conveys the same information in Welsh and in English, the Welsh language text must be positioned so that it is likely to be read first.

The Standards have been drafted in a way to allow just the use of Welsh in some situations, without corresponding English text – in adverts, signage, publications etc. What the Standards direct is that if there is English text there should always be corresponding Welsh text.

I attach a link to the legislation [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#)

Further guidance on the design of Welsh / English bilingual signs can be found in the Traffic Signs Manual, Chapter 7, Section 16. [DfT Traffic Signs Manual – Chapter 7 - The Design of Traffic Signs](#)

Due to the limited number of characters available on Variable Message Signs (VMS), it is sometimes necessary to display information in Welsh, closely followed by the same message in English. Sometimes this is not always possible due to lack of additional signs between motorway junctions or some signs may have faults on them. Many of the variable message signs on the M4 are beyond their working life and spares are no longer available due to the insolvency of the sign supplier.

4 & 5 – No information held

6. Log attached

7. Since January 2024 up til now (28 months) there have been 13 pieces of correspondence.

8. No information held – this information would be held by the relevant police force

In the last financial year, funding was made available to purchase and install 16 new message signs, and these are being commissioned over the next few months. Additional funding has also allowed the purchase of a further 18 message signs and these will be installed later in the year once delivery is made from the manufacturer. Most of these new signs will be installed on the M4 from the Welsh border back to Cardiff as this is one of the busiest sections of the road network and having new signs available to set messages in both Welsh and English can only assist the road user. In the meantime officials and our Trunk Road Agent regularly review all possible options to ensure that emergency messages can be displayed in both Welsh and English.

Welsh Government are also replacing the Advanced Traffic Management System located in the South Wales Traffic Management Centre at Coryton. This is the back office system that will be used to set the new signs and signals as the old control system is end of life in March 2027.

In car technology is also moving at a fast pace, and many new cars have apps and screens to display useful road related messages, trials are ongoing with the Department for Transport in order to display “Virtual Message Signs” that will be presented within the car. This can only provide the road user more timely information to make informed decisions.

Next Steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government’s handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response.

Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government’s Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales.

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The contact details for the Information Commissioner’s Office are:

Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: www.ico.org.uk

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely