

British Summertime Factsheet

Lighter Evenings

In the UK, clocks follow Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) from October to March and British Summer Time (BST) which is GMT + 1 hour from March to October. Most of Europe follows Central European Time, which is one hour ahead of GMT in winter and 2 hours ahead of GMT in summer – always one hour ahead of the UK.

One of the consequences of the UK's system is that more people are killed and injured on the road because of darker evenings in the autumn and winter than would be if we adopted Single/Double British Summertime (SDST).

SDST would mean that we adopted GMT+1 during the winter months, with GMT+2 being applied to the summer period. This would create lighter evenings all year round and result in fewer people being killed and injured in road accidents. It would also bring significant environmental, economic and health benefits, the latter being particularly relevant to public health concerns about obesity. This change would also align the UK with the Central European Time Zone, which would bring additional business benefits.

The Road Safety Problem

During the working week, casualty rates peak at 8am and 5pm for adults and 8am and 3.30pm for children, with the afternoon peak being higher for both. Road casualty rates increase with the arrival of darker evenings and worsening weather conditions. Every autumn when the clocks go back and sunset occurs earlier in the day, road casualties rise. The effects are worse for the most vulnerable road users like children, the elderly, cyclists and motorcyclists.

The relative peaks are explained by several factors:

- Motorists are more tired after a day's work and concentration levels are lower
- Children tend to go straight to school in the morning but often digress on their way home, increasing their exposure to road dangers
- Adults tend to go shopping or visit friends after work, increasing their journey times and exposure to road dangers
- Social and leisure trips are generally made in the late afternoons and evenings.

These factors explain why a reduction in the evening accident peak produces more significant results than a reduction in the morning accident peak. Moving to SDST would produce significant net benefits – although there would be a slight increase in the morning accident peak, this would be more than offset by the reduction in the higher evening peak.

In 2008, pedestrian deaths rose from 38 in September, to 55 in October, 62 in November and 56 in December. Child road deaths rose from 7 in September to 18 in October, 12 in November and 9 in December.

The Benefits of Changing to Single/Double Summer Time

The most recent research estimates that adopting Single/Double Summer Time would have the net effect of saving around 80 lives and 212 serious injuries a year.

This confirms earlier research which showed that the 1968/71 experiment, when British Standard Time (GMT + 1) was employed all year round (the clocks were advanced in March

1968 and not put back until October 1971) saved around 2,500 deaths and serious injuries each year of the trial period.

The Department for Transport's consultation paper, "A Safer Way: Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World", confirmed that moving to lighter evenings would prevent about 80 deaths on the road a year. There would be a one-off cost of about £5million to publicise the change but then benefits of around £138million per year, as well as energy savings, business benefits and more opportunities for sport and leisure.

The Public Accounts Committee has recommended that "The Department [for Transport] should take the lead in re-examining the practice of changing clocks at the end of British Summer Time with other central Government departments."

RoSPA recommends that a change to lighter evenings should be introduced on a trial basis for 2 – 3 years (similar to experiment conducted during 1968/71). The decision about continuing permanently would then be based on the consequent effects on road casualties. This would provide objective, up-to-date evidence about the effects of SDST and also enable the public and the various industry and business sectors that would be affected to experience the change for themselves.

Other benefits

The move to SDST would cost the UK very little in monetary terms, but the benefits would be far-reaching, and would cover a wide range of sectors.

Environment

The Energy Saving Trust has estimated that we would save 1% of our energy if we stopped turning the clocks back to GMT in winter with 62% of Scots and 60% of Londoners stating that they would use less fuel if the clocks were changed to give more evening daylight. It is estimated that electricity bills would be reduced by £260million – consumers saving £60million (9% reduction in need for artificial light) and businesses saving £200m. All of this helps to meet the UK's commitment under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce energy consumption and related pollution. The 10/10 Campaign also supports the move to SDST.

According to a Cambridge University study, moving to SDST would cut carbon emissions by 450,000 tonnes each year. The energy saved would be equivalent to the annual domestic electricity consumption of 2/3 of Glasgow and 85 per cent of all the power generated by wind, wave and solar renewable energy in England.

Business

SDST would align the UK working day with continental Europe's for more effective working, including travelling on the day of meetings leading to fewer overnight stays. At present, the UK market loses an hour of overlap in the morning with Europe and an hour overlap in the evening. Both of these would be removed, increasing overlap by 25% of the working day. Stock market hours would match Europe, and produce a greater overlap with Asia – and although it would mean a reduced overlap with North America, the EU accounts for well over half of the UK's foreign trade (much more than North America).

The change would allow British airlines to be more efficient. Businesses would have reduced heating and lighting costs, reduced staff stress due to increased daylight leisure time, and broadcast transmission times would be matched across Europe (e.g. for sporting events).

Tourism

Changing to SDST would bring a substantial financial boost to Britain's £76billion tourism industry, which earns 4.5% of UK GDP (VisitBritain). It would extend by two months the part

of the tourist season that is dependent upon daylight hours, and enable later closing of tourist facilities – useful as the demand for facilities is greater after lunchtime.

SDST would increase the attraction of off-peak and short-break holidays, simplify international timetables, and bring benefits to airlines, cross-channel ferry and rail operators.

It is estimated that the change would bring £2.5-£3.5 billion into the economy, creating around 60,000 jobs.

Leisure

SDST would bring a shift in average sunset time year round from 6.35pm to 7.30pm giving an average gain of 55 minutes of “accessible” evening daylight every day of the year.

More evening daylight would encourage outdoor activity, making outdoor leisure activities possible in the evening during two more months of the year – people spend about 60% more time watching TV in winter than in summer. A 2005 MORI poll found that 62% of Scots and 60% of Londoners, including 70% of people aged 25-34, would take part in more active leisure pursuits if evenings were lighter.

It would stay lighter and warmer later each day, making it possible to enjoy more evening meals and drinks outdoors – and SDST would be welcomed by organisations representing the interests of Britain’s 2-3 million keen gardeners.

Health and wellbeing

SDST would bring an average increase of 28% more accessible daylight during waking hours, maximising the beneficial effect of natural light – summer sunlight is our primary source of vitamin D. Because of this, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and sub-clinical depression, suffered by 500,000 people in the UK, would be reduced by this extra hour of accessible daylight. Extra daylight hours for leisure activity would help fight increasing obesity in UK society, particularly among the young.

The elderly

The UK’s increasingly ageing population would benefit from this change. Older people generally do not leave their homes until after the rush hour (10am onwards) and are ‘curfewed’ by the onset of darkness in the evening. This is determined by several factors including fear of crime, fear of slips, trips and falls and the end of concessionary fare periods. Enabling older people to be out and about later would improve their health and wellbeing, helping to keep them fitter later in life which would in turn reduce their dependence on others, including the state.

Crime

A move to SDST would reduce opportunistic crime facilitated by the cover of darkness – over half of criminal offences take place during the hours of darkness in the late afternoon or evening and, of the small proportion of offences occurring in conditions of semi-darkness, far more occur at dusk than dawn (Home Office British Crime Survey 1988-1992).

As well as reducing crime itself, it also reduces the fear and cost of crime. A 2005 MORI poll found that if clocks were not put back to GMT in winter, 70% of Londoners and 66% of Scots would feel safer walking outside later at night.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) supports this proposal for these reasons.

Opposition to the Change

Some people are still cautious about accepting SDST. In the past, a move to SDST has been opposed by those industries whose workers rise early and utilise morning light, for

example some farmers, those who collect and deliver milk, the building industry and postal workers. There is now increasing evidence that these objections are less relevant. For example, postal workers deliver mail later in the day than when the 1968/71 experiment took place. Modern farming methods have also reduced the impact on farmers, with many now neutral or positive about this proposed change. In Scotland, the National Farmers' Union position is no longer dogmatically opposed to the change, as it was in the past.

In Scotland, there is still considerable anecdotal opposition to the change. Additionally a 2005 MORI poll suggested that only 40% of Scots were in favour of the change, with the main points raised being:

- 'This is something which would benefit the English, not the Scottish.' This is not true: in all the major dimensions measurable – road safety, environmental benefit and fuel cost, tourism, health and wellbeing – Scotland would benefit disproportionately compared to England and Wales
- 'There is nothing that can be done – there is only so much available daylight in Scotland.' This is not true: because Scotland has less available daylight in winter, it is more important for Scotland to manage it carefully, because it is a more precious resource. This fine-tuning is required to get the most benefit out of the available daylight north of the border
- 'It would make sense for England to go one hour ahead and Scotland to remain where it is.' This is not true: apart from the devolution and consistency issues, this is a north-south issue, unaffected by time zones. If it were a significant east-west issue, there might be benefits in different countries in the UK going to different time-zones
- 'More children will die because of the darker mornings.' This is not true: the effect of SDST is to save children's lives, even more so in Scotland than in England and Wales, because Scotland has longer, darker winter evenings, which is where the principal casualties occur.

Scottish opposition arose from the 1968/71 experiment because certain media reported an increase in child casualties in the morning, omitting to mention that the evening reduction had more than compensated for this increase. As a result, there is a widely-held belief that this would be bad for Scotland, when in fact, the opposite is true.

This reaction may in part be explained by a nationalist perspective, perhaps frustrated by a lack of recognition in Westminster at the time. Devolution in Scotland may to some extent have removed the feeling of 'imposition' by England but public opinion in Scotland has not re-adjusted to examine the SDST issue more objectively.

There are numerous other interesting arguments which are regularly put forward against SDST. These range from the cogent and intellectual to the downright daft. However, RoSPA believes that most people in the UK, if asked, would willingly trade a slight inconvenience to themselves, in order to help to save the life of another.

Summary

The overwhelming evidence is that this would be a positive change for the UK, particularly those living further north. No objective evidence has ever been commissioned which might show that this change would bring any disadvantage to any group.

Since the 1968/71 experiment, it is estimated that more than 5,000 people have died and more than 30,000 received serious injuries in the UK on the roads, for no reasons other than entrenched prejudice and lack of political will.

It seems very unlikely that if a change to SDST were to take place, a campaign headed by many national organisations would be initiated to return things to the current system.

The argument is still alive and well. Here are some interesting quotes:

“It is now unarguable that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. It would bring about a significant improvement to the overall quality of life for the great majority of the population. A further hour of evening daylight would be enjoyed for an additional 11 months of the year whereas an extra hour of morning darkness would only have to be endured during the winter months. These advantages are widely recognised. Opinion polls now show that a substantial majority of the population would favour the change.”

Policy Studies Institute, 1993

“Anyone who hopes, in looking at the history of this matter, to gain from this sorry story reassurance about the consultative and legislative process must prepare themselves for disappointment. Anyone who hopes to hear the sound of the smack of firm government will strain their ears in vain. For I am afraid this is a tale of dithering indecision and is as good an illustration of the politics of prevarication and, quite frankly, pusillanimous procrastination as one could hope to find.”

Baroness Mallalieu, House of Lords, 1995

“While everyone knows the downside of morning darkness, the benefits of more daylight hours in the afternoons and evenings are consistently understated. For example, it is a matter of statistical fact that there is a higher incidence of road accidents and more children are killed or injured in the afternoons than in the mornings, in Scotland as elsewhere in the UK. That fact cannot be ignored simply because it has become the ritual to oppose this measure.”

West Highland Free Press, March 2008

Further Reading

Single/Double Summer Time: Position Paper RoSPA, 2003 (updated 2005)

A New Assessment of the Likely Effects on Road Accidents of Adopting SDST, TRL Report TRL368, Broughton, J and Stone, M. 1998

Improving Road Safety for Pedestrians and Cyclists in Great Britain, House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 49th Report of Session 2008–09, 22 October 2009

Improving Road Safety for Pedestrians and Cyclists in Great Britain, National Audit Office, 6 May 2009

A Safer Way: Consultation on Making Britain’s Roads the Safest in the World, Department for Transport, April 2009

Reported Road Casualties Great Britain: 2008, Department for Transport, September 2009