Single/Double Summer Time (SDST) Policy Statement – May 2003

RoSPA supports the adoption of Single/Double Summer Time because it would result in fewer people being killed and injured in road accidents. It would also bring significant health, environmental and economic benefits.

In the UK, clocks follow Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) from October to March each year and are set forward one hour to British Summer Time (BST) which is GMT + 1 hour from March to October. The majority of European countries lie within the Central European Time Zone, which is one hour ahead of GMT in winter and 2 hours ahead of GMT in summer i.e.: always one hour ahead of Britain.

Single/Double Summertime in Britain would mean that the time would be GMT + 1 hour from October to March and GMT + 2 hours from March to October. This would put Britain into the Central European Time Zone.

The introduction of Single/Double Summertime (SDST) would not increase the number of daylight hours in each day (this depends on the degree to which the earth tilts towards/away from the sun during the year) but it would affect the use of the daylight hours.

The most recent research estimates that adopting Single/Double Summer Time in the UK would result in around 450 fewer road deaths and serious injuries, including between 104 and 138 fewer deaths. 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.

Although there would be more casualties in the morning during the Winter, these would be outweighed by the reduction in casualties due to an hour of extra daylight in the Winter evenings, producing a net reduction.

Extra evening daylight protects vulnerable road users like children, the elderly, cyclists and motorcyclists, making them more visible to motorists. There are more accidents in the afternoon rush hour during the week than in the morning. Motorists are more tired after a day at work and concentration levels are lower. Children tend to go straight to school in the morning but may deviate in their journey home, making stops, thus increasing their exposure to the road environment. Social trips are generally made in the afternoon/evening, often on the way home from school/work.

However, many people are still cautious about accepting SDST and many firmly oppose it. A move to SDST is generally opposed by those industries whose workers rise early and utilise morning light, for example some farmers, postal workers, those involved in the collection and delivery of milk and the building industry.

Tourism, leisure and sporting organisations generally support a move to SDST, welcoming the increased opportunities for activity presented by more daylight on weekday evenings. Road Safety organisations are persuaded by the research on casualty reduction and support the adoption of SDST.

Historically, many people and organisations in Scotland have opposed the move to SDST, citing the darker mornings (dawn in the far north of Scotland in the Winter months would be after 10am) as unwelcome and leading to an increase in road casualties. In fact, the most recent research confirms a net reduction in road casualties, even in Scotland.

Although the power to legislate about Summertime has not been devolved to the Scottish Parliament, there are those who say it should be. It has been suggested that Scotland should be able to set its own time and could remain in the current time zone if England and Wales adopted SDST. However, RoSPA does not believe that two time zones on an island the size of Britain would be practical or sensible.

Since the 1968/71 experiment, the road environment and people's travel habits have changed enormously. Society is more reliant on the car, fewer children walk or cycle to school, school opening and closing hours have changed, opportunities for leisure activities are significantly greater, people take holidays more frequently and overseas travel is much more common.

Therefore, RoSPA believes that SDST should be introduced on a trial basis for 2 – 3 years (similar to experiment conducted during 1968/71). The decision about continuing SDST 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.