



UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Campaigning for a single rational system of measurement

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In this issue:

Result of Google search for metric news:	1
Happy New Year 2012	1
UKMA welcomed these new members in 2011:	1
TfL and London Boroughs can get it right!	2
Market trader complies with law	2
Three steps to metric height signage	3
How many versions of car dashboards can you have?	4
How many megawatts in a gigawatt?	5
Why can't journalists get it right?	5
BBC asks the key question	6

Result of Google search for metric news:



Clip taken from NME website
www.nme.com/news

"Metric announce second London show and ticket details
Metric have announced they are to play a second London show next month.
The show will take place at KOKO on May 23.
The Canadian group had already confirmed a date at Shepherds Bush Empire on May 24."

UKMA members searching for news relating to metric matters may be surprised to find that there is a pop group competing for their attention in 2012!

Happy New Year 2012

Chairman's message.

2011 was the year in which UKMA began the process of applying for charitable status. At our AGM in July we amended our "Objects" so that they can pass the test of being "wholly charitable", and the Committee have circulated for comment the draft of a revised constitution to comply with the Charity Commission's rules. We now await Parliamentary approval of the new regulations that allow the formation of "charitable incorporated organisations". This has been postponed several times but is now forecast for the spring of 2012. After that we can make a formal application.

There is little else to report this year. Now that the EU has dropped out of the UK's metrication process, the media have largely lost interest in the issue, and it has also been difficult to engage the attention of politicians. This is all the more reason why our future role has to be primarily one of education, the disseminating of correct information by all means possible, and equally the dispelling of all the myths that surround the UK's adoption of the metric system.

Perhaps our most important current project is the revised Style Guide, which we hope may help to improve the standard of metric usage in the media, in publishing, and in society generally. The Committee is due to meet shortly to try to finalise this key project, and I hope we shall soon be in a position to publish the final product.

May I wish UKMA members a Happy New Year and all success in both your personal lives and your campaigning efforts in 2012.

Robin Paice

UKMA welcomed these new members in 2011:

Keith Bennett, Ronnie Cohen, Jess Cully, Ian Dare and Nick Lewington.

TfL and London Boroughs can get it right!

Contributed by Ronnie Cohen

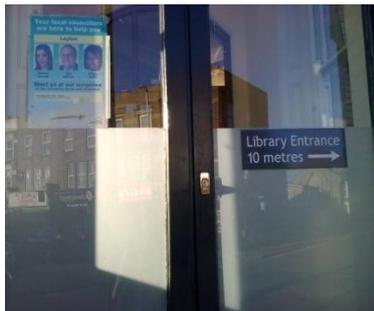
Here is something to shame the DfT. London Underground, part of Transport for London (TfL), uses metres to show distances to nearby stations on its maps displayed in train carriages. There is another sign by the council-run Leyton Library in London showing the metric sign to the library entrance (see images).

Isn't it ironic that neither Waltham Forest council, which runs Leyton Library, and London Underground do not fear that old people (or any others for that matter) will get confused by metric signs.

So why does the Department for Transport (DfT) refuse to metricate road signs?

Oh yes, they would have to spend a little money and 'red-top' newspaper readers might object!

Our message to the DfT should be: Oh, ye of little faith!!! The rest of the public sector do not share your fears.



Market trader complies with law

Contributed by Ronnie Cohen

In the attached image, a market trader in Stratford shopping centre in Newham, London displays prices in kg (as well as prices in lb) prominently. That trader deserves to be praised for complying with the law on metric signage. That is not difficult, is it? Why can't all market traders do likewise?

The Metric Martyrs, originally a small group of misguided traders, believe that they should be able to use whatever measurement units they like. When has this ever been allowed? Which country allows this? If they got their way, there would be chaos in the market place and a disaster for consumers. The Metric Martyrs never consider this from the consumers' point of view. Consumers have a right to be able to compare prices and quantities without effort or calculation. The use of different measurement units in different places prevents that.



Three steps to metric height signage

Edited version of item posted on Hughster's Blog (December 20, 2011)

In the DfT's recently announced review of UK signage, it was revealed that there will be a new dual-unit height warning sign prescribed to allow authorities to sign in dual units without needing two signs. However, notable in its absence is a requirement for authorities to use this sign and cease installing imperial-only signs, which means the problem of foreign lorry bridge strikes has no end in sight.

The solution to this whole problem appears as simple as mandating dual-unit signage and removing imperial-only versions from the regulations. However this requires drivers to read twice as much information compressed together in smaller text, making the sign less clear and therefore less effective as a warning in those split seconds available to drivers to process it.



Having dual units split across two signs is just as bad, as it presents the same problem of excessive information but with the additional costs of having to manufacture and fit twice as many signs and the increased visual clutter that ensues.

It appears that the only reason imperial indications on height signage are necessary at all is that Regulation 10(2) of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 requires vehicles over 3.66 metres tall to display in-cab notices in feet and inches.

The regulation specifically states:

"No person shall use or cause or permit to be used on a road a vehicle to which this regulation applies if the overall travelling height exceeds 3.66 m unless there is carried in the vehicle in the manner specified in paragraph (3) a notice clearly indicating in feet and inches and in figures not less than 40 mm tall, the overall travelling height."*

Because there is no requirement to show a metric figure, the vast majority of commercially available reconfigurable in-cab indicators don't show it, so to have metric-only height signs on the roads would be a safety risk.

All it would take to solve this problem would be to make three simple regulatory changes:

- 1) Amend RVCUR to require both imperial AND metric height indications on in-cab notices;
- 2) Amend TSRGD to replace all imperial-only and dual-unit height-related signs with metric-only versions; and
- 3) Amend TSRGD to define a transition period during which all existing imperial-only height road signs would continue to be legal (existing dual-unit signs could be kept legal indefinitely).

As soon as these regulatory changes came into effect, all high vehicles on the roads – both domestic and continental – would have their height displayed in-cab in metric, and imperial-only height signs on the roads would begin to be automatically phased out during the transition period at minimal additional cost to local authorities during the normal course of sign replacements, just as in the case of pre-1981 weight limit signs in "tons" and "cwt".

After the transition period is over, all height signs will be new metric ones or older dual-unit ones, so in-cab indicator requirements can be relaxed to only require metric.

The DfT couldn't object to this on grounds of cost. The only taxpayer expense would be the administrative costs of notifying all registered operators of oversize vehicles of the date of the change (the costs of changing in-cab notices would be borne by the operators themselves) and updating official documentation.

Of course, if you're going to remove imperial height-related signage from TSRGD, you might as well be consistent and remove imperial width/length-related signage as well. There seems to be no practical reason at

UKMA news - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

all why these should remain in imperial, since vehicle manufacturers' specifications and even the construction regulations themselves have long been in metric.

Surely Network Rail and the Police, among others, would be happy to put pressure on the DfT to carry out these simple, cost-effective improvements that would pave the way to ending the problem of bridge strikes due to unit confusion once and for all?

* Editor's note: See how an imperial sign is perfectly specified by use of metric units!!

How many versions of car dashboards can you have?

This illustration for a North American version of a Honda Civic car illustrates how manufacturers of vehicles have to contend with the inconsistencies of road signage.

Did you realise that Canadian speedometers had to have a mph supplementary indication to the main km/h scale? No doubt that this is due to the proximity to the US border and high probability that these vehicles will be driven over the border.

But what about Irish vehicles? This is a quote from an Irish car blog:

"I have an Irish 2007 Prius with the same problem. It won't take anything but km/h by default, I'm afraid. I find it unbelievable as not only is the UK a short ferry ride away, but in Northern Ireland they use miles as well."

So it appears that Irish vehicles have speedometers with km/h indications only in common with all other continental European examples.

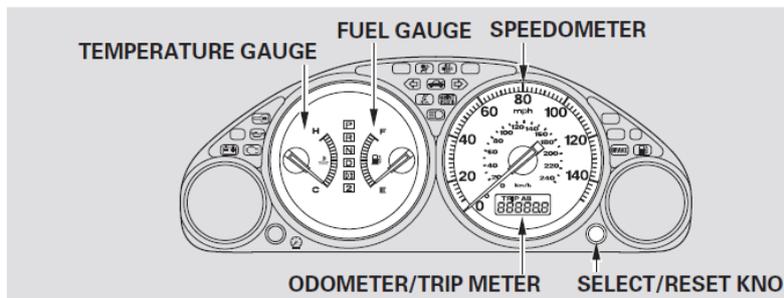
That makes at least three different versions of instrument clusters that have to be catered for even before catering for the desires of actual customers!

Guess who pays for this lack of standardisation?

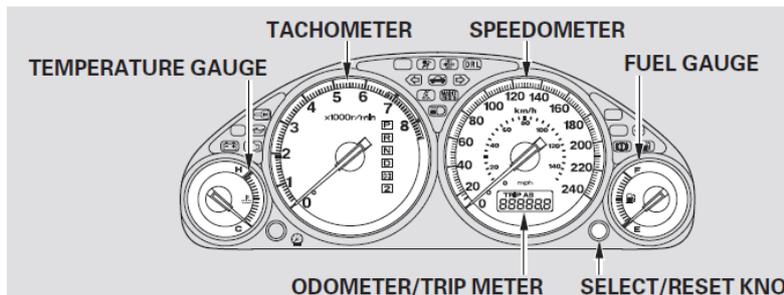
Illustration of dashboard layouts for Honda Civic and actual km only speedometer from unknown vehicle:

Gauges

U.S. DX model



Canadian DX model



What a proper speedometer should look like!!

How many megawatts in a gigawatt?

Contributed by Ronnie Cohen

BRAZIL

Protesters bring work on Amazonian dam to a halt

Hundreds of protesters have occupied the construction site of a massive hydroelectric dam in the Amazonian state of Para, Brazil, bringing work to a halt.

More than 600 indigenous people, fishermen and river dwellers are demanding that work on the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam is abandoned, and have no plans to leave the site. "Belo Monte will only be built if we cross our arms and do nothing," said local indigenous leader Juma Xi-paia. "We will not keep quiet. Our ancestors fought so we could be here now. The machinery continues arriving to destroy our region."



The \$11bn (£7bn), 11,000-megawatt dam would be the world's third

largest. The Norte Energia consortium building the dam, on the Xingu river feeding the Amazon, said it would not affect the property or quality of life of indigenous groups and others living in the area "who agree with the project".

But the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and other critics say the dam will displace thousands of indigenous people and cause environmental damage.

The commission has urged the Brazilian government to halt construction. However, the government has said the project is essential to helping Brazil's economy grow and so lift millions out of poverty. It also said the dam was designed to minimise environmental damage. AP

Why isn't 11,000-megawatt written as 11 gigawatts or as 11 GW? Maybe this seems too small to impress?

Maybe it's too difficult to divide by 1000. Recently in a mobile phone store, your editor enquired about data usage on a mobile phone. The assistant reviewed the usage data which revealed that the figure was 377,595 kbytes. The contract allowance is quoted as 500 megabytes.

The assistant had to use a calculator to convert kbytes to Mbytes!!

Why can't journalists get it right?

Item from Rail magazine issue 686:

◆ SNCF can only be described as acutely disappointing. The buffet menu has been improved in recent years, but the best one can obtain from the counter sandwiched between First and Second Class is a half-casserole moment (a changing menu of dishes with culinary pretensions) for 12.90 euros. Food can either be eaten at the small (and high) tables (with seats) in the buffet car, or taken back to one's seat.

It's a sad contrast to the deterioration of Swiss and German railways to retain proper dining cars in their new long-distance trains. It's not as if TGV services have so abandoned journey that there isn't plenty of time for a long lunch or dinner - Paris to Nice takes almost 5½ hours, for example.

Seats in First Class have power-ports, and each seat has either a drop-down table big enough for a laptop in a recline, legrest seats, or a fixed table in face-to-face seats. The luggage racks above the seats have space for only a thin case, but there are both end and central two-row luggage racks. Passengers are encouraged to use a small bench seat in the vestibule if they need to make a private mobile phone call. Surprisingly, given how many people on business are now required to travel Second Class, these 2-2 carriages on TGV sets generally don't have power sockets, nor do seats always align with windows.

The route from Paris to Geneva uses France's first TGV à Grande Vitesse (LGV) to Lyon as far as Mâcon, where trains turn east on to conventional railway to reach

Bourg-en-Bresse.

Then the countryside is much more appealing than the landscapes of LGV Nord to the Channel Tunnel, with a tapestry of wooded hills, delightfully homogeneous villages of uniform stone, shuttered chateaux and isolated farms. The speed hardly allows time to admire anything before it is lost to view, and the train's velocity showed up the occasional section of track in need of attention with a sudden wobble - it is 30 years since the line opened.

From Bourg-en-Bresse Geneva TGVs are now routed via the 68km line to Bellegarde, which was re-opened in December 2010 to cut 45min and 22 minutes off the old route via Archères and Galka. Originally opened throughout in 1882, it was a tremendously challenging section of line to build, running through the spectacular karst landscape of the Jura Mountains with numerous tunnels and an impressive stone viaduct over the Ain river gorge at Cluses-Bellegarde.

For much of the way the single-track line is high up on a mountain ledge with dramatic views over the wooded gorge, and the fastest stretch on the whole line is limited to 140km/h. Of the new or enlarged stations en route, the

new domed building at the junction station of Bellegarde-sur-Vallée is an example of SNCF's neo-architecture, echoing Network Rail's new Acragainston Euro station built under the Sustainable Project. The large circular domed building at Bellegarde operates on a new bio-climatic principle, whereby solar energy is used to heat the air in winter and provide natural ventilation in summer.

Re-opening of the line was a collaborative project, with the Swiss government contributing 35% of the 30 million euros funding. Besides increasing rail's competitiveness for passengers between the French capital and south-west Switzerland, the line has allowed paths for freight traffic on the busy Bourg-en-Bresse-Cluses section of the Lyon-Turin line.

Once across the Swiss border, hillsides of vine line the railway to La Plaine, stretching to the surprisingly industrial western slopes of cosmopolitan Geneva, where we speed on time at 160.

ICE: Zurich-Frankfurt (Hamburg 1h) 295km Under the ICE and TGV coveries, this ICE set hardly exceeds

wooded gorge, and the fastest stretch on the whole line is limited to 140kph.??

Why is kph so widely used and what can we do to encourage those responsible editors and journalists to use the correct km/h symbol?

◆◆ For much of the way the single-track line is high up on a mountain ledge with dramatic views over the wooded gorge, and the fastest stretch on the whole line is limited to 140kph.??



The bar area of a TGV. These trains are also fitted with meeting rooms, offering business travellers to continue working, even when travelling across France-ENRICHY LAURENT

BBC asks the key question



Item published on BBC news webpage in December, reproduced here in full.

Note comment from UKMA chairman Robin Paice!

It is 200 years since Napoleon backtracked on his grand scheme to make his empire metric, but today the British remain unique in Europe by holding onto imperial weights and measures. With the UK's relationship with its neighbours under scrutiny, can it ever adopt the metric mindset?

It's an existential question that reveals much about how you make sense of the world. Is your ballpoint pen 6in long or 15cm?

Do you buy petrol by the gallon or the litre? Cheese by the ounce or the gram? And just how far is Dover from Calais - 21 miles or 34 km?

Call it a proud expression of national identity or a stubborn refusal to engage with the neighbours. Either way, the persistent British preference for imperial over metric is particularly noteworthy at a time when its links with Europe are under greater scrutiny than ever.

Supporters of traditional weights and measures may have rejoiced in 2007 when the European Commission announced it was dropping its attempts to bring the UK into line with the rest of the EU.

But a looming anniversary is a reminder to decimal sceptics and enthusiasts alike that successful resistance to metrication is not always permanent.

In February 1812, some 17 years after France first went metric, Napoleon I introduced a system for small businesses called mesures usuelles - French for customary measurements. These were based on the old, pre-revolutionary system, in response to the unpopularity of the new decimal codes.

Only after Napoleon's departure did France go fully metric in 1840, using the law to enforce metrication.

Continue reading the main story

Measuring up in the kitchen

Rick Stein

Chef Rick Stein on cooking in a country with two systems of weights and measurements

"I think children are able to learn both metric and imperial measurements.

"It's just like learning a new language - our brains are quite capable of using both systems.

"I'm not fussed that imperial has gone.

"Metric is a lot easier to deal with when it comes to cooking and writing recipes because it divides everything by 10 so it's a much more convenient system.

"When people prefer to use imperial over metric, I believe they are saying the old times were better."

As told to Sophie Robehmed

Rick Stein's Spanish Christmas is on BBC Two on 21 December at 2100

But if the French eventually learned to think in units of 10, the UK, so far, has not. All the evidence suggests that, despite more than decade-and-a-half of goods being labelled in both metric and imperial, the British remain defiantly out of step with their counterparts across the channel.

In May 2011, a survey by supermarket chain Asda suggested 70% of customers found metric labelling confusing and wanted products labelled in imperial instead. In response, the company reverted to selling strawberries by the pound for the first time in over a decade.

According to social historian Joe Moran, author of *Queuing For Beginners*, the notion that imperial measures embody tradition and reassurance accounts for much of their appeal to the British.

UKMA news - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

"It may also have something to do with the poetic, concrete names used in the old imperial system, particularly for coins - tanner, half a crown, guinea, etc, that just seem more familiar, friendly and native than metrics."

Nonetheless, the legal requirement to display measurements for most products in both systems means many Britons have become adept at making the mental switch from ounces to grams and back again.

Nowhere is this duality more apparent than in relation to alcohol. Imperial measurements for spirits were phased out in 1988. Yet it remains illegal to sell beer and cider in any other units than pints.

It is a discrepancy that is reportedly mirrored in the illegal drugs market, with cannabis typically sold in ounces while cocaine is packaged in grams.

However, support for traditional measurements has gone beyond shoppers merely expressing a consumer preference.

In 2001, grocer Steve Thoburn became a cause celebre - if French terms are not inappropriate in this context - after being convicted for using scales showing only imperial weights. The Metric Martyr group's appeals against conviction were rejected all the way up to the House of Lords and, in February 2004, by the European Court of Human Rights.

Given the widespread association in the UK between the metric system and the European Union, it's tempting to view the battle simply as an expression of hostility towards political integration.

For one of the Metric Martyrs, Neil Herron, however, it was primarily concerned with how we understand the world around us.

"It's about the language and vernacular with which we relate to each other," he says. "Even with kids who have been educated in metric for the past 30 years, watching a football match talk about a penalty kick being 12 yards or the striker being six foot tall.

Continue reading the main story

Mixed measures

Whisky

Since 1995, goods sold in Europe have to be weighed or measured in metric, but shops can also label products in imperial

Exceptions for pints of beer, milk and cider, miles and acres, which are measured in imperial only

So in pubs, beer is sold in imperial pints but spirits are served in 25ml units

Petrol stations typically use litres but car manufacturers usually advertise miles per gallon

"It goes to the core of who we are. If we are going to change we will do it organically, with the consent of the people. We won't have it imposed."

Despite its popular identification with European bureaucracy, British attempts to scrap imperial measurements stretch back long before the UK came under the jurisdiction of Brussels.

In 1863 the House of Commons voted to mandate the metric system throughout the Empire, and in 1897 a parliamentary select committee recommended compulsory metrication within two years. In 1965 the Confederation of British Industry threw its weight behind the cause and the government set up the UK metrication board in 1969, four years before the UK joined the European Common Market.

Joining the community meant signing up to directives on standardised measurements, although the deadline for implementation was repeatedly pushed back. Since 1995, goods sold in Europe have had to be weighed or measured in metric, but the UK was temporarily allowed to continue using the imperial system.

This opt-out was due to expire in 2009, with only pints of beer, milk and cider, miles and acres supposed to survive beyond the cut-off. But ahead of the deadline, the European Commission admitted that persuading the British to accept grams over ounces was a lost cause, and shops could continue to label products in both systems.

To supporters of metric measures, it is a source of frustration that what they regard as a more logical mechanism has never achieved predominance.

Robin Paice of the UK Metric Association insists there is nothing intrinsically British about miles and pints and, for that matter, nothing inescapably foreign about kilometres and litres.

"I don't believe things are hard-wired into the national mentality," he says.

"The government has done very little to explain why it would be to the benefit of the UK to use the world's system. If people are asked to change the habits of a lifetime without explanation they are naturally quite reluctant. It's very much a failure of leadership."

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The UK may have the failure of Napoleon's armies to cross the channel to thank or blame for the resistance of imperial. But it is not the only country to fail to enthusiastically embrace metrication.

Japan's traditional shakkanho system was supposed to have been replaced by metric in 1924, but remained popular. It was forbidden in 1966 but is still used in agriculture.

And of course the US continues to weigh and measure in customary units, a system derived from imperial. According to Moran, the similarities between the two codes has served to reinforce UK Atlanticism.

"Our residual attachment to imperial weights and measures is really to do with a resilient fact about our geographical position: we are an island with one eye on America and an ambivalent attitude to the continent," he says.

"In Britain the metric system has been associated with mainland Europe and also, since Napoleon, with European imperialism. The Americans used a set of weights and measures that was a variant on the imperial - and Americans coming over here in the war probably strengthened the sense that we had this in common."

Switching between imperial and metric, the UK's approach to the issue may mirror the debate about its place in the world. But whichever way you measure it, the Channel isn't getting any larger or smaller.