SATELLITE MAPPING

Local authorities in the United Kingdom will be given greater control over how their roads appear on maps and satellite navigation systems, it was announced in February by Local and Regional Transport Minister, Norman Baker, as part of bureaucracy-cutting proposals.

The consultation, now published on the DfT website to be found at: www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/2011-02/ will be open until May.

The consultation also invites suggestions on how local and central Government can better co-ordinate with satnav companies.

At present, if a council wants to change the classification of one of its roads - for example downgrading an ‘A’ road to a ‘B’ road - it has to be approved by the Department for Transport.

The Government proposes devolving decision-making to councils as they are best-placed to decide the classification of local roads. This would help them make clear to drivers which roads are most suitable for through-journeys, potentially reducing congestion on local routes.

Norman Baker said, “The current system dates back to the 1960s and is a hangover from the days of Whitehall-knows-best. I believe in giving power to local people. This reform will cut red tape and mean councils can better control traffic in their area.

“They can ensure A roads are placed where they want traffic to run, and can lower the category of road in places they want traffic to avoid. By making it less onerous for councils to ensure road classification better reflects conditions on the ground, journeys will be easier to navigate.

“We are also using this as an opportunity to invite new ideas of tackling some of the problems caused by satnavs, for example lorries being directed down unsuitable roads. We want to hear suggestions as to how the current system could be improved - and how councils could better work with satnav companies.”

Under the new system, councils will have control over road classification decisions in their area - including which roads should be used as primary routes - with no requirement to get approval from the DfT. The
Department will only deal with contentious cases where there are serious disagreements about a council’s decision.

Local authorities will be required to send a formal record of any changes to its road network to DfT but reporting will be streamlined - with the current eight forms replaced with one.

As part of the move to open up Government, for the first time policy about the road network and classification will be made available to the public. This will help motorists and communities to hold central and local government to account for their decisions.

This will also include our policies on detrunking and trunking - the process by which a local authority takes over a road from the Highways Agency (or vice versa). This will help explain why some roads are run nationally, and where they could be run locally.

Roads classification and the Primary Route Network are a devolved matter in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.