



LIGHTER EVENINGS

INTRODUCTION

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 European countries follow Central European Time, which is one hour ahead of GMT in winter and 2 hours ahead of GMT in summer i.e., always one hour ahead of the UK.

Nigel Beard MP's Lighter Evenings 10-minute rule bill – to be debated on Tuesday 8th June 2004 – would change Britain's timekeeping to Single/Double British Summertime (SDST) so that during Winter, time would be GMT+1 and during summer, time would be GMT+2. This would put Britain into the Central European Time Zone.

This would create lighter evenings all year round and result in fewer people being killed and injured in road accidents and also bring significant environmental, economic and health benefits, the latter being particularly relevant to the current debate about obesity and public health.

THE ROAD SAFETY BENEFITS

During the 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 and the casualty rate rise.

2002	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Deaths	238	233	299	247	274	263	285	308	328	324	300	332
Casualties	23,634	23,355	23,848	23,364	25,435	23,604	25,947	24,697	24,934	28,919	28,732	26,136
Casualty Rate*	63	66	59	58	60	59	59	56	59	67	71	67

*Rate per 100 million vehicle kilometres

The effects of clocks going back in October are greatest for the most vulnerable road users. In 2002, pedestrian deaths and serious injuries rose from 759 in October to 851 in November.

The Effect of Changing to Single/Double Summer Time on Road Accidents

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 may 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 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 than in the morning. 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 and so increasing their exposure to the road environment. Social trips are generally made in the afternoon and evening.

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, those who collect and deliver milk, the building industry and postal workers (although the change to later deliveries may reduce the latter's objections).

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

Many (but by no means all) people and organisations in Scotland oppose the move, citing the darker mornings as unwelcome and fearing they would lead to an increase in road casualties. In fact, the most recent research confirms a net reduction in casualties, even in Scotland. However, the Lighter Evenings Bill would devolve the power to make decisions about time zones in Scotland to the Scottish Parliament.

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 and opportunities for leisure activities are significantly greater.

A change to introduce 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.

Further Reading

RoSPA. 2003. *Single/Double Summer Time: Position Paper*. RoSPA: Birmingham.

http://www.rospace.com/road/factsheets/pdf/summer/summertime_paper_2003.pdf

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

<http://www.trl.co.uk/800/reports.asp?url=368.htm>

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