



**THE BRITISH DRIVING SOCIETY LTD.**

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**BRITISH DRIVING SOCIETY RESPONSE TO  
CONSULTATION ON HIGHWAY CODE**

The British Driving Society (BDS) was established in 1957 as the national organisation responsible for all harness horse driving in the UK. The BDS is an independent, non-profit making organisation, administered by an elected governing Council. The BDS provides education and examination in all aspects of harness horse driving, to all age groups. Candidates for instruction and examination do not have to be BDS Members; examinations are open to anyone who applies to take them and pays the appropriate examination fee.

BDS examinations focus on horse welfare, correct and safe harness horse driving and safe driving on the public highway. BDS examinations are accredited by the Learning Skills Council, and are accepted in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and the EU. The examinations are ( NB : those specific to driving on the public highway are highlighted )

- BDS Preliminary ( horse care & welfare; basic harness horse driving) NVQ Level 2
- BDS Intermediate ( next level of driving; training skills, etc) NVQ Level 3
- BDS Advanced ( advanced driving & training skills, etc) NVQ Level 3
- BDS Light Harness Horse Instructor's Certificate NVQ Level H
- **BDS Road Driving Test ( for private harness horse drivers; available as either a stand-alone assessment or as an element of BDS Preliminary. It is compulsory for candidates for BDS Intermediate) NVQ Level 2**
- **Code of Practice Assessment ( for Commercial Harness Horse Drivers on the public highway; a stand-alone assessment of safety standards of vehicle, harness, suitability of horse(s), competence of driver, care & welfare standards for horse(s))** assessment, not a formal qualification
- Certificate of Competence in Horse Transport - Driver NVQ Level 3 (DEFRA-approval pending)
- Certificate of Competence in Horse Transport – Attendant NVQ Level 2 (DEFRA-approval pending)

The BDS is committed to working closely with Government to improve facilities, education and safety standards for all harness horse drivers, whether private or commercial, both on and off the public highway.



We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the current consultation, and also welcome all enquiries about any aspect of harness horse driving ( contact list at the end of this document).

The growing popularity of harness horse driving has seen a considerable increase in both private and commercial horse drawn vehicles using the public highway. Unfortunately, motor vehicle driver awareness of horses – whether driven or ridden – has dramatically decreased in recent years.

Thirty years ago, most motorists had a good awareness of how to approach and pass a horse on the public highway. Even twenty years ago, awareness was within the bounds of safety for both motorise and horse rider/driver. Today, however, most motorists treat the horse as if it is as mechanically-operated as the motor car. The situation is even worse with horse drawn vehicles, where most motorists tend to view the vehicle as the object to be avoided, rather than the much more vulnerable horse pulling it, leading to incidents of:

- motorists cutting in very closely in front of the horse when overtaking,
- overtaking too fast,
- leaving insufficient room when overtaking,
- failing to understand harness horse driver's hand signals,

The British Driving Society feel very strongly that the four principal hand signals, traditionally made by harness horse drivers should be reinstated in the Highway Code.

So far as the BDS is aware, these were deleted from the Highway Code at least 40 years ago, and, despite the significant rise in horse drawn traffic in recent years, not been reinstated.

The harness horse driver correctly, traditionally and safely holds the driving reins in the left hand, leaving the right hand free to support the left hand in controlling the horse(s) and to make correct and safe use of the driving whip. Therefore, all hand signals given by harness horse drivers are correctly and traditionally given using the right hand only.

The harness horse driver retains the whip in the right hand at all times when making hand signals to other road users. This enables the harness horse driver to retain optimum control of the harness horse(s) at all times.



The four signals are :

1. ' I am turning right' or ' I am about to move out to the right' – the driver holds right hand out to right with whip extended to right at shoulder level, horizontally to the ground. The signal is clearly visible to road users behind and in front of the horse drawn vehicle,
2. ' I am turning left' or ' I am about to move in to the left '– the driver holds right hand above head with the whip pointing horizontally to the left above the driver's head. The signal is clearly visible to road users behind and in front of the horse drawn vehicle.
3. ' I am about to slow down or stop' – the driver raises the right hand with the whip extended vertically upwards above their head. The signal is clearly visible to road users behind and in front of the horse drawn vehicle
4. ' I intend to proceed straight on ' – the driver points their right hand with the whip directly forward. The signal is clearly visible to road users in front of the horse drawn vehicle.

Inclusion of these signals in the Highway Code would ensure that other road users will be aware of the harness horse driver's intentions, leading to greater safety for all road users..

So far as the Code of Practice for Horse Drawn Vehicles is concerned, the British Driving Society absorbed the former Harness Horse Training Board in 1999, and is now the sole national organisation able to provide training and assessment for commercial horse drawn vehicles operating on the public highway within the provisions of this Code.

The BDS also provides a voluntary Road Driving Assessment and a published Road Safety Code for private, non-commercial harness horse drivers, which covers much the same safety standards, applicable to smaller, privately-owned vehicles and horses, which neither operate commercially nor carry fare-paying passengers.

The current Code of Practice for Horse Drawn Vehicles was drawn up 15 years ago, when there were only a small number of commercial horse drawn vehicles working on the public highway.

However, there has been an upsurge in the popularity of horse drawn weddings and funerals in the past few years, with a consequent significant increase in the number of horse drawn wedding and funeral providers. Whilst many operators are long-established, experienced and competent, it has to be said that there are some who do not conform to the industry standards of safety and care.

The Code of Practice is a voluntary Assessment, and a number of local councils and licensing authorities insist on operators of commercial horse drawn vehicles working on the public highway being assessed before granting an operators licence.



However, some local Councils appear to be unaware of the provisions of the Code of Practice – despite having received information packs from the Department of Transport, and being advised by the BDS – and many do not recognise the value of making Code of Practice Assessment a requirement before granting a licence to operate commercial horse drawn vehicles on the public highway.

The BDS recommends that local Councils and licensing authorities be encouraged to make Assessment and Certification compulsory before granting a licence to operate a commercial horse drawn vehicle on the public highway.

The BDS also recommends a meeting with the Department of Transport to discuss an up-date of the Code of Practice, to reflect current practices and conditions, which we feel would be extremely valuable, as it would give us all the opportunity to examine the needs of the horse drawn vehicle on the public highway.

This consultation response may be made publicly available to anyone who wishes to read it.

For further information, or to discuss any of the above, please contact either :

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British Driving Society website [www.britishdrivingsociety.co.uk](http://www.britishdrivingsociety.co.uk)

John Parker, LHHI  
Chairman, British Driving Society

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