



If you're on the road to a TWP you need to read between the lines



**Dianne Bardsley**  
**WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE**

It's hard for one whose occupation is so tightly entwined in words to travel anywhere without noticing all sorts of usages that are remarkable or interesting in some way, but are simply accepted by, and acceptable to, those who see them every day.

Road signs and road names are cases in point. Road signs are often in a kind of shorthand, sometimes not too different from text language. In the United States, particularly in the mid-west and eastern states, it is common to see TWP on road signs, which stands for township. In these states, a township is not a town or urban centre as we know it, but a district, a specific county subdivision with its own local government.

(Interestingly, township is a term that seems to have quite a varied history and several usages, not one of them used in New Zealand. A township is a land area of 36 square miles, it's a racially segregated residential area in South Africa, and it was also formerly used for the administration of a parish catchment in England.)

In the US, the road sign HOV indicates a lane for high occupancy vehicles, those carrying two persons or more, while Pway is the short form of parkway, a limited-access laned road usually with a wide median strip. In New York environs, it is

also one which excludes trucks and heavy vehicles. Near JFK Airport, a sign identifies the highway as a POW and MIA Memorial Parkway in honour of those incarcerated during wartime and those missing in action. As visiting motorists approach the airport, the signs become more intriguing. "Kiss and Fly next right" directs one to the dropoff section of a terminal, while "Cell phone lot" is a temporary parking area for those picking up new arrivals. Pike, the short form of turnpike, is a toll road in the eastern US, while a b-way or beltway is virtually a ring road, also known as a loop or orbital highway. On roadsides, neon-signed placards headed "Silver Alert" give descriptions of vehicles of elderly missing persons which, in some states, also include adults with any cognitive impairment. A recent development not yet operating in all states and one of which the general population is not yet fully aware, "Silver Alert" is said to reflect the modern ageing population and the prominence of Alzheimer's disease. More widely understood and also on the route to JFK Airport is a sign that is sure to evoke, provoke, and polarise: it read "THE HOLY BIBLE: inspired - absolute-final".

In Montreal I noticed the stop signs at intersections read "Arrete", whereas in France they simply say "Stop!" Near Oxford

(England) an intriguing road sign read "Humped Camel Crossing". Fifty metres further on, there it was, a raised pedestrian crossing. In Britain, I also encountered examples of "No Hard Shoulder" and "Soft Shoulder" and almost felt a sense of relief.

We have our own distinctive road signs and road names in New Zealand, some of which have resisted the change to metric. The Eight Mile intersection south of Te Kuiti is still known as The Eight Mile, rather than the equivalent distance in kilometres. One might think that the well-known road in North Otago, State Highway 85 the Pig Root, is really the Pig Route, but no, it's not. The origin of the name is uncertain, but one feasible suggestion is that it reflects the muddy nature of the original route. And lines? We find the term line used instead of road for straight roads that were originally survey lines or tracks cut through native bush, providing access routes to unexplored and unoccupied country, being most common in Manawatu and Wairarapa.

In a road system with traffic as busy as the US's, the New Zealand road sign "Merge like a zip" would not need to feature.

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