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Editorial

This edition leads with an article on speed humps. Although many London boroughs have either stopped installing them, or are removing them, others have not. The borough of Lambeth is one of the latter. They send out a "consultation leaflet" on new schemes to local residents which is grossly misleading. It exaggerates the influence of excessive vehicle speed on road accidents, argues that 20-mph zones must be "self-enforcing" (i.e. require humps) when that is no longer DfT guidance, alleges that air pollution will fall if humps are introduced – contrary to all the scientific evidence published on that issue – and only lists options that they wish the recipients to support.

They also blatantly lie about the impact of speed humps on emergency vehicles. But Lambeth are of course not listening to my requests for them to get it right in future, and produce a more balanced consultation. There is a hint of fanaticism in Lambeth (just read their "road danger reduction plan" and you will see what I mean). Fanatics are not easily persuaded that their perceived reality is wrong.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Speed Hump Petition



Readers of this publication may well be aware that the editor has a long standing grudge against the use of speed humps. Indeed his initial interest in traffic matters arose from trying to firstly oppose the installation, and secondly attempting to get rid of the humps installed in Watts Lane/Manor Park Road, Chislehurst (photo above). Yes they are still there although there have been few humps installed in the London Borough of Bromley since for which no doubt many people are very grateful – the council now has a "preference for non-vertical deflection traffic calming" as they put it. Well for those who hate speed humps, there is an opportunity to show your feelings by signing a Government E-Petition. To sign it, simply click on the link here:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/901>

It's already one of the most popular petitions in the Transport section and if enough people sign it then a ban of humps should get debated in Parliament.

For those who are not familiar with the arguments against humps, the BBRAG web site still has one of the most comprehensive analyses of the problems they cause – see here for the "hump" pages:

www.bromleytransport.org.uk/Humps.htm

(Editor: I continue to get regular calls from people who are trying to get rid of humps – for example from a disabled person last week who suffers from pain when driving over them, and cannot drive to his son's house in the vehicle adapted for his wheelchair without scraping his vehicle.

There are also many calls from sufferers of noise and vibration from heavy vehicles driving over humps or speed tables located close to their house. Councils seem to persist in putting in humps and tables on bus routes which is one source of this problem, but any HGVs create the nuisance.

Remember that speed humps have no real safety benefits, and numerous disadvantages, so please do pass on the link and ask other people to sign this petition).

Other Petitions



There are a number of other E-Petitions which relate to transport issues that readers might care to also sign. The Editor's favourites are:

Remove Dartford Crossing Tolls:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/1878>

Remove all UK speed cameras:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/3632>

Legal costs refunded for acquitted defendants:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/5322>

Stop HS2:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/353>

The latter (opposing the construction of the High Speed rail lane from London to Birmingham) is the most popular of them all – see <http://stophs2.org/> for more details of the campaign opposing it.

Legal Costs Recovery

You may be wondering why the third of those petitions (on legal costs recovery) is necessary because surely the last Government's proposals were thrown out by a judicial review and the Conservatives supported opposition at the time?

Well unfortunately the new Government has brought it back so it's a live issue again.

Get Your Friends to Sign

Don't forget to get your friends, relations and work colleagues to sign the above petitions by forwarding the link to them. You don't need to explain them because they are self-explanatory.

Localism Bill

Readers may well be aware of a new bill going through Parliament called the Localism Bill that will revolutionise planning law. Without wishing to get into the argument about whether the "presumption for sustainable development" is a good thing or not – which is generating considerable controversy – there is another aspect of the bill that is worth mentioning.

This is the ability to create a Neighbourhood Development Plan. This introduces an additional tier into the national and local planning environment. The really interesting thing about this is that a Neighbourhood Development Plan can be created by a Parish Council, or any other local group that cares to represent residents (in London of course there are no Parish Councils anyway). So it's aimed at applying to the "village" level.

So for example, in Chislehurst where I live, the Chislehurst Society which is a local "amenity group" is planning to create such a Plan as it is the obvious body to do so. Chislehurst is of course only a few square miles and is simply a part of the conurbation of greater London. Your editor is on the Executive Committee of the Chislehurst Society.

But if there is no suitable local group existing, or the local Parish council does not want to bother, there is nothing stopping you forming one!

Perhaps you don't have experience of writing Development Plans, which is after all a rather specialist task? At least it has been until recently due to the complexity of planning law, and is likely to remain so even after Planning Policy Guidance has been reduced from 3000 pages to 50 as is intended. But that's no problem as the Local Council has an obligation to assist and provide funding if you need expert advice.

Development Plans are not just about building developments, but they also tend to embrace transport infrastructure and such matters as parking, so anyone interested in transport provision should take an interest in the possibility of having some influence via a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

This does not mean you can overturn national policy and regulations, and it is not yet clear exactly how the new tier will interact with other levels, but it is certainly something that those interested in local issues should try to get involved in.

Even though the Bill has not yet passed into law, you can start applying to create a Neighbourhood Plan already, so now's the time to push ahead if you have the urge.

Speed Camera Count in London



The Government has asked local authorities to publish data on the usage and effectiveness of speed cameras. In response to a question on when we might see this

data in London, I have been advised they will be published by the London Safety Camera Partnership (LSCP) in November – on their web site.

In the meantime, they have actually published the numbers of speed cameras. See www.lscp.org.uk/cameralocations.html for the details, but in summary these are the numbers:

Total cameras (directions) = 744

That excludes red light cameras.

We will try and report this figure on a regular basis so that you can see whether it is going up or down. At present it's probably still going up.

Perverting Justice



In previous editions, we have covered the apparent conspiracy to divert fees from speed awareness courses to finance the operations of the police

and the “Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership”.

Incidentally comments in the last newsletter that the latter organisation had been taken over by a private organisation named Safer Roads might have been misleading, because we understand that the police are now running the operation although Safer Roads do seem to be involved in some regards.

The complaint about what is happening is still being progressed. But it was interesting to read of a story in the news recently concerning PC Michele Selby who was given a prison sentence for ignoring a crime in Strathclyde. She seemed to be in a hurry to deliver letters to another police station and ignored a clear attempt by someone armed with a screwdriver, crowbar and wrench to break into a restaurant. After talking to the person concerned, she let him go and said to another police officer that the culprit “would have got the jail if she could be bothered”. The conviction was for “perverting the course of justice”.

(Editor: one has to ask what is the difference between this case and the waiving of prosecutions for motoring offences. It is obviously sensible that the police have some discretion to waive prosecution of minor offences – and give a warning. Indeed I am not opposed to them offering education courses as an alternative. But financing their operations, partly or wholly, from the fees that motorists are forced to pay unless they wish to go to court or accept penalty points is surely wrong).

Why Trams Belong in Museums



Do trams, like the one to the left in Croydon, belong in museums? Well Professor John Kay, an

eminent economist who has just been commissioned by the Government to review the operation of the stock market, obviously believes so.

He published an article in the Financial Times recently with the headline “Why trams belong in museums and not on city streets” which nicely demolished the arguments for trams.

He recalls being a small boy in Edinburgh and watching the last tram roll along Princes Street. He asks what has changed since that time to make trams more attractive than buses as a means of public transport and finds that nothing has changed. They are still very expensive to install and operate, and less flexible.

He says that the new Edinburgh tram scheme “would have been a marginal proposition if it had cost nothing to build. But the projected cost of the Edinburgh project was £545m”. He goes on to say that the actual cost might now be £1bn, so the total cost is about £500 per resident.

Anyway, for fans of trams everywhere, Prof Kay’s article is surely worth a read and it can no doubt be found on the FT’s web site.

The Government seems to have recommenced funding new tram schemes such as the ones in Birmingham and Sheffield though.

Managed Motorways

“Managed motorways” - or Active Traffic Management (ATM) - are all the rage at the Highways Agency. To quote them: “Managed motorways will make your journeys more reliable by controlling traffic flows more effectively through the use of new technologies such as overhead gantries, lane specific signals and driver information signs”. Residents of the London area will be familiar with them no doubt as they have been in operation for some years on the western side of the M25. They are also in use on the M42 around Birmingham, and were put into the M20 recently.

But this article was prompted by driving on the M25 recently when a 50-mph speed limit was imposed in the middle of the day, with very light traffic, for no apparent reason. This seems to be a regular feature around the M3 junction.

A writer in LTT (Local Transport Today – the magazine for traffic engineers) says that the operation of Active Traffic Management on the M42 “sometimes leaves me bamboozled”. Andrew Foster, the author, said he was surprised to see mandatory speed limits in operation at Saturday lunchtime when traffic was light.

Even more surprising was to be confronted by five changes to the speed limit on successive gantries – from 50 to 40, to 60, to 50 to 60!

As the author says, trying to drive at 40 mph when the traffic volume suggests 70 is reasonable is not easy – some vehicles slow down and others do not.

When he queried this nonsense with the Highways Agency, no explanation was offered as the system is supposed to work automatically (the only manual intervention on the M42 is when the fourth “hard shoulder” running lane is opened or closed but that did not apply at the time).

Railway Bridge Closure



Traffic in South-East London faces considerable disruption in the coming year because the bridge over the railway line on the Chislehurst/Orpington Road (the A208) is to close for a year to enable the bridge to be rebuilt.

It has had a width restriction (see photo above) for some time so buses and HGVs have already been diverted, but all vehicles will soon have to find another route.

The main diversion route is via Leasons Hill, Cray Avenue and Poverest Rd.

This will impose additional traffic on Cray Avenue which already suffers from significant congestion during much of the day.

As a result the plan is to suspend right turns off Cray Avenue, and to suspend the bus lane on that road also. *(Editor: one might ask, if removing the bus lane is the answer to congestion in this case why not make that change permanent? But I don't necessarily expect a sensible answer to that question).*

The bridge will definitely close on November 7th to all traffic for about a year, although it is hoped to maintain use by pedestrians and cyclists for most of the period. The railway line will not be affected at all.

Note that your editor expects traffic will find alternative routes (or alternative modes of transport) relatively quickly but you may want to avoid the area for the first couple of weeks.

TfL Surplus Staff

The TaxPayers' Alliance has uncovered details of how Transport for London (TfL) deal with employees that are out of a job and might otherwise be made redundant. They have what is termed a "redeployment unit" for employees "who have been displaced and transferred prior to securing an alternative role in TfL or leaving the organisation". The maximum time someone is supposed to be in this unit is 4 months, but it is clear that some people stay there much longer – presumably doing nothing.

According to the Taxpayers' Alliance, 19 employees have been on the scheme for more than 500 days, on an average salary of around £44,000. Some 71 employees have been in the unit for more than 150 days.

(Editor: one simply cannot conceive of any commercial organisation running such a scheme. Staff would be redeployed, found some useful temporary position, or sacked).

Speed Limit Changes



The recent proposals from the Transport Minister to raise the motorway speed limit to 80 mph, caused a lot of criticism from some circles. Both Greenpeace and Prof. Stephen Glaister of the RAC Foundation claimed that it might increase fuel consumption (and by implication, emissions) by 20%.

The latter person said on their web site that "There are good reasons for making 80 the new 70, and good reasons not to. Drivers travelling that 10 mph quicker might reach their destination sooner, but are likely to use about 20% more fuel and emit 20% more CO₂".

When challenged on that statement, there was some backtracking and it was subsequently removed from their web site. He acknowledged that even based on the figures available from the DfT (which are somewhat historic and modern vehicles might do better), for the average car the increase might be 9%. It would be higher though for less aerodynamic vehicles such as vans (if they were permitted to travel at 80, and many already have speed limiters fitted). Of course the key question is how many drivers would actually travel at significantly higher speeds. Many are already doing higher speeds, and most would surely not move by the full 10 mph. The ABD has always argued that the 85th percentile of free flowing traffic is the safest and best speed limit to use, and they suggest that any increase in fuel consumption is likely to be insignificant if the motorway speed limit was changed. The economic benefits from travel time savings also more than offset the higher fuel costs.

(Editor: Prof. Glaister is certainly an odd person to head up the RAC Foundation. He often speaks out in support of anti-motorist policies – for example he supports congestion charging schemes and promoted the merits of speed cameras in the recent report on that subject. Although the Foundation's primary object is stated to be research, Prof. Glaister is often contacted by the media to speak on topical issues as someone who might represent the motorist. But he seems to speak without doing proper research which might damage the interests of responsible road users rather than assist in the debate).

Accident Information



A very useful new web site is www.crashmap.co.uk. It shows the locations of road traffic accidents – just type in a post code and you can see all the accidents for the last few years (at least up to the end of 2010 with more data to follow).

If you click on a specific accident, you can obtain a lot more information about it, for a fee of £1. Presumably this data comes from the Stats19 reports filed by the police – so it only covers personal injury accidents of course.

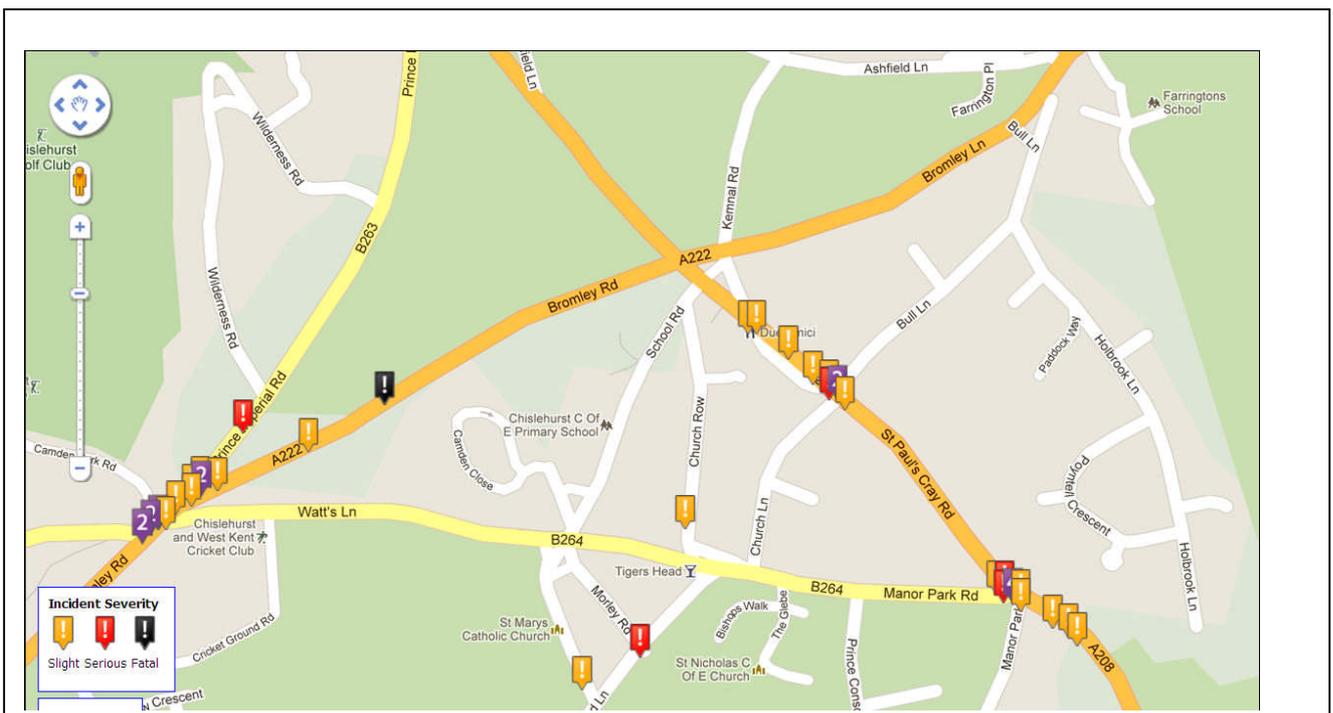
(Editor: This will be enormously useful. Although the data has always been available from your local authority, it might have taken time to obtain it and even require a Freedom of Information Act request. Having it in graphical map format also assists. Obtaining accurate accident data is the first step when looking at any complaints about road safety in any particular road. The charge is probably not unreasonable for the time saving it provides, but of course the information would be often free if obtained from an FOI Act request. Below is an example of a map around where I live in Chislehurst – some well known accident spots are clearly shown).

Incidentally Watts Lane/Manor Park Road, the road mentioned in the first article in this edition with speed humps on it, is at the bottom of the map. You might argue that the humps have clearly prevented accidents in recent years, but you would be wrong. The map would have looked the same before the humps were installed, with almost all the accidents at the junctions at either end of the road (with Bromley Road and St. Pauls Cray Road). In reality a lot of money was wasted installing humps to tackle a non-existent problem, when it should have been spent on tackling the accidents at the junctions.

News Snapshots

Sundry news in the last few weeks that is worth a mention is as follows:

+ One correspondent has complained that permit parking costs in Greenwich have doubled from £42 to £84, but she was particularly annoyed because she pays it while she says the council complains that they have no staff to patrol the roads so people park there anyway without paying.



+ A report in LTT suggests that since guard rails have been removed in some London streets, pedestrian accident figures have risen. Since 2009 TfL have removed 63.4km of guardrails (31% of the total). They have monitored the results and at the 808 sites, accidents have risen by 5% with the number of casualties rising by 7% (some “collisions” result in more than one casualty). TfL said that overall slight pedestrian casualties rose by 8% in London in 2010, so this might simply be consistent with the overall trend.

+ The Daily Telegraph ran a report that residents of some London boroughs are suffering from film mania – where “Hollywood” camera crews take over streets to shoot big budget films and the local council bans parking on their behalf. It reported that feelings were running especially high in Primrose Hill where a street was closed for 5 hours for ten minutes shooting recently. Camden refuses to compensate residents or make alternative parking arrangements which is pretty typical of the attitude of Camden to car users in general.

+ It seems that inexperienced drivers not only run risks, but simply taking a driving test can be dangerous. In south-east London, six examiners and one candidate have ended up in hospital after being injured in the past two years, and another 10 suffered minor injuries. It is not clear what the cause of these injuries were.

+ Richmond council is writing to 18,500 vehicle owners who were wrongly given penalties as a result of the use of “CCTV cars” from April 2009 to April 2011. They are being invited to apply for a refund. The CCTV cars did not have the correct licence. Originally the council were not going to volunteer refunds but have apparently changed their mind on this.

+ TfL has stopped issuing printed receipts for Congestion Charge payments, which seems rather odd bearing in mind that it now costs £10 per day.

+ The Transport Statistics User Group (TSUG) recently published some interesting statistics on UK travel. In the UK generally, three out of 4 people work within 30 minutes of home, but the picture in London is very different – only 40% do so, and 16% are more than an hour distant.

Nationwide 71% of people drive to work, but only 35% in London. UK road traffic, road casualties and fuel consumed all fell in 2010. Total road length in the UK has only increased by 1% in the last ten years.

+ TSUG also reported that although vehicles exceeding the 30 mph speed limit had fallen over the last 10 years, on motorways the picture was very different. Here 49% of cars exceeded the 70 mph limit and 14% exceeded 80 mph. It is surely realistic therefore to increase the motorway speed limit.

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About The Association of British Drivers (ABD)

The ABD is the leading independent organisation which represents the interests of private motorists in the United Kingdom. We campaign to protect the rights of individual road users and believe that road transport is a beneficial and essential element in the UK transport infrastructure. We oppose excessive taxation of motorists and are against tolls and road usage charging. We also campaign for more enlightened road safety policies. The Association is a “not for profit” voluntary organisation which is financially supported primarily by its individual members. More information on the ABD is available from our web site at www.abd.org.uk

Note that the ABD maintains a list of members who are familiar with individual London boroughs and may be able to help with information on local issues in those boroughs. The current list is below. If any other members would like to keep an eye on local news and advise on local transport issues then please let me know. Roger Lawson

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