



4<sup>th</sup> November 2003

Lynne Featherstone  
Chairperson  
London Assembly Transport Committee  
City Hall  
The Queen's walk  
London SE1 2AA

Dear Ms Featherstone

**INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPACT OF SPEED HUMPS**

Thank you for inviting the London Ambulance Service NHS Trust (LAS) to assist in your investigation into the impact of speed humps in London. We hope our views will be helpful.

It is important for us to stress right from the start that of course the LAS supports initiatives which reduce road traffic accidents. After all, our organisation exists to care for the sick and injured and it is our crews that are called to deal with the results of such accidents.

However, we are concerned at the type of 'traffic calming' measures introduced across London, especially speed humps which have a negative impact on the service we provide to London.

While recognising that excessive speed both causes traffic accidents and contributes to the level of injury suffered, the LAS believes that the proliferation of speed humps (and some other traffic management schemes) has a detrimental affect on our ability to respond as quickly as possible in 'life-threatening' situations.

We believe there have been a number of studies relating to 'speed humps' but at this time the LAS is not aware of any significant UK-based report that has made any scientific study into the overall effects of speed humps, including their impact on ambulance response times; the potential consequences of delayed responses by emergency vehicles to 'life threatening' situations; and their effect on the comfort of patients being conveyed to hospital.

We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in any such research if it were to be commissioned.



The LAS submits that avoidable death and suffering among Londoners should be seen in the wider context. At the present time there are some 2000 deaths a year from external causes in London, of which about 280/300 are road deaths, 939 from other accidents (falls, fires, drowning, poisoning etc).

In addition there are some 5100 deaths from Myocardial Infarction (MI) (source- London Health Observatory). It is hard to say what proportion of these could have been avoidable but it is suggested that 'road deaths' are but a part of a much larger picture.

In respect of MI, the LAS submits that there is a clear and generally accepted clinical link between response time and survival and this includes the time taken to transport a patient to hospital.

The Department of Health requires the LAS to attend 75% of life threatening calls within eight minutes. Clearly the LAS is committed to this goal and submits that speed humps are a contributory factor in delaying our speed of response.

It should also be noted that in terms of MI, the target time from the 999 call being taken to the patient arriving at hospital is 30 minutes. This is particularly challenging as it includes the time taken to receive the call, despatch details to an emergency vehicle, travel to the location, stabilise and treat the patient, place them into the ambulance and drive to hospital. Within this process, a whole series of adverse road and traffic conditions may contribute to delay

This Service believes that it could probably save more lives if the overall traffic flow were to be improved. Just among the 5000 cardiac care victims that we try to resuscitate this could possibly save about 500 lives. In addition a minute gained in reaching other life threatening cases could potentially save hundreds of lives.

Not only do speed humps delay our response to calls they can also lengthen the patient's journey to hospital. Furthermore, they can have an adverse effect on patient comfort - as well as the inevitable jolting that can be experienced there is also the need on occasions when negotiating speed humps for the paramedic or emergency medical technician (EMT) to delay or temporarily cease their treatment of a patient.

Other 'traffic calming' initiatives that can impact on our service include chicanes and width barriers, pedestrian areas and blocked streets. However, the LAS also acknowledges that there are a variety of good reasons why such traffic management measures are deployed.

As far as damage caused by speed humps is concerned, most people would think it possibly unlikely that a large, relatively high vehicle like an ambulance would suffer damage. However, nowadays the first unit to be deployed to 'life threatening' cases is often likely to be a fast response car. The transport department of the LAS did become concerned that the sumps of these vehicles were being damaged by speed humps and as a result has fitted 'sump guards' to these vehicles.



# London Ambulance Service

NHS Trust

The LAS is the largest and busiest ambulance service in the UK and an integral part of London life as evidenced by the fact that we deal with 1.1 million 999 calls per year. We are committed to playing our part in improving the overall health of our capital city and it is for this reason we are willing to assist you as much as possible with your investigation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I – or any of my colleagues – can be of further help.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Bradley  
Chief Executive