



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 33 (April 2005)

In This Issue

- *Biggin Hill Airport Draft Master Plan*
- *Congestion Charging Defeated*
- *The Congestion Charge Con*
- *Borough Spending Plan (BSP)*
- *Transport Local Implementation Plan*
- *All Speed Humps to Go in Two Years?*
- *Burnt Ash Lane Car Park Charges*
- *Mayfield Avenue, Orpington*
- *Bromley Common & Consultation*
- *M11 Consultation*
- *Speed Limit in Court Rd, Orpington*
- *Old Hill Hump Stories*
- *The Local Government Ombudsman*
- *Permit Parking in Beckenham?*
- *Taxed to Park Outside My Front Door*
- *Orpington Car Park and the FOI Act*
- *News Snapshots*
- *B.B.R.A.G. Information and Contacts*

Editorial

This is a feature packed issue with two contributed articles on the subjects of congestion charging and permit parking schemes (or CPZs if you like TLAs - three letter acronyms for the jargon free).

Other articles cover the proposals for Biggin Hill Airport which are arousing a lot of local ire and the Bromley Transport Local Implementation Plan (LIP - yet another TLA).

The effectiveness of the new Freedom of Information Act, and the Local Government Ombudsman are also covered. Don't forget to write in with comments on any of these subjects if you get the urge.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Biggin Hill Airport Draft Master Plan



The operators of Biggin Hill Airport have issued a "Master Plan" for future development of the airport. The plan envisages "*limited growth*" and "*small scale development*" but also includes the introduction of some scheduled flights, and extended operating hours. This is despite the fact that their attempt to reinterpret the existing lease so as to permit scheduled flights was thrown out by a judge last year.

Note that the airport is operated by a lease from Bromley Council and the terms of the lease only permit existing "general aviation" (which means private hire flights), private flying, training activities and aircraft maintenance, plus limits operating hours..

Residents of Bromley, and councillors, have consistently rejected any major expansion of this airport due to the extra noise that would be

created. There are also concerns about the inadequate transport facilities with no rail line through Biggin Hill and only local roads with no easy access to the M25. In essence, residents generally seem to feel that the airport should pretty much stay as it is, and no way do they want it to become another major London airport.

Note that the Draft Master Plan is not a Planning Application and the operators still have the legal problem of the lease to overcome, but the council is considering the matter even so (as to exactly why is not clear). Please send your comments to Bromley Council, to your local councillor, or to the airport operators at: Master Plan Consultation, Biggin Hill Airport, TN16 3BN (email: masterplan@bigginhillairport.com) as soon as possible.

At the head of this article is a copy of the campaign poster from opposition group FLIGHTPATH.

Congestion Charging Defeated



Proposals to introduce a £2 congestion charge for drivers in Edinburgh have been soundly voted down in a referendum. Of 290,000 eligible voters, only 16% voted in favour with 46% voting against (a 62% total turn-out which compares favourably with election polls in the city). The ratio of opposers to supporters was therefore almost 3 to 1.

One of the strong supporters of this scheme was Professor David Begg who previously sat on the City's Transport Committee as an Edinburgh Councillor and was an active promoter of public transport schemes. He is also head of the government Commission for Integrated Transport which has advocated restrictions on car use, rationing of road space, and a halt to investment in the road network. It certainly raises questions whether road pricing will ever be acceptable to the public and suggests that the policies of the Commission should be reconsidered.

The defeat was ascribed to opposition by both businesses and local residents pressure groups, but it seems that the complexity of the scheme

and the prospective poor economics counted against it.

(Editor's Comment: Well let's face it, when did a Scotsman ever want to pay money for anything when he could avoid it. Or perhaps they looked at how the scheme in London operates and decided that they didn't like what they saw. Of course the vote is even more surprising if you consider that much of the population in the region that would have paid the charge did not get to vote because they live outside the city boundary.

But it's worth reflecting on what would happen in London if the people were permitted to vote on the Congestion Charge in that city. Unfortunately Ken Livingstone has not only blocked any such vote, but has consistently ignored public opinion in the consultation processes that have been undertaken.

Your editor would certainly like to see such a vote, and personally will continue to oppose such schemes until the technology is better and cheaper, and it is clear that there are substantial benefits. As it is these kind of schemes seem to be supported primarily by anti-car groups based on very unsound arguments and ridiculous economics.

The following article on the subject of Congestion Charging was written by road safety campaigner Paul Smith, who lives in Scotland, before the vote was taken in Edinburgh and highlights some of the issues with congestion charging in general).

An interesting site if you want to learn more about road tolls is the web site at: <http://www.notolls.org.uk>

The Congestion Charge Con by Paul Smith

Edinburgh faces a vote on congestion charging. Will you vote for a charge to enter the country's capital city? I certainly wouldn't. The congestion charging advocates have not thought it through properly and their threat of gridlock is false.

Why do we worry about congestion? It causes delay and if it's too bad we won't be able to travel because it will take too long. It really is this simple - we have to avoid gridlock because we can't afford to sit in our cars for hours on end.

The powers that be tell us that if we don't act there will be "gridlock", but strangely they never show any examples of all the other gridlocked cities elsewhere. Why is this? The truth is that there aren't any. Not anywhere in the world, and there's a very simple explanation. Time is valuable. If a journey takes too long, we don't go at all or we seek an alternative. In other words if congestion rises then we avoid it.

Conversely, if congestion falls then we are more likely to have time to travel.

Suppose it took you 4 hours to drive to work, and another 4 hours to drive home again. What would you do? Change your job? Travel by a different means? Move house? One thing is for sure - you wouldn't sit in traffic for 8 hours every day. You would find an alternative. An extreme example, perhaps, but most journey decisions start with the question: "Do I have time?" If congestion increases then more and more potential travellers don't have time to travel.

If they don't have time then they don't travel, and that tends to reduce the degree of congestion. So more congestion leads to less traffic which leads to less congestion, and less congestion leads to more traffic which leads to more congestion. It's a self-balancing, self-limiting, self-regulating seesaw. When kept free of interference the road network maintains a reasonable balance between delay and throughput by virtue of normal human behaviour.

Business use of the roads is even more sensitive. Time is money for every business. If too much time is being wasted, it's very much in the nature of business to seek a solution. Many businesses have already done so - they have located onto industrial estates with good road connections.

That's why there aren't any gridlocked cities. There never will be. People simply won't choose to sit in gridlock. Of course there might be a breakdown or a crash that causes exceptional traffic for a while. But no congestion charge could address that problem.

If a congestion charge is introduced, those with least cash will be discouraged from travelling. The roads will have less traffic and flow more

efficiently, but this won't last long because other people with more money will take full advantage of the improved conditions. If it takes less time to travel then road users who were previously time constrained will again choose to travel.

- Official figures show absolutely no national increase in traffic on urban A roads since 1996[1], despite an 11% increase in traffic overall.[2]
- If we look at central London, we find a 5% decrease in car traffic between 1990 and 2000.[3], during which period national roads traffic grew by 14%.[2]
- Morning peak car travel into central London declined by over 20% through the 1990s, (before the congestion charge). [4] We suspect that loss of road space was a large influence.

They tell us that nationally congestion costs £20 billion per year. Now that's a congestion charge if ever there was one. Why isn't it working? Or is that what it takes to really regulate congestion?

References

[1] Table 2.1b:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_transstats/documents/page/dft_transstats_030354.pdf

[2] Table 3 RCGB 2003

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_transstats/documents/downloadable/dft_transstats_022248.pdf

[3] Table 4c

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/pdffdocs/stats2001.pdf>

[4] Table 1.5.1

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/pdffdocs/ltr/london-travel-report-2004.pdf>

Notes

London congestion charging started on 17th Feb 2003.

London has suffered a significant increase in particulate air pollutants since the congestion charge. See Table 8.1 in:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/pdfdocs/ltr/london-travel-report-2004.pdf>

Transport for London claim a substantial success for their congestion charge with a 33% reduction in private cars. But there has also been a 20% increase in taxis, a 25% increase in buses and a 12% increase in motorcyclists. (see page 50 in <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/pdfdocs/ltr/london-travel-report-2004.pdf>)

When we questioned 10 London taxi drivers in Summer 2004, 9 of them insisted that the congestion charge had made absolutely no difference to Central London traffic. With the extra taxis and extra buses staying in the zone for much longer than private cars, it is entirely plausible that TfL's figures are correct but that congestion is unchanged.

Contact: Paul Smith (tel: 01862 832000, email: psmith@safespeed.org.uk)

Borough Spending Plan (BSP)

The Borough Spending Plan (BSP) for expenditure on transport in the borough was published last year, and covers the years 2005/6 and 2007/8. It is supposedly in accordance with the Ken Livingstone's London Transport Strategy and basically outlines what funding requests the local borough will be making to Transport for London (TfL). There are a few points worth highlighting:

More Permit Parking Schemes

The report says "*Within the Council's programme for reducing congestion, it is proposed to expand its Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) in order to reduce parking stress and improve access to non-car modes and especially buses.*" It then goes on to propose new schemes for Beckenham and Petts Wood.

(Editor's Comments: What do permit parking schemes have to do with reducing congestion? And how do they "improve access" in any way? This is surely utter nonsense. Permit parking schemes actually make access worse so far as the general public are concerned as they limit parking to local residents only. And they have absolutely no impact on traffic congestion whatsoever).

Expenditure Rising

The proposals in the BSP document mean that total expenditure in the borough would rise from £2.8 million in 2004/5 to £4.5 million in 2005/6, but fall back to £2.1 million in 2006/7.

Road maintenance expenditure would be static at about £2 million, but there is exceptional expenditure of £790,000 on bridge strengthening in 2004/5 which accounts for a lot of the increase.

However road safety expenditure would rise from £527,000 to £700,000 in 2005/6, expenditure on "bus stop accessibility" would rise from £50,000 to £90,000 and "other schemes" would rise from £198,000 to £968,000. The latter included £150,000 for the "London Cycle Network", £70,000 for the proposed CPZs mentioned above, and a number of schemes around schools. But a lot of these submissions may of course not be approved and funded by TfL.

Road Safety Plan

The BSP document does include an update on the Boroughs Road Safety Plan and some useful statistics on road accident data. One useful table shows that Bromley actually ranks 5th among all 33 London Boroughs for "all casualties per 100,000 head of population". The KSI figures for motorcyclists and car users are not as good though, which is disconcerting. The former are a rising problem.

Postscript

After the above was written the "settlement" from Transport for London was announced. Only £3.0 million of the submitted bids of £4.5 million were actually approved. Road and bridge maintenance was substantially cut, and £54,000 requested for "Education, Training & Publicity" on road safety was rejected altogether. *(Editor's Comment: This is a great shame as such programmes have been shown to be very effective in reducing accidents in Bromley to the young).*

However the good news is that TfL rejected the permit parking schemes for Petts Wood and Beckenham. It seems that they expect local boroughs to pay for such schemes in future but

in Bromley there is rarely any local budget available for such items so it means they are unlikely to be considered. Or was it also perhaps that TfL did not understand the logic behind such schemes either?

A scheme to improve access to Beckenham Station was also unfortunately rejected.

European Funding to the Rescue?

One additional source of funds for transport schemes in Bromley that is being pursued is an initiative to obtain funds from the European Community for "Mobility Management Services".

To quote from the council report "*Mobility Management is a technique used to tackle the native impacts of congestion, in terms of health, economic prosperity and overall quality of life. It does this by promoting personal choice when travelling, so that people are aware of all the transport options that are available to them when making a journey. Mobility management is not 'anti-car', as it accepts that all methods of transport are an essential part of a fully integrated transport system, but seeks to provide users with the information necessary for them to take a travel choice most appropriate to their journey.*"

Bromley will be the lead partner in a project for which total funding of £1.1 million would be obtained over three years. It is hoped that this and other European funding might relieve Bromley from over dependence on TfL for funding of transport schemes.

Transport Local Implementation Plan

Bromley Council have also recently published a "Consultation Draft Local Implementation Plan 2006-2011". This basically says how they are going to implement Ken Livingstone's London Transport Strategy and other detail local transport plans for the next few years.

It's over 400 pages long and can be seen on Bromley Council's web site at: http://www.bromley.gov.uk/content/transport/tranps_strategy/lip_transport.html . Public comments are invited but are required by the 4th April. BBRAG will be submitting some comments (which will probably be put on the

News section of our web site, and will be participating in consultation "Workshops".

All Speed Humps to Go in Two Years?

Tim Yeo, shadow transport secretary for the Conservatives, tabled an amendment to the Road Safety Bill currently going through Parliament. The amendment proposed that all new speed hump construction be stopped, and councils be obliged to dig up existing ones within two years.

(Editor' Comments: An admirable and justifiable policy and it is a pity that this amendment is not likely to become law. But if the Conservatives adopted this as a policy in their forthcoming general election campaign, they might see a surprisingly positive response from the electorate.

Your editor and Joshi Patel, one of the traders at the foot of Old Hill, appeared on Radio 5 Live on this subject. It included the interviewer recording a conversation while we drove over one of the humps in that road, and me saying "ouch" at the crucial point.

Note that the Road Safety Bill also includes new provisions to ban speed camera detection devices. How that is to improve road safety is not made clear, but it seems to be another infringement of personal liberty, just like the proposed Control Orders Bill that was being debated at the same time).

Burnt Ash Lane Car Park Charges

Bromley Council was proposing to introduce charges in the car park at the rear of the shops in Burnt Ash Lane. Currently it is a free car park, and although usage has risen after the introduction of a permit parking scheme in nearby roads, there is normally spare capacity in it.

The report to the council on this subject claimed only four objection letters had been received, but before George Taylor, Environment Portfolio Holder, could decide on the matter a 700 name petition was presented to the council by local shopkeepers. The item was hurriedly withdrawn from consideration for further investigation.

Mayfield Avenue, Orpington



Residents of Mayfield Avenue, Orpington (picture above) are becoming incensed that still nothing has been done about parked cars blocking the road. The carriageway is reduced to one lane, and numerous “contretemps” result when drivers coming from different directions refuse to give way.

The parked cars are probably those of commuters who relocated from nearer the station when parking restrictions were extended a few years back (*Editor: a classic example of parking schemes requested by residents simply moving the nuisance onto someone else*).

There has been extended consultation on a proposed scheme (in fact over the years, more has been spent on consultation in the area than it would have cost to paint a yellow line to stop the problem), but this has again been deferred pending a review of parking in the whole area while the Station Road multi-storey car park is demolished.

Meanwhile the problem continues to get worse, with no resolution in sight.

(Editor's Comments: My solution would be to just have a double yellow line down one side of Mayfield Avenue which would immediately put a stop to the obstruction problem, or even better, remove the parking restrictions west of Knoll Rise that created the problem in the first place).

Bromley Common and Consultation



We covered the lack of proper consultation on the reduced speed limit on Bromley Common in our last edition. It subsequently transpired that the person at Transport for London (TfL) responsible for this change did not even have the existing traffic speed data for this road, and therefore clearly did not review it before deciding on what road safety measures to introduce.

This is contrary to government guidelines set in Department for Transport Circular Roads 1/93 (available on the internet). The following are two specific things it says:

"Specific speed limits cannot, on their own, be expected to reduce vehicle speed if they are set at a level substantially below that at which drivers would choose to drive in the absence of a limit.", and "Speed limits should be lowered only when a consequent reduction in vehicle speed can reasonably be expected. A survey of traffic speeds should indicate whether a lower limit, will, in the absence of regular enforcement, be likely to result in lower actual speed."

Clearly if the existing speed of traffic suggests that other measures were more appropriate (such as road engineering), to ensure safety and/or reduce speed, then the approach of introducing a lower speed limit with a speed camera to enforce it is an inappropriate and probably over costly solution.

M11 Consultation

Many of our members probably use the M11 to access the Eastern Counties or the North of England. The Highways Agency has started a public consultation on their "route management strategy" and all 150 pages of it can be seen on the internet at:

http://www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/motorways/m11/london_cambridge/index.htm

In summary the existing problems were seen to be:

- Congestion on the two lane sections due to slow moving lorries in the inside lane (*Editor: and also blocking the outside lane when attempting to overtake when they can't due to their speed limiters*).

- Congestion and accident problems caused by poorly designed junctions, and inadequate exit points.

- Excessive accidents on some sections in comparison with other motorways.

- A requirement for more service stations, and road user information displays.

There is particular concern that with the expansion of Stansted Airport, and the Thames Valley Gateway generally, the congestion problems will also get significantly worse.

Speed Limit in Court Road, Orpington

There has been a proposal made by Bromley Council to reduce the speed limit from 50 mph to 40 mph in Court Road, Orpington (this is the extension of the Orpington bypass that leads to the M25). The justification by the council was "*To reduce the excess speed of traffic and related accidents in the specified area*".

However, when your editor obtained the accident and traffic speed data from the council, this showed in fact that there were only three "slight" accidents in the last three years on this stretch of road, all at the junction with Church

Road. Neither was there any evidence that these accidents were speed related.

Bearing in mind the nature of the junction, the number and type of accidents hardly appear unusual, but if anything should be done, it is improvement of the junction, not a general speed reduction on the whole stretch of road.

The speed data shows that the 85th percentile speeds were 47.6 mph and 49.8 mph in the two directions, so based on government guidelines the correct speed limit is 50 mph, not 40 mph. And setting a 40 mph limit is likely to result in excessive "enforcement" action to get traffic to adhere to it.

(Editor's Comments: Yet another example of a speed limit being set based on no evidence, and at an unrealistic and inappropriate level).

Old Hill Hump Stories



Above is a picture of a Ferrari 355 Spider, parked on a speed cushion on the lower part of Old Hill. As you can see, it grounds on the hump. In fact with a driver and passenger in, it is impossible to cross these humps and caused significant damage when the driver attempted to do so. As he says, a car that adheres to European regulations should not ground on road humps, and in Holland the council would be forced to remove such humps.

Another story of the impact of the humps on Old Hill is given in the letter below from Des Andrews, who recently broke his hip:

"I have recently had cause to be taken by ambulance from Brenchley Close to Beckenham Hospital. The ambulance drove down Old Hill and up Chislehurst Road to Logs Hill, as he had another

patient to pick up en route. As a result, I have a very personal experience of the great discomfort, and delay, caused by speed "cushions" along this route. I fully support your efforts to have the cushions removed and replaced by alternative traffic calming measures".

The Local Government Ombudsman

BBRAG members complained to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) some months ago about various actions (and inactions) of Bromley Council in regards to the Old Hill traffic calming scheme. A final decision is still awaited at the time of writing, but it does not look hopeful that our complaints will be upheld.

Older members may recall that we also complained to the LGO about actions by council staff on the Watts Lane/Manor Park Road traffic calming scheme which was the cause of the formation of BBRAG. In that case a council officer, who has since left, said that residents of Manor Park were not consulted because they "were likely to oppose the scheme". As they were one group likely to be most affected, this was clearly a case of bias in the consultation process, but the LGO rejected our arguments.

You may be interested to hear this is not unusual. In reality in 2003/2004 there were 11,600 complaints processed by the LGO. And how many were upheld - only 180 as cases of "maladministration", although some kind of "local settlement" was agreed in another 3,188. The vast majority of complaints are rejected, and that excludes the several thousand that are considered "premature" or outside the jurisdiction of the LGO.

The number of complaints accepted about road engineering schemes is particularly low - it seems that if you have a complaint about how your housing benefit has been calculated then you have a good chance of getting it resolved in some manner, but anything that concerns serious issues or matters of principle are likely to be rejected.

And why are such low numbers accepted? Well it could be because two of the three English ombudsmen are former local authority chief

officers and all three deputy ombudsmen worked in local government previously.

A Committee of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is examining the effectiveness of the LGO, but to your editor it seems at present to be utterly ineffective, and hardly worth the £10 million per year that it costs.

Permit Parking in Beckenham

Bromley Council is consulting residents around Beckenham Hospital about the possible implementation of a permit parking scheme. The hospital is being redeveloped which will bring additional pressure to bear on parking in local streets such as Westfield Road, Hayne Road, Elm Road, Cedars Road, Durban Road, Belmont Road, Balgowan Road, Hampden Avenue, Shaftesbury Road, Faversham Road and Croydon Road.

BBRAG consistently opposes such schemes, and if you want to do likewise please write to Mike Hammond at Bromley Council quoting reference ADE(TP)/MH/H12.27Be.

Our views are very much those of Philip Johnston who lives in Merton and wrote the following article that was recently published in the Daily Telegraph (reprinted with his permission in a condensed form).

Taxed to Park Outside My Front Door Philip Johnston

From today, our household is the proud possessor of that indispensable accessory of modern suburban life, a resident's parking permit. This menace has taken a long time coming to our corner of south London. Since we do not live in the town centre or on a road that could conceivably be regarded as a main thoroughfare, a controlled parking zone (CPZ) was considered unnecessary by most residents.

However, the council in its infinite wisdom, and after something laughably called a local consultation exercise, has scrawled yellow and white lines all over our extravagantly humped road, erected signs everywhere and, for good measure, thrown in a few cash meters that,

apparently, are legally required on the periphery of the zone to ensure that non-residents can also park.

There are two extraordinary features of this exercise that will, no doubt, be familiar to many readers who have already gone through the CPZ initiation. First, a local referendum was held to ascertain whether the residents wanted it or not. We didn't; but the council has gone ahead anyway. This sleight of hand was achieved by a method beloved of the European Commission when it comes to getting recalcitrant countries to sign up to unpopular measures: just keep asking the question until you get the answer you want. To this end, the CPZ was introduced in one street where a majority had voted yes, even though a majority of the residents overall had voted no; a year or so later, by which time cars had been displaced from the new zone into surrounding streets, the refuseniks were invited to vote again. This time, apparently, there was a majority in favour among the remaining residents, though for the life of me I cannot recall this second round of voting.

Secondly, the CPZ has created problems where none existed before. Eight potential parking spaces have been taken away by the over-zealous use of yellow paint, so that large sections of the road where it was once possible to park are now out of bounds, even to residents with passes. The fact remains that there was no need for this CPZ and no demand for it until the council created one. Yet now, in order to park outside our house, where we have lived for many years without causing congestion or blocking the road to any emergency vehicle, we must pay £60, plus another £1 for every visitor's permit. And if we refuse, we are fined and have our car towed away.

This regime might just be acceptable if we lived close to the town centre where people park to shop and regularly take the few spaces remaining to residents. But even here, if you are a resident paying local taxes (and road taxes), why should you have to pay to park outside your own front door unless you have more than one car?

Over the last ten or so years, we have watched as the CPZ tide has spread out from the town centre, introducing parking restrictions, meters and double yellow lines into leafy lanes where there has never been a problem with congestion and where to be charged for parking is nothing less than extortion, since it fulfils no function other than to boost the borough's revenues.

By a perverse logic, the council says it has to charge in order to raise the funds to pay for its traffic management strategy; yet this has become so bloated only because it has extended its remit into areas where it is neither needed nor wanted.

Of course the administration of CPZs is expensive - but only because there are so many of them. There is now an army of bureaucrats working in local council traffic management offices up and down the country drawing lines on fancy maps to irritate the life out of their taxpayers without ever visiting the residents themselves to ask them what they want. No doubt there are occasions when people who desperately want a CPZ are prevented from having one by the objections of the majority. But I suspect the opposite happens far more regularly, with councils insisting on getting their way because of the money involved.

The powers on which local authorities rely to designate on-street parking spaces for permit holders, and to charge for the use of those spaces, are contained in the 1984 Road Traffic Regulations Act. It is quite clear under this legislation that charges must not be levied to raise revenue, but only to make appropriate traffic management provision. This was underlined by the High Court after a judicial review of an early CPZ.

But if there are already plenty of free spaces for residents and if, as a result of introducing the CPZ, the number of spaces declines, it becomes difficult for a council to claim that its policy is anything other than a revenue-raising exercise. Lurking behind all those claims about traffic management and anti-congestion measures is, quite simply, a parking tax.

Orpington Car Park and the FOI Act



The Station Road Multi-storey Car Park in Orpington was commonly described by council staff and councillors as "nearing the end of its useful life" when the planning application by

Tesco to replace it by a superstore was being discussed. However, when people asked to see the independent survey reports that had been obtained by the council on the state of the car park, this was consistently refused.

Why these requests were refused is not clear, but it is not the first time your editor has found council staff less than open and he has had to complain before about needless refusals to disclose information. But the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations, which came into force at the beginning of this year, provided an opportunity to force disclosure.

Your editor therefore requested a copy of those documents and related communications on the 30th January. After various delays, and the payment of £154.40, he received the requested information on the 19th March. This is not a great performance bearing in mind that the information is required to be supplied within 20 working days. The cost incurred arises from the "research" time and the copying of several hundred pages of documents and emails. At least residents of Bromley can be assured that the council is recovering its costs in providing such information.

What can be learned from the documents? A brief summary is follows:

Structural surveys of this car park were requested as far back as 1999, when a review of all older multi-storey car parks was recommended following the collapse of one in Wolverhampton. A structural survey was undertaken in March 2000 and there were doubts raised about the load bearing capability of

the structure. In fact it was even proposed to close part of the car park considered to be at risk at one point. However after further investigation and review, this view was changed and it was concluded by November 2001 that there was no immediate problem.

Contemporaneously it seems the car park site had been identified as a "development opportunity" in a report to councillors in May 2000. This later led to the production of a draft "Planning Brief" in December 2001 and the issue of "Sales Particulars" to potential bidders in March 2002.

Another investigation of the car park was an "inspection report" in September 2000. This showed many defects including hairline cracks in many parts of the structure, poor previous repair work and damage by water ingress. It was recommended that concrete repairs costing £65,000 be undertaken and a sealant coating costing £240,000 be installed.

In summary, it seems that the structure was probably ageing, and repair costs were rising, but it is not clear whether that made retention of the car park unviable or not. It would seem that council planners were putting a "spin" on the facts, which is why they may not have wished the full story to come out. But clearly the doubts raised on the car park condition back in 2000/2001 resulted in the site being considered for development when it otherwise might not have been.

FOI Information from the DfT

One good approach to publishing information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act is that of the Department for Transport (DfT). They actually have on their web site a list and details of all answers to such requests. See http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_foi/documents/divisionhomepage/033916.hcsp

For example, one answer to an inquirer gave the revenue and expenditure figures for Safety Camera Partnerships in 2003/2004. The figures were respectively £112 million and £92 million.

(Editor' Comments: So in fact the vast majority of revenue is spend on operating these "businesses", and bearing in mind that the above costs exclude

court costs incurred by non-payers or those who plead not guilty, it seems likely that almost nothing goes to support other road safety or policing measures. As they also have had no effect on road deaths in the UK over the last few years, it seems just a way of employing policeman to do very little worthwhile).

News Snapshots

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

+ The number of fines from speed cameras rose to 1.8 million in the last year. Needless to say, a survey by the RAC showed that 72% of drivers thought speed cameras were more about raising revenue than road safety. *(Editor's Comment: On a simple calculation that shows that 6% of drivers will get a fine each year, which means that in less than 20 years, almost everyone will be found guilty, if they are as randomly distributed as I believe they are. Interestingly nobody seems to have studied whether they are other than randomly distributed which would not be a difficult bit of statistical analysis).*

+ The British Medical Journal recently published a review of published research on speed cameras by two lecturers from the University of the West of England. Their comments are that the "the level of evidence is relatively poor" and "most studies did not have satisfactory comparison groups or adequate control for potential confounders". Much of the "research" is not published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, the experimental designs are poor and the statistical methods used often flawed. They suggest that more controlled introduction of such schemes with better evidence collection is required. The full report can be read at: <http://www.safespeed.org.uk/bmj001.pdf>

+ Drunken pedestrians contribute to two million road accidents per year in the UK according to recent research reported in the Daily Mail. Round the clock drinking as recommended by the Government, may make matters worse.

+ The rising cost of parking fines was also covered in recent editions. According to the Daily Telegraph, English councils raised nearly £1billion from parking charges in 2002/2003, which is 50% more than when Labour came to

power. *(Editor's Comment: But as that is so long ago now, I am surprised it's not a larger increase).*

+ Our last edition covered the review of Cycling in London by TfL which was prompted by the death of Victoria McCreery on Blackfriars Bridge after she was crushed under the rear wheels of a bus. The review made some suggestions for policy changes such as 20 mph speed limits on all bridges. However subsequently, novice bus driver Michael Duncan, aged 22, was convicted of causing death by dangerous driving and given a one year prison sentence. *(Editor's Comment: It's all rather odd as blaming the bus driver suggests that there clearly is no systemic problem with the design of cycle lanes in London, and no problem with the design of the one on Blackfriars Bridge, even though it is apparently going to be changed).*

+ It seems that TfL is claiming more success in respect of compliance with the London Congestion Charging scheme. They are now "only" issuing 6000 fines per day.

+ One group that has been formed to oppose the Crossrail project (see edition 30) is the Romford Crossrail Action Group. They are opposed to development of green belt land and adverse environmental effects from the siting of a maintenance depot. See the following web site: <http://www.romfordcag.co.uk> for details. It could be one of many.

+ Road deaths fell by 12% in Germany last year, while in the UK it has taken a decade for road deaths to fall by 8%. Commentators such as Paul Smith of Safe Speed blame the difference on the policies pursued in the UK (eg. oversimplified emphasis on excessive speed as the cause of accidents, excessive expenditure on "token" measures, etc).

+ Mark Thompson hit a speed bump in Thorpedale Road, London N1 while riding a scooter. He fractured his shoulder after being thrown off, but he claims he was riding normally and is an experienced road user, being in his early forties. He is still searching for a lawyer willing to take on his case.

+ Nine people were hospitalised in Reading after a bus hit a speed hump in a bus lane, causing it to halt abruptly. Initially thought to be caused by vandalism, it was later blamed on the driver.

+ Judith McCrorie who lives in Aberdour, Fife, is lodging a petition at Holyrood (the Scottish Parliament) highlighting the health effects of speed humps. She suffers from osteoarthritis and incurs a lot of pain when driving over humps.

+ Councillor Tony Wilkinson and his colleague Chris Phillips have been "deselected" by the Beckenham Conservative party. It seems there was grass roots dissatisfaction with some of their decisions as "executive members" of the council. Tony Wilkinson was head of the Development Control Committee for example which decided on the recent Tesco car park redevelopment in Orpington and it seems there were also complaints about "over-development" in Beckenham in recent years.

+ A proposal to introduce a one-way system in Fishponds Road on Keston Common was rejected by Councillor George Taylor after lots of adverse comments from ward councillors, local residents and fishermen.

+ The record for parking fines generated from one road is claimed to be Alum Rock Road in the Birmingham suburb of Saltley. This produced £334,620 in fines in a year over its 400 yards.

+ The Association of British Drivers have reported, based on DfT research, that buses kill 10 ten times as many pedestrians as cars in relation to the miles travelled. And light goods vehicles are even better than cars at 13 times safer than buses. The fact that "white van man" is also known to be the most likely driver to break the 30 mph speed limit, while buses are least likely, rather confounds the "speed kills" mantra. *(Editor's Comment: This is probably not surprising. Trams are known to be notoriously unsafe for pedestrians and this is almost certainly caused by a combination of poor braking ability and heavy weight of the vehicle. Clearly buses have similar characteristics).*



Contact Information

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B.B.R.A.G. Chairman and Newsletter Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 020-8467-2686, fax: 020-8295-0378, Email: roger.lawson@btclick.com). Contact the above for information on the aims and objectives of B.B.R.A.G. or for membership information (membership costs £9.50 per annum for individuals, or £7.50 if you opt to receive our Newsletter via email, or £50 for corporate membership). B.B.R.A.G. would be happy to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic, transport or road safety issues in the borough.

Our internet web address is:

<http://www.bromleytransport.org.uk>. This contains much useful information including articles extracted from our newsletters. It also contains a "News" page which is updated regularly with items of topical interest.

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BBRAG Background Information

The Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (B.B.R.A.G.) stands for a more democratic and more rational approach to the traffic management problems of the London Borough of Bromley. Our initial formation some years ago was based on opposition to the kind of traffic calming scheme that was being introduced in the borough that simply caused more traffic congestion, and general inconvenience to road users, without any significant benefit in terms of road accident reductions. In fact, the money wasted on such schemes could have been much better spent on actual improvements to road safety in other areas. We now take a more general interest in all transport and associated environmental issues in the borough of Bromley and the greater London area. This includes traffic management schemes, public transport, road safety, parking policies, air pollution, other transport environmental issues such as noise, and associated local and central government policies. Our prime objective is to promote improvements in the transport infrastructure while stopping wasted expenditure on unpopular, ineffective or inappropriate policies.