



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 37 (December 2005)

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Editorial



No the picture on left is not that of your editor, just an excuse for seasonal greetings.

This edition contains one of the best justifications for our campaigns against speed humps that I have ever seen. So read on and be dismayed. Let us hope that the Christmas period gives sufficient time for people to reflect on what this should mean in practical terms in the new year, and not just in Bromley.

Other articles cover the possible granting of more power to Ken Livingstone, and a new campaign on an iniquitous road toll. This edition is slightly shorter than normal so as to get it to you quickly, but the next edition will include such topical matters as the debate on the merits of 4x4 vehicles in London.

So there are lots of controversial matters to write to us about if you have the time and get the urge. Otherwise best wishes for Xmas and the New Year.

Roger Lawson, Editor

The Dangers of Speed Humps Proved



Our last newsletter talked about the fact that another public consultation exercise was taking place on the traffic calming scheme in Old Hill, Chislehurst. But we could not have anticipated that an accident of the kind

that BBRAG and many local residents had foreseen, was about to take place.

On the 4th September 2005, Anja Szkodowski (picture above) was riding a cycle down Old Hill, and did not notice the large, single "cushions" in the centre of the road on the lower part of the hill. That's not particularly surprising as we have previously complained that they became invisible in dappled sunlight and the markings were wearing off also (see the picture below).



Old Hill - Can You See the Humps?

Anja was thrown from her bike and was seriously injured. With breaks to her jaw in three places, and other injuries, she spent three days in hospital and is still undergoing extensive repair work to her teeth.

Fortunately she is young and hence is making a fairly rapid recovery as you can see from the photograph, but there is no denying that this was a "serious" accident, and indeed a potentially fatal one. And her financial loss has been considerable as she was off work for three weeks, apart from the pain and suffering she experienced.

This accident took place on one of the large cushions placed in the centre of the road on the lower part of Old Hill. Both BBRAG and local residents have complained repeatedly over the last two years about the design of this scheme. Those "cushions" do not accord with recommendations laid down by the Government and the design and positioning of these cushions is positively dangerous. And as Anja herself has said: *"All in all I went through the most difficult time of my life. Looking back at that incident I truly believe that my accident could have been avoided as there is no need for such speed humps in this road."*

Will council staff and councillors now admit that what we have been saying was right? Well we will soon know because Councillor George Taylor should announce a final decision of whether anything is to be done about the scheme at his meeting on the 18th January commencing at 6.0 pm at the council's offices. The public of course can attend and hear what Mr Taylor has to say so you may care to go along.

How Accidents Go Unreported

One interesting aspect of this case is the fact that although an ambulance was called at the time of the accident, the police were not. As a result the police were not aware of this incident and it would not have appeared in accident statistics. Also therefore it would not have come to the attention of the council road safety staff. Fortunately Anja became aware of the activities of BBRAG and contacted us, so we could give the appropriate advice.

Even though this would be classified as a "serious" accident in the road traffic accident statistics, it is known that there is substantial underreporting of such incidents. Those involving uninsured people such as cyclists often go unreported. Readers are reminded that all road traffic accidents that involve personal injury, however minor, should be reported to the police as soon as possible. And it's a good idea to ask for them when an ambulance is called.

The Cost of Road Congestion

We are all aware of the personal inconvenience and time wasted as a result of traffic congestion on Britain's roads, due to the failure to invest in more capacity to meet the growth in demand. But what is the impact on businesses?

According to a recent report from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) this amounts to an excess cost of £20 billion per year. Also they claim that the poor transport network, not just roads but rail also, is damaging Britain's competitiveness and discouraging new investment.

Also almost nobody thinks it will get better. A survey by the CBI of 500 companies reported that two thirds thought the situation would get worse in the next five years, with only a fifth expecting any improvement.

The CBI have also complained about the delays that arise in the existing planning system when even minor improvements to the road network are put forward, such as road widening or junction improvements. Government proposals for a "fast-track" procedure for urgent proposals have been blocked by environmental pressure groups. Sir Digby Jones, director-general of the CBI, said *"Someone's going to have to decide what's more important – the yellowback toad or the prosperity of the nation"*.

And what was the Government response to the above? At the same CBI conference where the above was reported, Transport Secretary Alistair Darling announced that the Government was to provide £7.46 million of funding to local and regional authorities to "work on plans for tackling congestion".

In reality what this means is development of new congestion tax schemes. Areas in which such schemes are to be developed are the West Midlands, Bristol, Greater Manchester, Tyne & Wear, Cambridge, Durham and Shropshire. For example the West Midlands are planning to develop a road-user charging system like the one that Mr Darling would like to see rolled out nationwide.

(Editors Comment: So the way the Government wishes to tackle excessive costs for industry due to congestion, is to charge them even more. Is that rational? I think not. Obviously the Government and Mr Darling are handicapped by their preconceived notion that spending money on more road building is evil incarnate and they would rather do anything but take a sensible approach).

TfL Tries to Kill Off a Useful Service



Transport for London (TfL) have tried to stop a service to assist motorists in paying the London Congestion Tax. This service is called "Fivepounds" and can be

seen at www.fivepounds.co.uk on the internet. Effectively what the service does is to put you into a fleet scheme so that you only pay when you enter the congestion charging zone, and run no risk of accidentally getting a fine. There is a small service charge but it would be exceedingly useful for those people who regularly drive into the zone.

The service is currently suspended for new applications while the operators obtain a judicial review of the actions of TfL.

(Editors Comment: This seems to be a straightforward and useful service. Probably the main reason why TfL don't like it is because if a lot of people signed up for this, they would lose the major proportion of their income which comes from penalty charges. So this is yet another example of TfL and the Mayor being more interested in raising money than reducing congestion or making life easier for road users).

Empire Building by Ken Livingstone

Ken Livingstone recently showed how sympathetic he is to the problems of van drivers being wrongly ticketed for parking in London, when all they are doing is delivering goods. He announced that he would like to sort out this problem by having TfL take over all parking enforcement in London. *(Editors Comments: So this is not another empire building bid by Ken then, just his normal sympathy for the downtrodden road user?)*

But some areas where it looks like Ken Livingstone may get more powers are in respect of Planning and Waste Management. These are areas that are primarily the responsibility of the London Boroughs at present, but a consultation document issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) proposes to give the Mayor of London more control over them. It is not totally clear why they think such a transfer is necessary, except for the fact that the Government thinks Ken has been doing a good job in his existing areas of responsibility such as Transport (*Ed: not all Londoners would agree though*). It is also proposed that he takes over Chairmanship of the Metropolitan Police Authority, although Ken seemed somewhat less than enthusiastic about that proposal.

There are also proposals to strengthen the powers of the Greater London Assembly (GLA). At present the GLA is a pretty toothless organisation that the Mayor can effectively ignore in most respects.

The full details of this consultation and how to submit your views are present on the web at: <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161561> . You have until the 22nd February to submit your comments so perhaps this is something with which to fill up the long Xmas holiday break.

(Editors Comment: Waste management seems to be an area that the local boroughs look after reasonably well – certainly that is the case in Bromley so far as the service to residents is concerned. But removing it from local control is yet another example of how matters that directly impinge on borough residents are removed from local democratic control.

It seems to be yet another step in reinstating the centralised, undemocratic and unaccountable style of the Greater London Authority which Margaret Thatcher swept away many years ago. And the increased powers suggested for the Greater London Assembly to act as an advisory body, and ultimately with some powers to block the actions of an unreasonable "executive", are nowhere near strong enough. Until the GLA has clear powers to block Ken Livingstone by a simple majority where he ignores public opinion and his own public consultation exercises (as has happened several times in the past as previously reported in this newsletter) then I would certainly not want to give him any more powers.

And the proposals to give him more control over planning will result in even more of the "socialist dictatorship" approach to planning matters than we get at present. Let's have more powers in local boroughs to block lunatic centralist dogma and more democratic control, not less.

Dartford Crossing Toll Campaign



Our last Newsletter covered various campaigns against road and bridge tolls. Another one that has been launched recently is one against the Dartford bridge/tunnel crossing. You can see it on the internet at: <http://www.scrapthetolls.com> (a picture from their web site is shown above).

As was also reported in our November 2001 edition, this campaign points out that there was originally a commitment to scrap the tolls when the bridge had been paid for. But that was not done even though when the public were consulted there was a clear majority against extending the tolls.

In addition the Government has claimed that the tolls do not cause congestion which is obvious nonsense to anyone who uses the crossing regularly (if it wasn't obvious in 2001, it certainly is now when long queues form at either side of the tolls during rush hours).

The "Scrap the Tolls" campaign also point out that the tolls are illegal under European Law as EU Directive 99/62 says that revenues from road tolls should only be used for maintenance of the roads on which they are collected, not used to subsidise other transport schemes which was the justification for retaining the Dartford tolls.

(Editors Comment: The campaign seems to have strong associations with the UK Independence Party but it's certainly a good cause so I would suggest you go to the web site and sign up to support them).

Tram Schemes Off The Rails



Tram schemes are no longer in favour in Government circles it seems according to reports in the Daily and Sunday Telegraph. The Government has reneged on a promise of £170 million on a scheme for Liverpool and other schemes in Manchester, Hampshire and Leeds have been abandoned. The Leeds "supertram" project was ditched when its costs escalated from £355 million to £486 million.

In Liverpool the authorities had already bought 11 miles of track which will now not be used, and in Manchester houses and schools had been demolished to make way for a line that will never arrive. The new lack of enthusiasm is blamed on a National Audit Office report published in April last year which said that the trams schemes in Sheffield, Birmingham and Croydon were poor value for money.

(Editors Comments: We have previously reported on the poor economics of the existing schemes, and the generally irrational financial justifications that are employed to promote such schemes when alternative public transport solutions would be better. They also commonly overrun the initial capital cost budgets and hang like a millstone around the neck of any transport authority for many years to come as scrapping them after construction becomes politically and economically a severe embarrassment).

Light Rail Costs Versus Transit

Randall O'Toole of the Thoreau Institute has recently done a comparison of the costs of light rail (i.e. trams) versus transit (i.e. buses) in the USA. This was to refute the argument that light rail is cheaper. As he points out, comparison is often difficult because light rail typically is installed on the busiest city centre routes, whereas transit often covers widespread suburban districts. The result is that the typical "load factors" on buses are much lower. For example in Salt Lake City the average number of bus occupants is five!

In addition the additional capital costs of light rail are often ignored, making the comparisons invalid. Even a small increase in load factors for most transit schemes would make them comparable if not cheaper than light rail, if capital costs are properly amortised.

Bromley Town Centre Revamp



There are plans afoot to produce a new strategic plan for Bromley Town centre. This is entitled an "Area Action Plan" or AAP and will form part of the Council's "Local Development Framework" which will eventually replace the Unitary Development Plan that currently sets planning policies for Bromley.

It is felt that there is a need to reconsider the town centre because of a number of developments that have taken place. For example, the closure of the Alders and Army & Navy stores, the desire for the Glades to expand and recognition of long-standing problems with the location of the town centre. For example, Bromley is spread from Bromley North to Bromley South railway stations, with no clear focus or central point (pictures of one of the possible centres are shown above and below – the ugly wooden huts seem to be those of temporary Xmas traders).



Much of it is also cut off from the green space to the west of the town, of which many residents are not aware. Even the Library and Churchill Theatre have problems because of poor access to them. And Bromley Council itself does not like the site it currently occupies because of the inadequacy of some of the buildings.

In summary, Bromley does not make the most of its existing architectural and environmental assets, and the future of retailing in the town certainly needs to be considered if it is to remain a competitive attraction.

Consultation has already taken place with interested "stakeholders" in which BBRAG was involved. Outline plans which were developed as a result have already been discussed by councillors and got general support and these are now being put to wider public consultation. You can see them at the Glades from January 19th to 21st, at the Civic Centre from Jan 23rd to 27th, and in Bromley Library from Jan 30th to Feb 13th.

(Editors Comments: Although these proposals may take many years to come to fruition, clearly we will have to examine the implications as regards transport and such matters as car parking provision in some detail. But many of the ideas make some

sense. Let us hope that the incentive to maximise Council income/capital, or save costs, does not dictate events as has often happened with past major developments.)

More Congestion from Tesco?

Approval for expansion of the Tesco store in Elmers End has been given the go ahead by Bromley Council's Development Control Committee. It will increase in size by 30,000 square feet, and have 171 additional car parking spaces. Local residents have complained about the increased traffic congestion that will result, and the impact on retailers in Beckenham High Street.

As a "sweetener" for this proposal, Tesco have offered to pay £2 million for a new bus terminal nearby.

(Editors Comments: As with the Tesco development in Orpington, little attention seems to have been paid to the impact of such a store on local traffic flows. And expectations that people will switch to shopping via public transport rather than take their cars to the supermarket are surely misconceived. The idea that the problem of big stores killing off smaller stores by moving them from out-of-town sites to urban centre sites is also misconceived.)

News Snapshots

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

+ Our last newsletter explained why the London Congestion Charge is basically a tax. It's a "toll" on road usage, and the money is used like any other tax to subsidise what politicians think are good causes. The US and German embassies apparently agree as they are now refusing to pay the Congestion Charge tax. This is on the grounds that foreign embassies are exempt from paying national or local taxes under the Vienna Convention.

Some wag at TfL apparently claimed it was some kind of "service charge", not a tax. But when a reporter visited the US embassy he was shown a copy of the Declaration of Independence and

"no taxation without representation" was mentioned.

(Editor's Comments: Well at least someone knows how to call a spade a spade. As we all know, the London Toll is a tax that was just raised by 60% because Ken's financial extravagance means that the TfL budget cannot be balanced by any other means).

+ The new rumble strips on Rushmore Hill, Pratts Bottom were mentioned in our last newsletter. It seems these were installed without prior public consultation and without the knowledge of Councillor George Taylor who is the executive council member responsible for traffic matters. But it was at the prompting of one of the local councillors who persuaded council staff it was a good idea, when they should know better. It's odd that such expenditure can be authorised so readily when finding money to fix the problems in other schemes like Old Hill is so difficult. Subsequently some of the strips have been removed, which has no doubt resulted in further expenditure.

+ A "pay and display" parking scheme for roads in the Shortlands area has gone to public consultation, following a petition being submitted to the council. Free parking bays are allegedly used all day by commuters, thus making it difficult for short term visitors such as shoppers (although many roads are already covered by residents permit parking schemes).

It is therefore proposed to introduce "pay and display" schemes in Station Road, Martins Road, Meadow Road and Ravensbourne Road, although the latter will contain some "long-term" parking bays (ie. no 2 hour limit as on the others).

+ Hazel Kinsey of Chesterfield has just raised a petition with 9,000 signatures to remove speed humps in her part of Derbyshire. She works for Social Services as a home carer and is as a result aware of how many people suffer pain and other stress from riding over them.

+ A recently produced report into the causes of motorcycle accidents, which was commissioned by the Department for Transport, shows that only 3.5% of crashes involved exceeding the speed limit. Which confirms the claims by many people that excessive speed is over-emphasised as a cause of road accidents. For the full report go to:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_rdsafet_y/documents/page/dft_rdsafety_035422.pdf

+ Seven children were treated for minor injuries in Reading when a number 44 bus hit a “sump-buster” speed hump (this is a hump which is slightly higher than normal to deter use of the road by other vehicles). The driver has been sacked but it is not clear why.

+ Here’s an interesting quotation. Speaking on the Jeremy Vine programme on BBC Radio Two today, Chief Constable Richard Brunstrom (former head of road safety for ACPO) said: “In fact, very few people get killed or injured outside schools, which is very often the reverse of the public perception”.

+ A new organisation called the London Motorists Action Group (LMAG – see <http://www.lmag.org.uk>) has been set up. They appear to mainly be campaigning on parking enforcement problems in London.

+ A motorist in Worcester is challenging a parking Penalty Notice which was issued under the current “decriminalised” parking enforcement system on the grounds that it breaches the Bill of Rights. The 1689 Bill says “All grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction are illegal and void”. In other words, it is not legal to have an “executive” system for parking or other traffic offences that bypasses the normal court system.

(Editors Comments: I hope this challenge succeeds as the failure to adhere to the normal principles of justice is fatally undermining public support for the existing systems. The regulations and enforcement of parking and congestion charging in London are now much too heavily weighted in favour of the authorities, with the result that reasonable excuses are not permitted and injustice is frequently the result. The demand for practical efficiency is undermining our basic legal rights in a way that would not have been tolerated in any earlier age).

+ A good example as to how the existing “decriminalised” system is not judicially independent was provided in the Sunday Telegraph. As readers will be aware, Capita Plc operate the Congestion Charging Tax on behalf of Transport for London. And if they make a mistake, which you dispute, or refuse to pay for,

then it is referred to bailiffs for collection. Bailiffs normally act on behalf of the court system, and should be independent. But Capita also own one of the largest bailiff companies so any failure to pay the Congestion Tax may well be referred to them. A clear conflict of interest in that Capita might have an interest in more cases ending up requiring bailiff enforcement.

+ The victory by Baroness Walmsley who obtained a “judicial review” of a Congestion Tax penalty notice has been overturned on appeal by TfL. She claimed that it was an innocent mistake that she gave the wrong registration number and as she had paid a charge it was unfair to penalise her. The initial judge agreed but the Court of Appeal said otherwise. The latter seemed to take the view that only TfL can waive the charges and it was to them that excuses should be directed. *(Editors Comments: Yet another example where there is no justice from the existing systems as TfL consistently fail to take account of extenuating circumstances).*

+ Bob Kiley has quit as Transport Commissioner for London, and will be departing in the new year. During his period in charge, the budget for TfL has grown enormously, and the Congestion Charge tax was introduced. The number of buses has increased but London Underground is still suffering major congestion problems, and unreliable services.

+ According to an answer given in Parliament, the following are the figures for crashes involving “excessive speed” over the last few years.

Year	Fatal	Serious
1999	29%	12%
2000	26%	12%
2001	27%	12%
2002	30%	13%
2003	30%	14%
2004	34%	13%

So as speed cameras have proliferated, the number of “excessive speed” accidents seems to be rising if anything. Clearly the medicine is not working.

+ The medicine also doesn’t seem to be working at an individual level either. Minister Stephen Ladyman admitted in a television programme that he had 9 points on his license from speeding offences. Mr Ladyman is the Minister of State for

Transport responsible for Road Safety and other matters. *(Editors Comments: Perhaps he is aiming to become a "non-driver" which from past history might then qualify him to be appointed Minister of Transport).*

+ Isobel Hare who is chairperson of the Edinburgh and Lothian branch of the National Osteoporosis Society is kicking up a fuss about the speed "cushions" in her area. As a long time sufferer from the disease she said: "They are difficult to negotiate and I often get a nasty jolt on the spine. Ultimately this could really damage the vertebrae." Her comments were supported by the clinical director of a local osteopath who said that "if you have back pain this will exacerbate the problem" and "I have had a lot of patients who come in swearing about speed humps".

(Editors Comments: Yet another example of people with disabilities suffering excessively from the curse of speed humps and cushions).

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.

Contact Information

This Newsletter is published by the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (B.B.R.A.G.), PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB. All material contained herein is Copyright of B.B.R.A.G. and may only be reproduced with permission. Any opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author of the article or that of the Editor which do not necessarily represent the official policies of B.B.R.A.G.

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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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