



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 41 (August 2006)

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Editorial

A pretty full edition this month, and slightly earlier than normal as a result. It seems to be the season for public bodies to produce bulky reports that your editor is expected to read. One is often dismayed at the amount of time, effort and expense that is put into producing paper that few people actually read. These documents are often issued in the name of "public consultation", but any feedback from the public is then ignored and the bureaucrats simply apply their adopted policies as they have in the past.

Perhaps they only choose to issue these reports in late Spring so that people are discouraged from responding by absence on their summer holidays. But let us not think that there is any conspiracy here.

As usual, don't forget to send in your comments or questions on the contents.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Metropolitan Police Consultation



In our previous edition, it was mentioned that the Metropolitan Police are running a public consultation on policing priorities in London. This

can be seen on the internet at:

www.met.police.uk/about/performance/consultation

Although it may be too late now to contribute, you can see the results of the initial submissions by hundreds of organisations and members of the public. Just looking at the comments on "Traffic and Road Safety Offences", there were 152 individual comments, including of course several from your editor.

It's particularly interesting to count how many people raised similar issues. A summary of the commonest points raised is as follows.

A Call for More Traffic Police

A need for more traffic police was mentioned by at least 11 people, with complaints about the frequency of bad driver behaviour increasing because there were so few traffic police on the roads to stop it.

Speed Cameras Not Supported

There were more negative comments about speed cameras than there were positive ones, with several saying that over reliance on cameras instead of active police patrolling was causing bad behaviour on the roads by drivers and cyclists to become worse.

Cyclists Come in for Criticism

Cyclists came in for a lot of criticism for ignoring red lights, riding on pavements, generally ignoring road signs, and being abusive when challenged. At least 22 people mentioned some aspect of this. And the lack of any enforcement by police, despite this being raised previously as a problem, was also criticised.

Mobile Phones and Off Road Riding

A number of people complained about the continued use of hand held mobile phones, despite it being illegal.

The riding of motorcycles, mopeds and powered scooters on footpaths and in parks, and the lack of police action, was complained about by a number of people, although this seemed to be a problem only in specific boroughs.

Likewise the ignoring of red traffic lights by all classes of road users seemed to be a particular problem in certain areas of London.

General Standards of Behaviour Falling

There was a general view that standards of road behaviour were falling, with inconsiderate driving, excessive speed and ignoring traffic regulations being growing problems. *(Editor's Comments: As many people predicated, the rash of speed cameras, bus lane cameras and other "automated" enforcement systems is simply resulting in a growing contempt for the law by many people. There is no longer a consensus about what is or is not reasonable behaviour, and as soon as many people are out of range of a camera they feel they can do what they like. There also seems to be a growing menace of unlicensed and uninsured drivers using "disposable" cars which the lack of traffic police just encourages. Whether we will see any action to bring back some sense to road traffic policing, remains to be seen).*

Higher Parking Fines In London



Parking fines in London could increase again under proposals being discussed by the Association of London Government (ALG) and Transport for London (TfL). Penalties could increase from £100 to £120 in central London and from £80 to £100 in outer London. Fines for traffic offences such as blocking box junctions or driving in bus lanes could also increase from £100 to £120.

However, there are also proposals to vary the severity of the fine based on the nature of the offence. For example, parking on a double yellow line currently gets the same penalty as overstaying by a few minutes in a meter bay. These are clearly very different offences, but there is no discrimination at the moment. Consultation on the details of any new proposals have been promised over the summer, once they have been finalised.

(Editor's Comments: Well I personally view the existing rates as already too high and totally unreasonable in relation to the nature of the offence, so I will oppose any increases in the rates. And I have yet to see any honest and open consultation by TfL about anything. But the proposal to vary the level of penalties makes sense, so long as the overall income from parking fines does not rise as a result.)

Parking Fines and a Bill of Rights

David Cameron has recently been in the news advocating a new "Bill of Rights" to at least partly replace the Human Rights Act. But of course we already have a "Bill of Rights" which unfortunately does not seem to be upheld.

There have been several cases of late where people accused of parking or other traffic offences which are subject to "decriminalised" penalties have invoked the original English Bill of Rights. This piece of legislation, which dates from 1689, includes the following phrase: "That all grants and promises of fines and forfeitures of particular persons before conviction are illegal and void" and people are arguing that the legislation that introduced decriminalised offences could not override that prior statute.

This right of course was very important because it made impossible the imposition of fines or other penalties on people, without a full hearing in a court of law where they can present their case. This prevented malicious or unjustified persecution of individuals by executive authorities, such as the Crown in past times, without the backing of an independent judiciary or of a jury.

Anyway it seems that people such as a Mr Webb and a Mr de Crittenden have invoked the Bill of Rights to refuse to pay the Congestion Tax and other penalties. The latter's argument on a parking fine can be seen in full at www.bwmaonline.com/Robin%20de%20Crittenden's%20NPAS%20hearing.htm – it's an interesting and amusing read. The full Bill of Rights as originally enacted can be seen at: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/england.htm>. Apparently Mr de Crittenden lost a subsequent judicial review when the judge ruled that a parking penalty "fine" is not a fine.

(Editor's Comments: It is certainly the case that the introduction of "decriminalised" offences was just another step in the erosion of our civil liberties in the UK. It leads to petty officialdom running a quasi-legal system with no proper rights to appeal, and it should be scrapped. The cost saving from introducing such a system does not justify the erosion of our civil rights.)

Should You Buy a Hybrid Car?



The above question may be on many peoples' minds. At first glance, you get something for nothing in that you can get improved fuel consumption, without necessarily paying more in capital costs for the vehicle. In addition you will impress everyone with your environmental credentials, while being exempt from paying the London Congestion Tax. So should you follow the lead of Tory leader David Cameron and buy a Lexus GS450h? (See picture above).

This newly released car is based on the existing GS300/430 platform. The GS300 has a

conventional 3 litre engine, while the 430 has a larger 4.3 litre engine, and both were aimed at the sport/luxury market segment dominated by the BMW 5 series and Jaguar S-Type. However the GS450h has a hybrid powertrain so at low speeds it operates purely on electric motors driven by the large capacity batteries. Battery power is also used to supplement the new 3 litre petrol engine when accelerating at higher speeds.

Your editor had the opportunity to take an extended drive of this new vehicle recently and it's very impressive. Very quiet, and very smooth, with performance even better than the GS430 (and that is faster than most people need). And according to the specification, the "urban" fuel consumption is only 30.7 mpg in comparison with 17.3 for the GS430 or 19.6 for the GS300.

Price wise, the GS450h base model is actually less than a GS430 and comparable to a top-end GS300, so it seems you can get something for nothing. But not all is as it first seems.

In reality on a drive through central Bromley, and a short trip down the A20, the fuel consumption was less than 27 mpg, so the improved "urban" figure really only reflects the likely benefit in very dense traffic conditions. In practice I used to get 23 mpg in an LS400 (similar engine to the GS430 in an even larger body), so 27 mpg seems no great result to me.

And the other downside is that the large battery capacity results in the boot space being significantly smaller. Your editor bemoans the modern trend to produce large cars with smaller and smaller boot space. The GS450 is not exactly a small vehicle, but the boot space is not enough to accommodate the two large suitcases that our small two person family takes when we go on holiday. Similar problems afflict cars such as the Jaguar S-Type and it makes you wonder whether the owners of such vehicles often have second cars they use to take rubbish down to the local tip, to move offspring around, etc.

Someone else has even pointed out that the hybrid Toyota Prius has more boot space than the GS450h. Plus of course, almost any smaller engined or diesel family saloon might give you more economical fuel consumption.

So my conclusion is, if you want a luxury car, with fascinating technology, and with great performance in which to impress people with your green credentials, then buy one. But if you want a better general purpose car then simply choose something more practical. And if you do enough mileage to worry about petrol consumption, or are concerned about the environmental impact of car pollution, then consider the Prius.

Incidentally due out soon is a new version of the top of the range Lexus. This has already been launched in the USA and is the LS600h model. Yes it is another hybrid, with a new 5 litre V-8 petrol engine and two electric motors. It all sounds somewhat "gross" to me, but maybe it will solve the boot space problem.

"No Car Lanes" Proposed for London

Transport for London (TfL) have recently issued a draft consultation document on freight transport in London – "The London Freight Plan". This can be obtained from the internet at: <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/freight/plan.asp>

As the population of London is growing (yes that is of course one of the results of the policies of Ken Livingstone), and as freight transport needs are increasing while it remains heavily dependent on road transport, a review was certainly needed.

Among the proposals contained therein are therefore measures to increase night time deliveries, but to otherwise minimise lorry movements by promoting modal shift from road to rail and inland waterways. (*Editor: yes readers may not be aware that South East London is well served by a network of canals as they are of course invisible to you and me*).

One of the most pernicious proposals is undoubtedly the suggestion that "no-car lanes" be considered. To quote from the report: "*Develop guidance to enable the use of no-car lanes to be considered on a case-by-case basis within TfL Network Management Plans where there is a strategic need, where vulnerable road users can be safeguarded and the legibility of the streetscape is not compromised*".

(Editor: Don't ask your editor what "legibility of the streetscape" means – it's all gobbledegook to me. But it's yet another example of the "anti-car" bias demonstrated repeatedly by TfL and their master. One very simple point which the inventors of this idea seem to have overlooked is that it is downright illogical to encourage freight traffic to move to other modes, while creating new "freight & bus" lanes. The latter will simply reduce lorry freight times, and encourage even more freight to move by road, with a resulting increase in noise and pollution. You can be assured that BBRAG will be submitting comments to this consultation, and we suggest you might like to do the same).

No Environmental Benefit from the Congestion Charge Tax



Improvements to London air quality were repeatedly put forward by Ken Livingstone and others as one reason to go ahead with the Congestion Charge, despite experts saying

it would not be so. A recent report published by TfL (the "Fourth Annual Monitoring Report") makes it clear that no improvement has taken place as a result. To quote from the report:

" Table 6.3 shows a full breakdown of the estimated changes to emissions of key pollutants in relation to congestion charging between 2002 and 2003. Key observations from the table are as follows:

- Of those effects directly attributable to congestion charging, traffic volume changes are now assessed to have had only a relatively small impact on total emissions. This mainly reflects the relatively small contribution of petrol cars to total emissions in central London and a substantially increased proportion of the car fleet that is now assessed to be diesel fuelled in the inventory. Furthermore, these reductions are partly offset by observed increases in taxis and buses (diesel vehicles). These profile changes apply both to the charging zone and the Inner Ring Road, in the latter case a small increase in overall traffic volumes having been observed.

- The overall impact due exclusively to changes in traffic volumes and relative vehicle populations is therefore assessed to be: savings of around one percent in both NOx and PM10 within the charging zone; and increases of between 7 and 9 percent in NOx and PM10 respectively on the Inner Ring Road, although much of this reflects methodological changes to the inventory calculations, rather than 'real' change (see further below), and in any case is only one component of overall change."

In other words the change within the zone is negligible and probably statistically insignificant, while there is a significant degradation on the Inner Ring Road. Any improvements from reduction in car traffic have been more than offset by the increase in number of taxis and buses required to transport people around the zone.

This is a good example of where Ken Livingstone misled the population of London in his keenness to adopt an anti-car strategy. Note that air quality did improve somewhat within the zone but this mainly arose from the improvements in vehicle technology.

Other Impacts Mentioned in the Report



The improvement in traffic delays following the introduction of the London Congestion Tax seems to be wearing off, although they are still better than before

the charge was introduced (*Editor: Yes that is also noticeable from personal experience with jams seeming to return in many places*).

The report claims that the previously seen downturn in retail trade has recovered, and it claims that the charge has had a neutral impact on the central London economy. Ambient noise levels seem to be unchanged, so it has had no impact on "noise pollution".

The increase in the charge to £8 (from £5) caused charge payments to reduce by 11%. Net income from the scheme after expenses was £122 million in 2005/6, most of which was spent on improved bus services. As the scheme costs £90 million per year to operate, one can see how inefficient the scheme is as a tax collection device.

More Speed Cameras in London



A new type of camera called the "Monitron" is being installed at up to 66 locations in London – see picture left. They are typically positioned at the top of a tall pole. They work by digital photography with images being transmitted via broadband to a central monitoring station, so the whole process can be automated unlike the Gatso devices which require film replacement. Some of these are replacing existing Gatso devices but they are also being installed in new locations.

The typical cost is apparently £50,000 per installation. (*Editor's Comments: More wasted money that would be better spent on other real road safety measures*).

Speed Cameras to Enforce 20 Mph Zones

In addition to the above, there are plans to introduce a network of speed cameras into some 20 mph zones in London. These would operate like the "SPECS" system that calculates your average speed over a distance.

They are due to be approved by the Home Office in November, and have already been tried out in Mansfield Road in Camden. Again these are digital in nature and transmit information automatically to a central location where the average speed is calculated, and tickets issued without any human intervention if the speed limit is exceeded.

It seems that many people are arguing that they will enable speed humps to be removed, and hence reduce the excessive noise and pollution that they cause.

(Editor's Comments: Yes it seems we have managed to persuade people that humps are a bad idea, so even Robert Gifford of PACTS said recently: "Replacing humps with these new cameras will benefit law-abiding motorists as well as making streets safer and more attractive". But as I have previously pointed out, it is exceedingly difficult to stay within such a low speed limit and 20 mph is simply not reasonable on many roads where such limits are imposed. I am generally opposed to 20

mph speed limits as they are often imposed in locations where proper road design measures should be used instead - for example go and look at Tower Bridge or Upper Thames Street in the City where SPECS systems are used to enforce such limits – not only are these limits ridiculously low on such roads, but almost nobody adheres to them. It may make sense to use 20 mph zones in certain residential areas to indicate that people should be driving more slowly than the normal 30 mph target, but the last thing we need is more imposition of artificial and unnecessary speed limits by automated systems).

And Fewer Speed Cameras in London

Irrespective of the above story, another group of public minded citizens seem to be taking steps to reduce the number of speed cameras in London. "Motorists Against Detection" who revel in destroying speed cameras, recently claimed to have destroyed the one on the slip road at the Sun in the Sands roundabout as you approach the Blackwall Tunnel northbound. It certainly disappeared about mid June, as have one or two others on the A20 and elsewhere.

To quote from their campaign director, Captain Gatso and his "press release" which can be seen at www.speedcam.co.uk: "*We have completely pulled it out of the ground - it is now lying flat. In many areas the cameras have not saved one life – the statistics for road deaths have not gone down. In some areas they have actually gone up – in Essex, for instance, which has a high density of cameras there are more people being killed. We are now planning to target any and all cameras until the Government sees sense and rethinks its road safety policy. Before we had speed cameras we had the safest roads in Europe – since their introduction this is no longer true.*"

This group claims to have destroyed over 1000 speed cameras since 2000 (that's about £50 million of taxpayers money down the drain if they all contained cameras).

(Editor: Well it does not surprise me at all that this group has grown up. With many people being disqualified simply through collecting too many points from speeding offences, which could well be destroying their livelihoods, you can see how maddening it can be, when there is no clear public consensus on the merits of speed cameras – in fact I

believe most people would vote against them today if they were asked. With both mobile and fixed speed cameras now everywhere, you can collect penalty points through sheer accident when you were driving perfectly safely and at a reasonable speed for the road and weather conditions.

It is unfortunately the case that we now have a "police state" where a few anti-car fanatics have promoted laws to harass ordinary people who are behaving in a quite reasonable and normal manner – namely driving in a way that they consider to be perfectly safe. No longer do we trust the average person to behave in a sensible manner, but we have to have constant surveillance and penal laws to enforce compliance with petty rules and regulations, irrespective of the real circumstances.

It is regretfully just another aspect of turning this country into a state dominated by intrusive surveillance in the name of safety, and erosion of the basic liberties and freedoms of the population.

But if you think that Motorists Against Detection is worthy of your support, please don't ask me how to contact them – I have no idea.)

Water Shortage Blamed on Motorists



In his evidence to the inquiry into the proposal by Thames Water to build a desalination plant to increase London's water supply, Mayor Ken Livingstone apparently suggested that it would be unnecessary if they dug up more roads to fix the leaks. And what perfidious force was stopping them doing this? Well of course it's the "*fear of upsetting customers*" and particularly those motorists that fear it "*will lead to a certain amount of disruption*".

Yes Ken Livingstone never misses the opportunity to blame the harassed motorist for all the ills of this world. But perhaps the fault is the economic incentive of Thames Water not to spend money digging up roads and replacing ageing mains systems, but simply to pray for wet weather and limit the supply to customers when their bet on rain is lost.

London Transport in 2025

Transport for London have recently published their vision (in only 86 pages) of how transport in London will develop in the next 20 years. It's entitled "Transport 2025" and can be read on the TfL web site.

More congestion charging, both for road users and public transport users is envisaged, with a particularly emphasis on encouraging the staggering of journey times.

They are also of course keen on the "behavioural change" approach as bureaucrats just love to be able to tell us what to do.

(Editor: It would appear to be the same old policy of muddling through and "making the best of existing resources" that we have seen too often with transport policy. There is little vision, and with no plans to improve the road network, life is bound to get worse while Ken Livingstone insists on expanding the population of London.)

Letters to the Telegraph on Humps



The Saturday edition of the Daily Telegraph recent ran an article on speed humps in their "motoring" supplement. It generated a lot of letters in response and some were

printed in the edition on the 17th June. This included one from your editor which read:

"Regarding the injuries that speed humps cause, there was an incident recently very near to where I live when Anja Szkodowski was severely injured after being thrown off her bike by a speed hump. This hump was hidden from view and had been the subject of numerous complaints by me and other residents in the last few years, but the council persistently refused to do anything about it. Oddly, the police refused twice to accept a report on this incident so it will never appear in the road accident statistics.

My organisation has been campaigning against the dangers of speed humps for several years, and Bromley now has a policy of "no more

speed humps". A pity that all councils have not yet adopted the same policies, but we will not be satisfied until they are all removed.

More details of the problems of humps, and lots of other cases of the accidents they cause, and their negative impact on disabled people are covered on our web site...Roger Lawson"

Another letter referred to a case ten years ago in the East Midlands when a retired police officer drove over a speed hump quite slowly. His neck was broken and he spent the rest of his life paralysed.

Yet another letter claimed a dangerous tyre blow-out was allegedly caused by damage to tyres from speed humps. You can see all the letters by going to the daily Telegraph web site at www.telegraph.co.uk/motoring and entering a search for "humps" – they are under "Honest Johns Agony Column".

The Government's Transport Goals

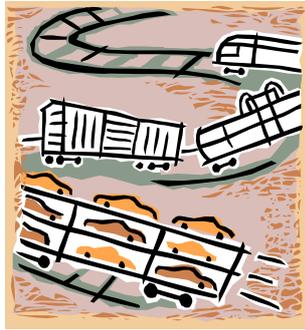


Our last edition mentioned the appointment of Douglas Alexander as the new Secretary of State for Transport (picture left).

The following is what the Prime Minister said about the Government's achievements in the field of transport in his appointment letter: *"An efficient and reliable transport system is essential for our economy and future competitiveness. This is why we have committed to record levels of investment in transport by 2015 in the DfT's long-term spending guideline. The results of this investment are evident. More people are travelling by rail than at any time in the past forty years, while performance is back at pre-Hatfield levels and continues to improve. Thirty five major road schemes have been completed since 2001 and we have seen progress in bus travel in recent years."*

(Editor's Comments: This makes it sound like the current Government has done a great job in the field of transport, when we all know that the UK transport system is one of the worst when compared with other major economies, and underinvestment in the road network is creating major problems for everyone. It just shows how politicians can live in a different world to the rest of us).

New Tory Transport Initiatives



New ideas from the Conservatives as regards transport policies are:

1. Permit people to turn left at red lights (ie. you can ignore a red light at a junction so long as you are turning left).

This system is used in many US states, and your editor is very familiar with this system in California (except of course it is right turns there, unless there is a specific sign saying otherwise as there sometimes is for safety reasons). It seems to work eminently well, but immediately this proposal was criticised by PACTS on possible road safety grounds, despite them being unable to produce any specific evidence that it was in any way dangerous.

2. More underpasses and bridges should be built to take away pedestrians away from roads.

3. Cycle lanes should be positioned on pavements where there is room.

4. Roads at junctions and roundabouts should be made wider to increase traffic flows.

5. Speed limits should be varied by the time of day so they might be reduced outside schools (*Editor: this has operated outside a school in Orpington for a number of years, but no results have ever been published so far as I am aware*).

6. Letting taxis and motorcyclists use bus lanes.

Public transport supporter and well known critic of car use, Professor David Begg, also jumped in with an immediate response of "It does seem to be flying in the face of the direction David Cameron seems to want to be taking things". He cited Kensington High Street and Norwich as examples of where increasing the numbers of pedestrians mingling with road traffic reduced car speeds and the "cars have to adapt". The Conservative committee that developed these policies was headed by John Redwood.

(Editor's Comments: There seems much to support and little to criticise in these proposals to me. At least they are ideas that might help relieve congestion and improve road safety to some extent).

What is the Most Cost Effective and Safest Transport System?



The Transport Watch web site has been mentioned in our newsletters before – see: www.transport-watch.co.uk. But it has been extended considerably in the last few months.

One of the key issues it tackles is what is the cheapest way of moving people around? Is it road or rail? He compares the costs of coach transport via road, with passenger rail transport and shows the former has a higher capacity and a lower construction cost.

He also looks at the death rates of road and rail transport and shows that certainly the death rates for long distance coach passengers are less than that for rail passengers. In fact if there was a dedicated highway for road users, as there is for rail users, then the death rates for car users would probably be less also.

This web site was developed by one-man expert (and former Transport Planner) Paul Withrington. Certainly it is one of the most interesting sites to study, as the authors views are often refreshingly new and different to the accepted conventions.

Past Newsletter Articles



New readers may not be aware that the BBRAG newsletter has now been published regularly since June 1999. Past issues contain a wealth of articles on transport issues, not just in South East London but also on national policies.

For example back in August 2001, edition 11 looked at the proposed London Congestion Charge, road accident statistics in London and the UK, and the impact of speed cameras. But nobody predicted what an unmitigated financial disaster would result from the Congestion Tax.

A full list of the contents of past editions can be seen on our internet web site at: www.bromleytransport.org.uk/Newsletters.htm. Any members who want any back copies can simply request them and they can be emailed to you as a pdf document (or in extremis, posted as a paper copy). This service is offered also to non-members to anyone who requires the odd copy, but we don't publish the full contents on-line because it encourages members to join – one of the few direct benefits of membership is the newsletter.

Membership Price Increase



Will all BBRAG members take note that a membership price increase will apply to all renewals after the date of issue of this newsletter. New annual membership rates for individual members will be:

£8.50 instead of £7.50 for newsletters via email.
£11.00 instead of £9.50 for newsletters via post.

The corporate membership rate remains unchanged at £50 per annum.

The executive committee of BBRAG considered the current rates, which have applied for some years, at the Annual General Meeting, and we took the view that rates should increase slightly to reflect increases in postage and printing costs in the last two years. For example postage rates only recently went up from 21p to 23p for second class letters, almost a 10% increase. In addition the association only remains financially viable due to the generous donations of a few members as our costs continue to exceed our regular membership income. We have also increased the differential between email and postal rates to encourage the take up of the receipt of newsletters via email – we accept that this impacts those more without email facilities but our actual costs of servicing members who

still receive the newsletter and other communications via post are probably even higher.

Any members who now wish to switch to receiving newsletters via email as a PDF document (so you get a full colour version!) should send an email to roger.lawson@btclick.com.

We will also ask members to sign up to pay subscriptions by standing order as again this will reduce our administrative costs. Regretfully it will not be economic to set up direct debit or credit card payments.

Bromley Transport Plans Published



All London boroughs have to publish a Transport Plan known as a "Local Implementation Plan" – yes it's really only to tell us how Bromley is to implement the Mayor London's Transport Strategy as he calls all the shots these days. Yet another example of how the Mayor's office and TfL have undermined local democracy. This means that the borough has no real control any more over many of the key issues that affect transport in Bromley, although they do have some flexibility on minor matters.

But for those interested in local transport matters it is of some interest as it will lay down policies for some years, and has been open to public consultation. The LIP can be obtained from the council on CD-ROM or paper (for some reason it's not on their web site but BBRAG can supply electronically although it is several hundred pages), and BBRAG's response can be seen on our web site (in the News section of www.bromleytransport.org.uk of course).

Here are a few points of interest from the report:

“Car Dependency” Still in Use

The introduction refers to “car dependency” which is an emotive phrase and misleading. We have objected repeatedly to the description of people’s rational choices of transport modes as “dependency”.

Tackling Congestion

Of course there is nothing really of significance in the document about improving the road network of Bromley to actual increase traffic flows and reduce congestion (that is simply not a part of the Mayor’s Transport Strategy). But there is reference to tackling some congestion bottlenecks under TfLs “Pinch Points” initiative. Such junctions as Mason Hill/Homesdale Road on the A21, Rectory Road/High St Beckenham, Farnborough Common/Crofton Road, Sevenoaks Road/Midhurst Way and Orpington Bypass/Spur Road are being considered.

Note that there is much discussion of encouragement for “modal shift” and for school and workplace travel plans to assist this, but little concrete evidence that such policies are likely to have any major impact and no targets have been set.

Pedestrian Phases at Traffic Lights

Several signal controlled junctions are in line for the addition of pedestrian phases to improve safety. However one of these is the Chislehurst war memorial junction where additional delays to traffic would cause severe problems as it is already heavily congested, and it is unclear that this is necessary on road safety grounds. See the photograph at the start of this article for a picture of queuing traffic at that junction.

Road Safety Policies

The report highlights that Bromley compares well with other London boroughs in terms of road safety. Per 100,000 head of population, Bromley ranks 4th of 33 for overall casualties.

However fatality numbers are not improving as much as hoped. One possible reason for this is

that the majority of car users killed in road accidents in Bromley are not in fact wearing seat belts, so improvements in other areas may be offset by this factor.

One interesting paragraph reads: *“Until drivers are convinced of the need to slow down at appropriate times or in appropriate places, it will be very hard to force them to do so. The use of safety cameras, humps, etc, must be fully explained to sceptical Bromley road users. Speed humps and cameras will only be used in this borough where the Council’s preferred methods of accident reduction are not appropriate or prove ineffective.”* (Editor’s Comments: *Well I have had these devices “explained” to me and I am not convinced of their efficacy, so this is just patronising rhetoric, but at least the policy won’t apparently be changed*).

Road Safety Education Does Work

Accidents to younger drivers, motorcyclists and pedestrians are one of the major problems in Bromley. However research in Bromley shows that drivers who successfully complete a Traffic Education Course are much less likely to be involved in an accident. So thankfully education is one of the key policies for the future.

Parking and Parking Provision

Penalty charge notices for parking and other infringements increased to 78,378 in 2004 and are probably rising even faster more recently with more bus lane and parking cameras being introduced. There were widespread comments from the previous public consultation about the high and rising cost of parking in Bromley, which is opposed by most residents.

Also the failure to provide sufficient off street parking, particularly at rail stations was mentioned by many people.

Despite the lack of enthusiasm by residents for Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) these are still on the agenda it seems. Even residents within such zones object to the high charges imposed. In fact Bromley made a surplus of £2.3 million on parking charges in 2004/5, of which 78% was used to subsidise the Freedom Pass scheme. (Editor: *Yes readers, whenever you park in Bromley you are paying for my free travel subsidy which I don’t need*).

Bus Driving Standard Discourages Usage

Many respondents to the previous consultation complained about the standard of buses and passenger safety. A particular problem seems to be that now bus routes have been cleared (with bus lanes, red routes and other measures), many drivers now take off rapidly from stops, and brake hard before the next one. This causes problems for unsteady older passengers who do not have time to sit down before the bus lurches away. As a result, many bus passengers suffer minor injuries.

Underreporting of Road Accidents

We have previously reported on the problem of underreporting of road traffic accidents. Road safety experts rely on statistics produced by the police, which have shown recent reductions in road casualties, particularly of slight accidents. But there is a widespread belief that significant underreporting takes place, and that it is getting worse. This was highlighted recently in our report on the accident to Anja Szodowski on Old Hill that the police refused to record.

This problem has been confirmed by a recent report in the British Medical Journal which analysed the hospital admissions of road accident victims. It seems that the numbers have remained level since 1996. This is surprising given the improvement in in-car safety, and road improvements, although of course this has been partly offset by increased mileage driven. But it certainly demonstrates that the policy of harassment of motorists by speed humps and speed cameras has not had a significant effect.

News Snapshots

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

+ The new Conservative administration in the London Borough of Bexley has suspended a bus lane in Welling - a small stretch of road near Welling Corner. This was enforced by cameras and was the source of numerous complaints about accidental infringement resulting in large fines, very much the same allegations as recently came up in Bromley on the Cray Avenue scheme. In both cases the claim is that the design of the scheme resulted in large number of fines

being issued as a result of very simple mistakes by motorists who would not normally break the law. Perhaps Bromley councillors may take this as a reminder to reconsider the Cray Avenue scheme?

+ Two more bus lane cameras have been installed on Cray Avenue, one outside Comet and one just before the Poverest Road traffic lights. *(Editor's Comments: from recent personal usage of the latter stretch of road, it was clear that there were a number of people infringing the solid white line, and hence making themselves open to a penalty fine, simply by moving over too soon. They were of course not obstructing any buses, so it seems the council have condoned the criminalisation of more innocent victims in the pursuit of more income).* Incidentally independent candidate John Hemming-Clark recently ran in the local by-election on a platform that included "no more bus lane cameras", so he clearly thought this would get widespread support.

+ According to the latest statistics from the Home Office, in 2004 there were 466 offences per 1000 licensed vehicles. And the figures are still rising with more than 2 million speed camera offences recorded last year, and the number of cameras still being increased. So it seems that most of us are being criminalised as a result, or will be soon. *(Editor's Comments: Yes it seems you only have to talk to your friends and relatives to realise that there are few people lucky enough to escape with no penalties – at least those that drive any distance. And even if you agree with the principle of speed limits and legal enforcement by cameras, and I agree with neither, the fact is that it is clear that these measures are having little impact on drivers' behaviour. It's it all an enormous waste of money and resources, generally promoted by car haters).*

+ The London Borough of Richmond is removing many speed humps. Councillor Christine Percival, the executive member responsible for transport, said: *"Humps are unpopular with local residents. They delay emergency vehicles, putting lives at risk and they are painful and distressing for elderly and disabled passengers. Across the world few countries are now installing them; there are better ways of improving road safety. This council has listened to the concerns of our residents and it has listened to the emergency services. I can give this promise to local residents:*

this council is totally committed to schemes which promote road safety but experience shows humps are not the best answer. You can rely on us to remove them whenever it is prudent and cost-effective to do so." (Editor's Comments: This speech could well be copied by any councillors who wish to remove speed humps as it is a good, "politically correct" summary of the issues).

+ You can now pay the £8 London Congestion Tax up to midnight the same day, or even pay the next day but then the charge increases to £10. According to TfL, some 83% of drivers who "pre-registered" to pay the Congestion Charge have in fact incurred a £100 penalty at some time by forgetting to pay. Also more than 4,500 drivers are still being fined each day for not paying. *(Editor's Comments: A welcome change to what is in essence a pretty daft system to start with).*

+ One of the more major announcements of late from TfL (if one can call it that), is investment by London Buses of £1.5 million in more opening windows on the top decks of their double decker buses. In addition, some have been fitted with forced air ventilation systems and reflective white painted roof panels are now "de rigeur" it seems. But it is noted that still only half double decker buses have received more windows. *(Editor's Comments: What a pathetic claim when all buses should have air conditioning if they want to persuade people to use them instead of cars).*

+ PACTS, a road safety lobbying organisation and supporter of speed humps, have set up a web page to collect the views of people on how safety might be improved. You are encouraged to go to www.pacts.org.uk/beyond2010 and submit your own comments before the 31st August.

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 £11.00 per annum for individuals, or £8.50 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.