



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 56 (Apr 2009)

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Editorial

If you think you have missed an issue of this newsletter, the answer is you have not. No edition was produced in February due to pressure of other work.

Even this edition is smaller than normal simply due to lack of news. No big pronouncements coming out of City Hall about new transport initiatives so it seems the initial impetus for change after Boris Johnson took over as Mayor is being ground down, or perhaps taking time to mature into actual plans. Let us hope it is the latter.

But this edition does cover some interesting articles on “shared space” and some topical issues in Petts Wood..

Roger Lawson
Editor

Contentious “Shared Space”



“Shared Space” schemes are now “a la mode” in traffic engineering circles. The term applies to road engineering schemes where there is little or no demarcation between different types of road users so pedestrians and cyclists are mixed up with car users and other motorised vehicles. Barriers are removed, kerbs may disappear altogether and it’s basically a “free for all”.

It is claimed that such schemes reduce road accidents because drivers perceive the road differently and take more care. Generally it seems to introduce a more “relaxed” atmosphere and less contention between different users of the road.

It is worth stating that your editor is not opposed to these schemes in principle and indeed thinks that it might be a good idea to look at developing one in his local neighbourhood for Chislehurst High Street. But they are possibly being misused and placed in inappropriate locations.

A good example of their misuse is the scheme in Sloane Square, Kensington. Here the kerbs have been removed and traffic light controlled zebra crossings taken out.

The end result is that people can now walk out of the dark underground station into bright light and into the roadway without even realising that they are in a road with vehicles on it at all.

The pavement and road surface have been flattened so the only hint of a roadway is a slight change in the surface texture. Blind people find this positively dangerous and it is obvious when observing people who are unfamiliar with the area that they simply do not realise they are walking into a roadway and mixing with vehicular traffic.

A demonstration was held recently by local residents, supported by the ABD and other groups. And some photographs of this and the scene are given above and below.



This is surely simply a badly designed scheme which is positively dangerous? But the same borough is also introducing another such scheme onto Exhibition Road at the unbelievable cost of over £13 million (that's not a misprint – yes thirteen million which is being provided mainly by TfL). In this case it will be imposed on a main “A” road where traffic volumes are enormously high.

It could well result in the worst possible scenario where through traffic is frustrated by the delays imposed on them, and pedestrians do not realise the dangers imposed by the speed and volume of traffic.

Memorial Flowers



Dead flowers recording the position of a fatal accident are a common feature on our roads, and seem to be particularly prevalent in my local London Borough of Bromley. They

don't just stay there for a few weeks but sometimes for years (as the ones above on Bromley Road in Chislehurst have done). Indeed some local councils do specifically remove them after 6 weeks.

These “withering” tributes or roadside shrines are surely an eyesore and at best are a distraction for road users. Would it not make sense to encourage some other form of remembrance? Why not introduce a scheme where the council would plant a shrub or perhaps bulbs that would mark the spot without ostentation. This would be a reminder of life, not death, and surely be more acceptable to the general public.

Crofton Lane Speed Humps



The speed humps in Crofton Lane, Petts Wood were mentioned in our last newsletter and it was reported that a proposal to remove the full width humps which are on part of the road and replace them with cushions had been devised.

This was primarily to improve the road for bus passengers as buses always have difficulty with speed humps - their suspension cannot cope well with humps and the jolts get transmitted directly through to passengers unless buses go very, very slowly. Indeed there are reports of serious injuries to bus passengers on our web site when they inadvertently went over humps at speed. Passengers can easily get ejected from their seats if they are sitting at the back of a bus.

The solution to these problems is typically to replace the full width humps with the euphemistically named “cushions” or “split humps” which buses can straddle.

This would also assist ambulances which might have difficulties using this route which is one of the few points where the railway line can be crossed and hence is an essential part of the road network in this area.

Your editor suggested to the council that a better solution would be to remove the humps altogether as we did not believe there was ever any good justification for them. I also suggested that a proper public consultation be undertaken.

But Councillor Colin Smith not only ignored our views, but he also ignored the similar suggestion of a public consultation by some irate local residents who wanted the humps retained (you may have seen a letter in the local press from one of them making unsubstantiated claims about the speed of traffic before the humps were installed, and they also got up a petition to the council).

One can only guess at Councillor Smith’s motive here. Was he worried about the public debate that might ensue? Did he wish to avoid a contentious and divisive issue polarising public opinion where there was even a difference of opinion among his own party’s councillors and MPs? It might have turned into a long fight between residents of the road who like the humps deterring traffic and the road users who have to put up with the pain and discomfort of driving over them.

It is also worth pointing out that the council may have breached the law by not doing a full public consultation.

Any speed hump scheme must be put to a public consultation (see our web site at www.bromleytransport.org.uk/Legal_basis_of_traffic_calming.htm for the relevant legislation) , and although it might be argued that this was simply replacing one set of humps by another, in reality one scheme was removed and a new one put in.

Note that the number of accidents in Crofton Lane (East) was always relatively low and it is not at all obvious that the figures have been improved as a result of the speed hump scheme. Indeed it was introduced at a time when schemes were not judged on objective criteria or cost justification, but on who shouted loudest. It seems unlikely that it would ever have been introduced under current policies.

Chislehurst Road Bridge



Many delays have been occurring on the railway bridge on Chislehurst Road (the road between Chislehurst and Petts Wood). A weight limit had to be imposed after an assessment indicated it could not support more than 7.5 Tonnes. This meant that one-way working was put in place temporarily but that has now been replaced by the width restrictions shown in the above photo.

This has eased traffic congestion although it has meant that buses and HGVs have to be diverted via Lesson’s Hill and Poverest Road – a very long detour. Some additional parking restrictions on those roads are also being introduced to assist larger vehicles.

These restrictions may be in place for over 2 years while the bridge is rebuilt.

Specs 3 Cameras

A new generation of average speed cameras named Specs3 is about to receive Home Office approval. These cameras can be used to enforce 20 mph zones because they can work out the average speed from any entry to any exit point on a local network, including taking account of changes in lane.

A “Scrutiny Panel” of the London Borough of Ealing has already called for their use to enforce 20 mph zones on a trial basis. The argument is that they may be an alternative to the use of “self enforcing” road engineering measures, such as speed humps, which everyone hates.

(Editor: I may hate speed humps but I also hate this invasion of one’s privacy even more and the erosion of the assumption that drivers should drive at appropriate speeds for the road conditions. Have you ever tried to consistently drive at under 20 mph even in 20 mph zones? It’s simply impractical to do so particularly with current speedometer accuracy.. The end result of using this system would be yet more millions of speeding fines issued to unsuspecting and essentially innocent motorists – at least innocent of any moral crime).

There are also proposals afoot to introduce a general 50 mph speed limit on single carriageway roads, instead of the current default of 60mph, again enforced by these same cameras.

News Snapshots

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

+ Income from the London Congestion Charge is expected to be £37m lower this year than originally forecast. Traffic volumes are noticeably lower due to the recession and people are taking more care to avoid accidentally paying penalty fines. The Mayor has yet to announce details of proposed changes to the system which might make it more “user friendly” but also reduce income even further.

+ Islington may introduce a blanket 20mph zone over the borough after Green Councillor Katie Dawson took advantage from a Labour and LiberalDemocrat deadlock on the council. She got it put into the budget when the two main groups could not agree the figures. But it may yet be blocked by Boris Johnson because funding for such schemes typically comes from TFL over which he has control and he already blocked a similar proposal in Lewisham.

+ One of our readers reported having her car towed away after parking on a single yellow line in Hackney. Even more surprising is the fact that this took place at about 7.00 pm when most single yellow lines in London cease at 6.30 pm. It seems Hackney thinks they should continue until midnight and the severity of the offence is so extreme that you should be towed. Yet another example of unreasonable and inconsistent parking enforcement policies operated by one individual local London borough. Readers should make sure they always check the signs that indicate the exact times of permitted parking when parking on a single yellow line.

+ Cyclists in the London Borough of Islington are becoming increasingly disrespectful of traffic laws according to evidence given by “Living Streets” (the old Pedestrians Association). They cycle on pavements, through red lights, ignore no entry signs and “verbal abuse” is the result if you remonstrate with them. Editor: we have reported this in the past as well, in other parts of London, but the police take little action.

+ Mayor Johnson has scrapped plans to extend the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) to Transit sized vans, ie. LGVs.

+ Ealing Council and TfL are apparently considering using “flashing amber” signals as a replacement for traffic lights, at least in off-peak hours. However they would need DfT approval. Such signals are used in other countries and indicate “proceed with caution” at junctions.

+ Both TfL and Boris Johnson got a lot of flak when it snowed heavily this winter, resulting in all London buses being withdrawn on the worst day – it seems they could not get safely out of their depots because nobody had gritted the relevant access roads. Boris ended up defending his own organisation rather surprisingly. *(Editor: it did not stop me getting to work in my new office in Chislehurst – I walked, but I think it might have been safer to drive as the roads were clear when the pavements were covered in snow and ice).*

+ Boris Johnson got fined £60 for accidentally failing to pay the London Congestion Charge in January. He described the system as “wretched” and “crazy” as a result – he also said “I got done by my own system and forgot to pay and then bing! I got the £60 fine.” No doubt many other people know exactly how he feels, and it may lead to reform of the system to introduce an “account –based” system. *(Editor: that will of course undermine the economics of this lunatic financial arrangement even more and hopefully lead to its rapid demise.)*

+ The London Borough of Richmond, not content with introducing a carbon emissions related permit parking scheme, is planning to introduce a similar arrangement for on-street meter parking and council car parks. It is not exactly clear how this will work, but it looks another sure way to make the Liberal Democrats unelectable at the next local elections in the borough.

+ Possible closure of Loop Road on Chislehurst Common is being considered – the mini-roundabout on the centre of the Common is still a notorious accident black spot even after past changes to try and solve the problem. However this would certainly inconvenience local residents substantially so your editor has made some alternative suggestions.

+ Your Editor has been appointed to the Committee of the Chislehurst Society to advise on Traffic and Transport matters, following the retirement of the long serving Ken Chapman from this role.

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

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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 £12.00 per annum for individuals, or £9.00 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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