



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 57 (Jun 2009)

In This Issue

- **Bickley Station Width Restriction**
- **Tesco Orpington Opens**
- **Electric Cars Plugged in London**
- **Every Breath You Take**
- **20 Mph Too Low?**
- **Mayor's Transport Strategy**
- **Does Policing Reduce Accidents**
- **The Causes of Accidents**
- **Travel Plans**
- **Motorway Speed Cameras**
- **News Snapshots**
- **B.B.R.A.G. Information and Contacts**

Editorial

The big topic in this edition is the “electrification” of transport in London, and the other elements of Boris Johnson’s new Transport Strategy.

A related subject we cover is of course the problem of air pollution in the capital, to which electric cars may be a partial solution.

Just to remind you, letters for this publication are welcomed, and I’ll include anything that is reasonably well argued and supplied in digital form. Accompanying photographs are particularly welcomed as there is nothing better to grab the attention of the reader and liven up the text.

More local news is the impact of the width restrictions imposed near Bickley station which is a matter of great public interest judging from the phone calls and emails I have received.

Roger Lawson
Editor

Bickley Station Width Restriction



We mentioned the new width restrictions on the Chislehurst Road railway bridge in our last newsletter.

Similar restrictions have had to be imposed on the bridge near Bickley station for the same reason – photos above and below. The bridge has been found to be too weak for heavy vehicles and will need to be strengthened. Unlike the Chislehurst Road width restrictions however, these ones seem to be causing great difficulty for drivers of many quite ordinary cars.



The signs indicate the width restrictions are 6’6” wide but when constructed they were apparently about 6’8”. They have since been widened to about 6’11”. But many cars still cannot get through them without damage.

For example, my Jaguar XJ (current model) has a technical specification which clearly would make it impossible to get through a 6'11" gap without folding the wing mirrors. Before I actually drove up to this width restriction I was sceptical about people's concerns, but I took one look at it and turned around.

It took me about 5 minutes to take the above photographs and during that time two vehicles (quite small cars) clipped their wing mirrors and other vehicles had to stop and turn around.

Numerous people have complained about damage to their vehicles, including one particularly irate driver who has an older model Jaguar XJ vehicle. This is wider than mine and I know that because I used to have one. He scraped the side of his car when trying to get through which is not surprising because his car is probably wider than the width imposed.

Why is the Bickley width restriction that much narrower than the Chislehurst Road one? Because the latter bridge has a weight limit of 7.5 Tonnes while the former has a limit of only 3 Tonnes. A fully laden Transit van can weigh as much as 3.5 Tonnes so it is essential that even those are stopped.

However with so many cars having problems with the Bickley restriction as it stands, it is questionable whether it might not be better to close the road altogether. At least more specific warning signs that tell drivers that this is an exceptionally narrow gap and even large cars should avoid it should be put up.

Dangers of Width Restrictions

Note that width restrictions are not free of dangers either. They have not been used as a traffic calming measure in Bromley since the width restriction was put in on Watts Lane, Chislehurst many years ago. What happened soon afterwards was that a heavy lorry, not realising the restriction was there, braked sharply when it came up to it. Two young riders of a motorbike that was behind the lorry ran into it and were killed. One of them was a resident of my street. Perhaps it is time to remind everyone of this tragedy which seems to be fading from memory.

Blackbrook Lane Residents Unhappy Also

Note that the residents of Blackbrook Lane are also complaining because the volume of traffic on their road has substantially increased. Heavy vehicles are also using it more frequently as it is now one of the few routes towards the south.

Clearly everyone would like to see these two railway bridges repaired as soon as possible, and preferably sooner than the several years that are being talked about.

Tesco Orpington Opens



The new Tesco superstore in Station Road Orpington has opened. If readers recall, there was a lot of concern about the traffic congestion that might result, and the impact of the store on other shops in the High Street.

Above is how it actually looks, and you can compare that with an artists impression of the proposed store below – not a bad forecast perhaps.



Even on a Sunday morning when your editor took the photos above and below, there were queues in the entrance to the car park and associated queues on Station Road, but this seemed to be caused by congestion within the car park itself.

If any readers have experience of any problems in this area, particularly during weekday rush hours or on Saturday morning that were problem times before the store was built, please let me know.



Likewise any reports of the impact on shops in the High Street would be helpful.

Electric Cars Plugged In London



Yes electric cars will not only be promoted in London, they are going to be plugged in all over the capital.

Boris Johnson has announced plans to provide 25,000 electric charging points and with other initiatives he hopes to have 100,000 electric cars on our streets soon. All new building developments would need to provide electric charging points and 20% of all new car parking spaces may require to have them. He wants to make London the “electric car capital of Europe”, and believes it will “also smooth the way for less polluting transport choices which will improve air quality, reduce traffic noise and contribute significantly to my carbon emissions reduction target”.

The cost of all this is about £60 million but the Mayor hopes that he will only have to fund about a third of this, with the rest coming from the Government and the private sector.

If anyone wonders how practical electric cars are, the picture above is of the latest Model S from Tesla Motors – 300 mile range, 0 to 60 in 5.6 seconds, seats 7 people and can be recharged in 45 minutes. Deliveries commence in the USA in 2011. See www.teslamotors.com. Other mainstream manufacturers are also expected to launch electric cars in the next couple of years.

Carbon Questions

Do the Mayor’s claims for reduced air pollution and lower carbon emissions stand up to scrutiny? Here are some comments from Richard Pike in the Financial Times: “Electric cars are slightly less good at turning fuel from a power station into movement than the average engine is at extracting energy from petrol or diesel”. He suggests the latter achieves an average of 34 per cent efficiency. Although power stations are generally more efficient in converting the energy, because of transmission losses and the losses in charging and discharging the batteries of electric vehicles, only 31 per cent is available to drive the vehicle. That comparison stands up so long as the current mix of fuels in power stations applies.

He then looks at the comparable carbon emissions and calculates that if all cars were replaced by electric versions, emissions would fall by a seventh (as cars produce about 12% of total carbon emissions in the UK, this would cause it to fall to about 10%). A cost of £150bn however, which is what the bill would be, does not justify that however because there are lots more cost effective solutions to reducing carbon emissions.

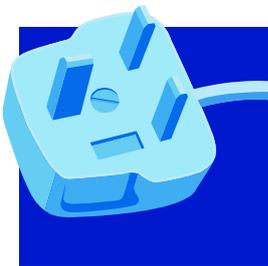
So the logic is defective in terms of the support for widespread Government subsidies for electric cars even if you believe that reducing carbon emissions is a good thing (which not everyone thinks is worthwhile) - at least until the generation of electricity in power stations is much cleaner.

London Pollution

But there may be a case in London. The capital suffers from major localised air pollution which does need to be tackled (see separate article in this newsletter for more details). Electric vehicles in London would have one major advantage in that any pollution they do generate is where the power stations are located, not within London.

(Editor's Comments: For that reason, I think this policy in London is not unwise although clearly there must be some concern about the cost to the taxpayer of these programmes).

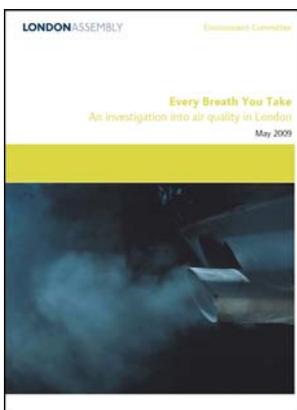
Charging Points



You may be wondering what the technical specification of these proposed charging points will be. In the short term, about 2,000 of them will be “slow” ones providing

13A, 240V and hence will take several hours to recharge a vehicle. There may be about 50 “fast” ones providing 32A, 240V three-phase supply and able to recharge a vehicle in about 30 minutes. But there may later be some “rapid” charge points providing 200A, 500V three-phase and able to charge a Tesla S in five minutes (these are still “under investigation” though).

Every Breath You Take



The London Assembly have recently published a report on air quality in London called “Every Breath You Take”) – cover left.

The Committee that produced this report was chaired by Green Party Member Darren Johnson, so it may

not be totally unbiased. Indeed it does tend to hyperbole and exaggeration.

So for example, it refers to possibly 3,000 deaths in London as a result of air pollution. But it fails to mention these are “premature” deaths of people who might simply have died slightly later, and they are based on estimates which are essentially guesswork with little actual factual evidence to sustain them. However, let us not carp excessively over this scaremongering in the report when there is some useful material in it.

London clearly suffers from poor air quality in some areas at some times, particularly in respect of particulates (PM10) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2). Indeed it breaches EU air quality targets and infringement action has been launched against the UK government as a result. Action is therefore needed.

The problems are particularly severe around busy roads, and in certain parts of central London. To quote from the report: “It is clear that road transport, and in particular older diesel vehicles, are the main cause of air pollution in London”.

But the number of diesel cars in London is increasing, and even modern ones still emit much higher levels of PM10s and NO2 than petrol vehicles. Diesel buses and taxis contribute substantially to this problem also. Indeed the report concludes that “using diesel for public transport was a very big mistake”.

The Mayor, Boris Johnson, is currently updating his Air Quality Strategy but has clearly decided that electric and hybrid vehicles are one solution to the problem.

But there are about 8,000 London buses and only 356 hybrids are planned by 2011 so there will be negligible impact on total emissions as a result.

Congestion charging and the LEZ are mentioned in the report, but the impact of these, particularly the former, is also low. So the report emphasises that the Mayor needs to spell out what targets he aims to achieve and how they are to be achieved, because at present it looks to be a difficult problem to solve.

20 Mph Too Low?



What's a reasonable speed to drive at down the above street? Your editor was prompted to ask this question when he saw the cover of another report from the London Assembly entitled "Braking Point" which is about 20 mph speed limits.

Do you think 30 mph would be reasonable, or is 20 mph too low? Would people adhere to a 20 mph limit if it was imposed? Personally I can see no justification for a lower limit than 30 in this street.

This report was produced by a Committee headed by Jenny Jones of the Green Party, so you would hardly expect it to be an unbiased exposition of the issues. And it certainly isn't. Ms Jones has consistently taken an anti-car stance in recent years and of course is a strong supporter of the London Congestion Charge.

The report refers to the experiment with wide area 20 mph zones in Portsmouth, for which no results are yet available, but that does not stop the committee advocating them. It also refers to a similar scheme in Graz, Austria, but when I looked at the statistics for that city their accident record seemed to be no better than those already achieved in the London suburbs.

Regrettably this report seems yet another exercise by GLA members looking to attack the new Mayor, and using spurious evidence to advocate minority policies.

Note: if you look at the unmodified original of the above image later in this newsletter, this street already has a 20 mph speed limit imposed, plus speed humps.

Councillor Smith's Comments

Bromley Environment Portfolio holder Colin Smith has apparently ruled out a blanket 20 mph speed limit in the borough when he answered a question at a full council meeting.

Mayor's Transport Strategy



Boris Johnson has produced a "Statement of Intent" document concerning his transport strategy. It seems to be an attempt to sound out opinion from stakeholders, local politicians and the public before firming it up in a revised Transport Strategy policy document.

As a result it's somewhat lacking in focus and short on specifics, and tends to talk in generalities that almost everyone can agree with.

But there are some clear hints of likely policies such as "resisting the provision of further capacity at Heathrow" and more emphasis on transport links in outer London boroughs (improving orbital connectivity and a more dispersed growth pattern, for example).

Some policies are simply the old TfL garbage rehashed – for example it talks about "removing dysfunctional gyratories, one-way streets and unnecessary street furniture" – the last might be a sound policy but the former two are very damaging to good traffic flows as was seen in the Aldgate development we covered in our last edition. He is also keen on "increasing the permeability of streets" and on shared space schemes. As mentioned above, electric and hybrid vehicles are going to be encouraged to reduce emissions but he has not excluded road pricing as a way to "balance supply and demand for travel".

Does Policing Reduce Accidents?



The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) recently published a report which is billed as a “Study to establish how methods and levels of police

enforcement in London affect road casualty rates” under the title “Evaluation of Operation Radar – PPR379”. It was paid for by Transport for London (TfL) .

Regrettably it is not as described. There is no attempt to actually measure the impact of policing on accident figures – at least no accident figures are published at all.

The study was undertaken on the A23 in the Croydon area. The police employed two teams of 6 people to create a more visible presence over a period of 4 weeks, by using patrol cars and motorcycles. Each police officer was asked to write a minimum of 10 Fixed Penalty Notices per day, and these mainly related to speeding, seat belt use and mobile phone use. Seventeen arrests were made and 2074 offences recorded.

There was also an extensive publicity campaign supporting the campaign, warning people about the increased police presence.

The impact on mobile phone use and seat belt use (comparing before and after observed rates) seemed negligible. Traffic speeds seem to drop slightly however.

The report then uses the reduction in traffic speeds to estimate accident reductions and cost savings.

(Editor: As a scientific study, this is one of the most appalling examples of bad science that I have come across. No controls to enable proper comparisons to be made and no statistical analysis to see if the changes are significant. In addition, the whole exercise is biased by the publicity undertaken – the changes observed in traffic speed may simply be the result of the publicity rather than the actual police presence. In essence a total waste of time and money with the results simply unbelievable. It's more a PR exercise for the police than the unbiased study it claims to be).

The Causes of Accidents

Some of you may have seen a letter from a Bromley resident concerning my comments on the Crofton Lane speed humps in the Newsshopper paper. It is regrettable that people who know little about road safety matters, but have suffered from some unfortunate personal events as a result of a road traffic accident, launch into print with their views without checking their facts.

For example she said “in most road traffic accidents speed is nearly always a significant part of the equation”. But that is simply not true. There has been a lot of research done on the causes of road traffic accidents. For example, Transport Report Laboratory Report 323 gives “excessive speed” as a factor in only 7.3% of accidents. There are four other factors that are more important such as “inattention” and “failure to judge other persons path or speed”. Similarly the Department for Transport has done similar analyses based on police reports of accidents.

Attacking traffic speed alone is not likely to reduce road traffic accidents and injuries significantly and is a mistaken policy adopted by some ignorant politicians who simply have not researched the facts. Regrettably the Government has also misled the public by publishing false statistics and bowdlerised summaries.

Travel Plans

Your editor recently had the opportunity to take part in the formulation of a Travel Plan for the office building where he has a new office. This involved the completion of a survey form about his travel patterns, which was one of the most poorly designed surveys he has ever encountered. It did not cope with his personal circumstances at all. Neither did it seem to cope with people who have more than one mode of travel, or ask why they are used.

In essence, it was likely to result in the well known phrase in the IT world: “garbage-in, garbage out”.

Motorway Speed Cameras

There are plans to install variable speed limit signs and speed cameras on both the M20 (near Maidstone) and the M25 (between the M2 and M20). These are currently the subject of a public consultation, although the gantries and speed limit markings are already in place for the former.

We would encourage people who use these roads to respond to the consultation and object. The justification given for these proposals is to “achieve the best use of road space”, “responding more quickly to accidents” and “reducing congestion”. The use of variable message signs may be justified to assist drivers, but the imposition of speed cameras is yet another step in the constant monitoring of your every step and is totally unjustified. Instead of drivers being able to use their own common sense about what is a reasonable speed for the traffic conditions, you are going to have someone else’s thoughts on the subject imposed on you.

One only has to drive frequently along the M25 near Heathrow to realise that the imposed speeds often bear no reality to the traffic conditions, and quite frequently impose much lower limits than are reasonable.

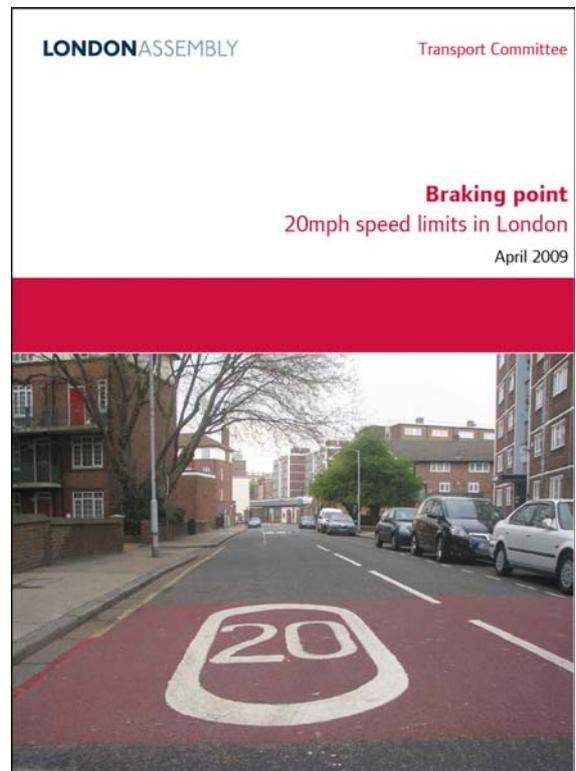
M20 Scheme

You can see the details of the scheme and respond on-line if you go to this web page: www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/23322.aspx or you can write to Hugh Maxwell, Highways Agency, GA Federated House, London Road, Dorking, RH4 1SZ.

M25 Scheme

Details of this scheme are on this web page: www.highways.gov.uk/roads/23458.aspx or write to: John Martin, Highways Agency, Federated House, London Road, Dorking, RH4 1SZ

The Braking Point Cover (see above)



News Snapshots

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

+ A segregated bus rapid transit scheme in Greenwich – the Greenwich Waterfront Transit project as it was called – has been scrapped. The cancellation of the Thames Gateway Bridge may have been a factor in this decision, but TfL budgets are under pressure due to heavy spending on London Underground and Crossrail, and a desire by the new administration to cut costs (TfL staff levels are being reduced for example).

+ A new scheme for Oxford Circus that will allow pedestrians to cross diagonally has been approved and has £5m of funding from TfL and other parties. This will be like such crossings in Japan where there is a dedicated pedestrian phase that enables them to cross in all directions. More space on the pavements will be created also by removing some of the existing obstructions, with the intention of relieving the over-crowding that currently exists.

It is not expected to impact vehicular traffic flows, according to the designers.

+ Ealing is trying to remove congestion by both removing some traffic lights and looking at reducing bus lanes.

+ It is reported that Specs cameras have been installed on the QE2 Dartford Crossing bridge. They will presumably be used to enforce the 50 mph speed limit although as there are no signs put up as yet, presumably they are not yet being used.

+ Bromley Council have agreed the new "Area Action Plan" for redevelopment of Bromley Town Centre. It is now being submitted to the Secretary of State to get Government approval.

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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