

BBRAG NEWS

BROMLEY BOROUGH ROADS ACTION GROUP – No. 6 (June 2000)

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This edition contains an update on the proposed traffic calming scheme for Chislehurst Road, and several other articles that may be of interest to our members. At the back are copies of press articles covering some of our activities, including a picture of your Chairman on the front cover of the Chislehurst Times - notice the purposeful look in his eye, the firm jaw, and determined stance.

Before he gets his ego too inflated, it is worth pointing out that any opinions published in this newsletter are purely those of the Editor or of the article writer, and are not necessarily the official policy of the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group. As with any publishing venture, we try to make the newsletter both topical and interesting (and some articles are designed to stimulate debate) whereas any submissions we make to public bodies are generally considered at length by our committee, unless they are simple matters in which case the Chairman or Treasurer may respond individually. Due to time pressures, not all items of interest have necessarily been discussed by our committee before they are mentioned herein.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Chislehurst Road, Bickley

The proposed traffic calming scheme for Chislehurst Road, Bickley was considered by the Environmental Services (Operations) Sub-Committee of the council on the 27th May. The report to the committee members included the results of the consultation exercise with local residents. Note that we requested extension of the consultation area (to Old Hill, Lower Camden and Lubbock Road to the east of the railway line) and this was in fact done.

Although BBRAG was not opposed to a traffic calming scheme in this case (mainly because it was not an arterial route, the route was clearly hazardous with speeds being often in excess of safe limits and most local residents being in favour of some kind of scheme), we did put in an alternative proposal which deleted most of the speed cushions and changed some other details.

Our proposal was rejected and objections from both London Transport (re a Mobility Bus Service that uses the route) and the London Fire Brigade were also rejected. The London Transport objection was rejected based on comments that refer to Transport Research Laboratory Report 417 which makes me wonder whether they have actually read that report (see later article).

However the consultation with local residents resulted in wide support for the scheme (eg. 74% of respondents supported the scheme in general, 68% supported the speed tables and 60% supported the speed cushions).

At least that applies so far as the people who responded which was only 29% of those circulated. As usual, bearing in mind local apathy, council staff presenting their proposals as essential on safety grounds and as innocuous otherwise, and our alternative proposals not being presented to the residents, the result is not particularly surprising. Local councillors also chose not to interfere so the proposals were carried and will be implemented.

Bromley Town Centre Parking Plan

A draft plan has been produced by the Council outlining the policies to be followed in future as regards parking in Bromley town centre and adjacent areas. BBRAG has submitted a 4 page response to what is a complex subject matter.

It is difficult to cover all the points we made in a newsletter of this kind but here are a few comments (if anyone would like a copy of the submission we made then please contact the Editor):

- We didn't see the need for any major changes because there are parking problems on only a few days in the year (eg. around Xmas).
- We are in favour of extending the park-and-ride scheme, the provision of parking availability signs, and possibly variable pricing (eg. higher on peak days) to manage the congestion on peak days.
- The council document seemed to presume that commuter and workplace parking should be discouraged. We are not convinced that such a policy makes much sense, but we would certainly be in favour of encouraging Railtrack to improve parking provision so that public car park use and on-street parking by commuters is reduced.
- We are in agreement with the proposal to provide more secure parking for motorbikes and cycles.

- We are not totally convinced that the Permit Parking scheme is well designed. As often happens, the desires of the local residents seem to be taking precedence over the needs of the community as a whole.

- In general we objected to the general presumption behind many of the proposals in the document that motorists should be discouraged by every means possible, and they should be forced to change their ways by introduction of new regulations and higher pricing. We also suggested that the council should ask residents of the borough as a whole what they wanted rather than council staff deciding what is good for them.

If anyone has any views on parking problems in Bromley town centre then please contact BBRAG or Adrian Bell at Bromley Council who produced the report.

Bus Lanes

It was mentioned in our last Newsletter that £700,000 will be spent this year in Bromley on bus lanes (for the London Bus Priority Network). Incidentally this was a case where BBRAG made no objection to any of the published proposals in this area, as it wasn't clear at the time what the cost was and if the scheme benefited somebody and encouraged the use of public transport then so be it (although your Editor did personally make an objection based on the cost of the proposals).

Anyway, there was an interesting article published in the Daily Telegraph on May 13th concerning the effectiveness of bus lanes. This was based upon a recently published report by the Transport Research Laboratory. The article was headline "Punishment, not Panacea" and concluded that bus lanes often simply punished private motorists without resulting in any significant improvement to bus services.

Quotes include: "In Brighton it failed to achieve its principal objective of making bus services quicker and more reliable..... and does nothing to relieve substantial delays to buses and other traffic." and "In Aberdeen the lanes are counterproductive on one busy stretch and have negligible impact on traffic flows" and "in Birmingham the scheme exacerbated the bunching of buses and adherence to an unchanged timetable neutralised the impact of bus lanes on journey times". Buses in Leicester took even longer to arrive at their destinations and time savings were so small in Middlesbrough that passengers failed to notice a difference.

The reports author was quoted as saying that "You often find buses sailing past queues of cars that wouldn't be there if it wasn't for the bus priority scheme. It's not that the buses are going faster - it's the cars that are going slower."

The DETR argues that sometimes such schemes are effective but it seems that bad detail design or simply putting them in for "policy" reasons where they are inappropriate often results in a bad end result (similar to the Green Lane cycle lane described below).

On the issue of atmospheric pollution caused by cars (as opposed to buses), a recent report (No. 431) from the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) states that "Restrictions on cars on air quality grounds have been shown not to be warranted". The report confirms that buses and taxis are the main reason why air quality targets in London have not been met, even though pollution levels are falling. A single diesel bus produces as much particulate pollution as 128 petrol cars and NOx emissions equivalent to 39 cars (ref. NETC). On typical bus passenger loadings, there would actually be less pollution if those passengers moved to using cars.

Green Lane Cycle Lane

A cycle lane has recently been introduced onto the western side of Green Lane, Chislehurst. It is effectively an extension of the existing cycle lane introduced by Greenwich Council on the northern side of the hill. However the Bromley side of the hill is much narrower and the lane cannot run around parked cars. With the introduction of pedestrian refuges and cars parking in the cycle lane it is now unsafe for both cyclists and motorists in my opinion (the effect is to create a giant slalom route on a steep hill). In reality there have never been more than a few cyclists on this road because of the steepness of the hill and anyway cyclists and motorists have a much greater hazard on this road where inappropriate parking of vehicles where Green Lane meets Heathfield Lane is a persistent problem which nothing has been done about.

Again money has been wasted on an ineffective solution to a problem that never existed, purely based on the policy of introducing cycle lanes. Incidentally the cost of this scheme is £7,500.

Waldo Road Rubbish Tip

Local residents have started a campaign to get something done about the traffic jams in Homesdale Road caused by traffic queuing to enter the Waldo Road rubbish tip. See the press article in the last section that explains the background. Although this road is a bus route, and the problem has been present for several years (although it may have worsened lately), nothing has been done about it.

BBRAG has offered its support to the local residents and has already made a representation to Bromley Council on this subject.

Latest Accident Statistics

The casualty statistics for Bromley roads in 1999 have recently been published. The total number of casualties were 1486 which represents a 6% reduction on 1998 and is the lowest figure recorded in recent times. A graph showing the overall trend is attached (acknowledgement to Bromley Council report).

However there was significant variation between types of road users (motorcycle casualties actually went up by 20% probably because of the increasing popularity of that mode of transport), and the overall change may not be statistically significant (as you can see from the graph, the numbers are not much different to what they were back in 1991-93).

BBRAG's view is that money is still being wasted on inappropriate "traffic calming" and other schemes with the result that accidents are still not being reduced effectively.

Speed Bumps (TRL Report 417)

The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) have recently published a report entitled "Traffic calming: Passenger and rider discomfort at sinusoidal, round-top and flat-top humps". The TRL organisation is an independent research body who produce reports on traffic matters, usually as a result of commissions from the DETR. They are widely seen as being fair and non-judgemental. Report 417 describes the results of studies on various kinds of speed hump and their impact on road users of different types. It also compares the effect of different "hump profiles" on perceived discomfort.

Trying to summarise a long report in a short article is not easy, but here are a few points of interest:

- There are some differences between the comfort of different hump profiles, ie. road users can go faster with the same "comfort level" over some humps, but as that would defeat the object of introducing the humps there seems little point in it.
 - Hump profile affects different types of users (e.g cars, buses, HGVs, cyclists, motorcyclists) in different ways so there is no one ideal shape.
 - The discomfort experienced by bus passengers substantially increased as speeds across the hump profiles increased from 15 to 20 mph. Driving at speeds over 15 mph is likely to cause unnecessary discomfort. In fact, from the statistics given for a "Midibus", even 10 mph can be uncomfortable over some humps.
Comment: uncomfortable at any speed would appear to be the right phrase.
 - HGVs were also uncomfortable at any but very slow speeds.
 - The degree of discomfort and subsequent speed reduction can be altered by using different hump heights and ramp gradients.
Comment: this type of statement makes it very clear that the only way speed bumps work is by actually causing discomfort. No gain without pain?
- Two glaring omissions from this report are that:
- a - Only three cars were tested (a Ford Fiesta, Escort and Mondeo). It ignores the problems of people with older vehicles, those with firmer or less effective suspensions, etc.
 - b - It ignores the discomfort experienced by people with medical conditions (such as bad backs which is a very common problem, recent abdominal surgery, etc). Many of our members have complained about this issue.

bungalows should be built in future, as clearly this would result in a major saving of life.

This is one example where you need to do a cost/benefit analysis to see whether it really makes sense, and shows yet again that a sense of proportion is essential.

AGM and Leaflet Availability

The Annual General Meeting of BBRAG was held on the 3rd June. The existing Executive Committee members were re-elected unopposed (except that J.Rudkin has resigned due to pressure of time). The previous Chairman (J.Nicholls), Treasurer (D.Nicholls) and Treasurer (R.W.Lawson) will remain in office.

There were no written resolutions, but there was discussion with attending members on the Waldo Road problem (see above), the problem of the traffic island in Perry Street outside Farringdon school blocking west bound traffic (a representation to Bromley Council has been made on this subject), the Chislehurst Road traffic calming scheme and general strategy.

One issue that came up was the availability of leaflets concerning BBRAG to assist with the recruitment of new members. A copy of a leaflet that explains the aims and objectives of BBRAG is enclosed and you can obtain more copies from the editor (see contact info below). Please pass onto whoever you think may be interested.

Contact Information

This leaflet was published by the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group, PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB. Treasurer and Newsletter Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 0208-467-2686, fax: 0208-295-0378), Chairman: John Nicholls (Tel: 0208-467-8284). Contact either of the above for information on the aims and objectives of B.B.R.A.G. or for membership information (membership costs £7.50 per annum). B.B.R.A.G. would be glad to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic or transport problems in the borough.

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Is This a Joking Matter?

This newsletter spends a lot of time discussing road accident statistics and how to prevent them. However more people die in their own homes from accidents (4000) than die on the roads (about 3500). In fact as many as 1000 people die each year from falling down stairs. An amusing letter to one of the national newspapers recently suggested that the government should legislate to ensure that only