The Cities of Oakland and Portland, & Speed Humps

This wouldn't be a BBRAG newsletter if it didn't contain at least one story on speed humps – this is just so our readers are reminded of the damage they cause, and the money that is wasted on them. This edition contains a note on some reports on the experiences of the cities of Oakland and Portland, on the West Coast of the USA, that have been recently been brought to your editors attention.

Michael Cunneen published a report entitled "Oakland's Speed Hump Program: Is It Really Working" in 2004 in the American Journal of Public Health. This was no doubt written in response to a previous article published in the same journal that claimed to show the success of the speed hump program in Oakland. In Cuneen's response he demolishes the statistical incompetence of the previous claims and in addition shows that the speed hump programme was probably a waste of money. He says that pedestrian accidents fell by 9.4% in Oakland from 1996 to 2001, but in fact they fell by even more in most Bay Area cities and indeed elsewhere in California, none of whom had such speed hump programmes. In addition, pedestrian accidents were declining more rapidly before the Oakland speed hump programme was introduced than they did afterwards.

He also points out that in Oakland just ten arterial streets accounted for 40% of pedestrian accidents, but such roads are typically not treated with speed humps, so much of the money for speed humps is actually spent on residential roads where the accident rate is already comparatively low. Hence the reason for their lack of cost effectiveness.

Mr Cunneen's report can be seen at: www.digitalthreads.com/rada/mcoaksh.pdf

City of Portland and Traffic Diversion

An interesting report which dates back to 1998 is a "Speed Hump Peer Review" from the City of Portland (available on the internet at: http://www.portlandonline.com/transportation/index.cfm?print=1&c=dfjde&a=ifdii

This report actually studied the impact of the installation of humps on accidents, traffic speeds and traffic diversion.

For example, it reported that on streets where "14–foot" humps were installed, traffic volume was reduced by 33 percent while crashes decreased by 46 percent. On parallel untreated streets (and if it's like most US cities, there should be plenty of parallel ones as they are usually in a grid like arrangement), the traffic volume rose by 4% but the accidents rose by 12 percent. Taking into account the combined figures, the crash frequency declined by 18 percent, but the really telling point is that it states that this was not statistically significant.

In other words, it is quite likely that there was no benefit whatsoever from the speed hump programme.

Roger Lawson, BBRAG 24/7/2006