

New TRL614 Report on Speed Humps

The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL - see <http://www.trl.co.uk>) have recently published a new report on speed humps - TRL614. It suggests that there is no case for changing speed hump usage or design. But this report is a simplistic whitewash of the case against using speed humps.

Certainly changing the design would be pointless as it is clear from previous research that the way humps work is by inflicting pain and suffering on those people who exceed a given speed level (what that speed is varies from vehicle to vehicle and person to person and is difficult to predict). But they claim that normal road users in normal vehicles will not suffer any discomfort.

Unfortunately the research is exceedingly flawed as they only used one private car type (a recent model Astra which is hardly representative of the range of cars on the road), and it appears they only used one driver, and a very limited number of passengers, so they didn't even test a reasonable sample of the population.

They acknowledge that "people with a mobility impairment may suffer extreme discomfort or pain when driving over humps even at low speed", but this didn't affect their recommendations and they didn't bother to evaluate such vehicle occupants. In fact back problems are the leading cause of disability and affect 1.1 million people in the UK, so they are hardly a small minority. Some 5 million people see their GP each year with back pain, and two thirds of adults in the UK have experienced back pain (sources: the BBC, Action Research and charity BackCare). Are these people not to be taken into account?

They also reported no significant damage to vehicles from passing over humps even though they only drove over them 85 times. For example, for me to get to my local Post Office I have to drive over 36 humps there and back. I do this trip almost every day so I actually travel over some 9,000 humps per year (ignoring those met on other trips). That would have been a more realistic level of testing, but maybe they couldn't find any volunteers to suffer to that extent!

They did actually find that even at very low speeds, the typical London taxi, buses and ambulances could cause major discomfort to passengers in the rear. They suggest that taxis in particular should be redesigned, but seem to have unrealistic expectations of how soon this might happen and how quickly existing vehicles are likely to be replaced, or whether it will happen at all.

They ignore the fact that humps are often not visible at night or in dappled shade, or that people park alongside "cushions" which defeats their objective.

This is a poor scientific study which seems to have been designed purely to support the objectives of the Department for Transport (DfT) who commissioned the study to justify it's advocacy of such devices. Even the problems it did find, have been discounted and ignored in the summary conclusions.

Perhaps the DfT should take more notice of the recent TfL London Road Safety Plan Consultation where 37% of stakeholders who were consulted wanted fewer humps as against 17% who wanted more (see report above). Clearly responsible public opinion is turning against the use of speed humps, despite such bad science being used to support them.

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