

The Cray Avenue Bus Lane Camera



According to the latest "budget review" by Bromley Council, the bus lane camera on Cray Avenue, Orpington was identifying three times the number of offences previously expected. Local paper the News Shopper is running a campaign alleging that the bus lane design and camera placing is specifically designed to catch people unawares, and should be changed. Many disgruntled drivers are writing in to complain and it seems that the council expects to collect more than £250,000 in six months.

This and the new Widmore Road camera is helping to offset the shortfall in other parking revenue, but as reported in our last newsletter, the council still expects to make a surplus of £3.6 million on car parking and penalty charges.

A photograph of the Cray Avenue camera site is shown above (camera marked by an arrow). Note how there is no break in the red asphalt of the bus lane for vehicles who need to turn left into Station Approach. This makes it very confusing for drivers, although the white line becomes "broken" shortly before the turn. There is an arrow on the road but it is not at all clear where one can legally turn, if at all, when in fact crossing the unbroken line at any point is an offence. If you are sitting on the right hand side of a vehicle, you can't see exactly where it stops to your left as the vehicle you are in and the one ahead obscure it. No doubt this is the source of the problems.

A meeting of the council's Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny (PDS) Committee on the 30th March discussed this matter. It commenced with a statement from Brian Cooke of LondonTravelWatch (what used to be the London Transport Users Committee who represent public transport users). He effectively said that everyone who got a fine for being in the bus lane deserved it. He was clearly breaching the rules for members of the public as you are only supposed to ask short questions, not make speeches. But the Chairperson, Samaris Huntingdon-Thresher said nothing until BBRAG Chairman Roger Lawson intervened.

Thereafter Gareth Davies, the council officer who looks after traffic matters made a presentation. This said that there was basically nothing wrong with the design of the scheme and that he would not recommend significant changes.

Local ward councillors did support changing the "dotted lines" to extend them further back by a few metres however, and the committee finally settled on that as a recommendation to Councillor George Taylor who is likely to make an executive decision on the matter at his meeting on the 5th April.

It was also agreed that congestion on Cray Avenue seemed to have worsened and that the kerb "build-out" on Cray Avenue after Station Approach which effectively reduces the whole road to one lane, should be reconsidered. Also the timing of the traffic lights at the junction with Leasons Hill, and the yellow "box junctions" should be examined. *(Editors Comments: These are certainly good things to come out of the meeting).*

Before then Councillor Julian Grainger had made a number of good points, and raised questions which were not adequately answered. For example, he asked how many of the people fined for being in the bus lane near Station Approach actually ended up turning left? He clearly suspects it is most of them.

(Editors Comments: This is either a gross error in design or a deliberate attempt to ensure that unsuspecting motorists incur fines. It should be changed to remove the red surface treatment and allow vehicles to enter the left lane up to 100 yards before the Station Approach junction (nobody wanting to go straight head will do so because they would have to get back into the main lane soon after which would be very difficult to do as there is a continuous queue of traffic there at all times of the day. The termination of the red surface treatment, and appropriate accompanying signage, would make it clear where the bus lane ends for traffic turning left into Station Approach. Ideally the road should be marked in that lane with "left turn only" to make it clear and the camera operators instructed not to penalise anyone who turns left.

Of course what really annoys motorists about this camera, and many others, is that perfectly reasonable behaviour, such as turning off to the left by using the bus lane when there is no queue there, and no bus in sight, generates an instant fine of £100. In addition, there is no system of appeal to an independent judiciary. The only appeal mechanism is to a tribunal which will only examine the facts in a very narrow way, and not consider the general merit of the case or whether the fine is appropriate – and even to appear at the tribunal risks doubling your fine.

I don't think this is justice in the normal sense and is a totally inappropriate approach to what is in essence a very minor infringement of the road traffic regulations even when it is not done accidentally.

In summary I am opposed to:

A – The system of enforcement of traffic law by "deregulated" offences where there is no real justice or a fair system of appeal.

B – Excessive penalties for trivial offences.

C – The placing of cameras to maximise revenue when there is no clear evidence that there was a major problem anyway, or a problem that could not have been tackled easily by other means.

In addition, I feel that the bus lane on Cray Avenue has been poorly designed, particularly near Station Approach, and in reality has worsened traffic congestion on this road significantly. But I do not think the whole bus lane should be removed. After all Cray Avenue was widened to accommodate the bus lane so that is not the sole cause of the problem).

More Bus Lane Cameras Planned

The council report on this subject also revealed that another two cameras are planned to cover the Cray Avenue Bus Lane, even though there is no evidence of deliberate infringement, or buses being delayed.

Note that if you have any views on this matter, make sure you write to the council and let them know – it seems they have had very few “representations” on the subject.

Roger Lawson, BBRAG, www.bromleytransport.org.uk, 31/3/2006